

DESTINY HAS MANY FACES

MY MOTHER'S LIFE STORY

1908 -2005

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For my mother

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1. Introduction

MOTHER'S DEATH

*Adele Louise Daun,
our beloved mother, born on March 10, 1908 in Düsseldorf,
went to rest peacefully on March 4, 2005, six days before her 97th Birthday
at home in her apartment in Lucerne.*

In deep grief, daughter Astrid and son Freddy

In the late evening on the day of her death, I sat like in a trance at mother's desk. In an indescribable feeling of chaos and tired from the many painful impressions of this memorable day, I tried to come up with a few simple words for condolence cards. Two or three sentences, just as mother would have wanted, but not revealing by what great tragedy her long life was marked. It had been ninety-seven unique years, full of love, and exemplary of courage and hope; a life, which had not been as quiet and peaceful as her death. Fate had given mother many hard and often scarcely bearable tests, which she had to endure courageously and bravely, through the power of her boundless confidence in life, with her unwavering optimism, and with dignity into old age. Now this life was extinguished in reverent silence and with it a strong, wonderful person: our mother.

When my eight-years-younger half-brother Frédéric, called Freddy, silently entered the room and noticed that I tensely tried to bring the right words on paper, he sat down opposite me at the table and said in a low voice, "Have you forgotten, Astrid, that mother had expressed several times in her lifetime that in the event of her death no trouble should be made, and that she wanted neither the sending of death announcement cards, nor a regular burial? Don't you think we should accept her decisions, even though it is hard for us at the moment?"

I thought for a moment and nodded absently to Freddy. Once again, I realized, how selfless and modest our mother was, and in the subsequent long conversation with my brother, together we remembered further requests of our mother, which she started every now and then with the following sentence, "Children, when the time comes, I would like to be..."

For example, it was mother's heart's desire to have her ashes buried in the beautiful and peaceful garden of her faithful friend Vilma in Meggen, near Lucerne, where the urns of Vilma's kind-hearted husband Seppi and that of her dear mother rested peacefully.

In anticipation, Freddy and I were able to take into account mother's last wish a few months after her death, along with Vilma, which filled our hearts with great satisfaction and joy. We were allowed to keep the urn at Vilma's house until the soil warmed up in early summer, and we could place mother's ashes in the garden to eternal rest, alongside the other two loved ones. For the purpose of this momentous day, I had a hole dug in the ground and poured the ashes into it. All our mutual friends had come to participate in this ceremony and to say goodbye one last time.

For all those present it was a moving and almost spiritual celebration, and during the subsequent barbecue in the garden, faces lit up slowly and we spoke with love and respect of the dear deceased. All were deeply happy that our beloved mother and friend could rest in Vilma's paradise garden, just as she always wished for.

Until the end, mother was a happy person. It was characteristic of her, and also touching to see how even in the most difficult situations in her life, she never lost her optimism. Her laughter, her humour, and her positive and amiable nature were much appreciated by the people whose paths she crossed. That also explains why everyone felt so well in her presence and enjoyed her company.

She had borne her later frailty, which insidiously had taken root after a stroke and had intensified more and more with age, with dignity and humility. She was full of gratitude that she could spend the last years in the warm comfort of her familiar environment, cared for and loved, without much pain or severe mental impairment. She owed that to Freddy and she was always aware that she was nowhere better off than with her beloved son.

Just days before Mother's death, early in March 2005, I traveled to her to Lucerne, not knowing that these should be our last days together. Like all the years before, Freddy and I wanted to organize a small celebration commemorating mother's birthday on March 10th, and as always we wanted to invite our mutual friends. During my regular visits, it was also always my concern to relieve my brother, who has taken admirable care of our mother on a daily basis for many years. I think that with his attention and care he wanted to make amends for the troubles he had caused her during the course of his life, and thus often had made hers, which was not an easy life, very difficult.

Since my arrival in Switzerland, I had still been plagued by a flu, which had caused many health problems prior to my departure from Montreal. At that time, Canada was hit by an unprecedented freezing cold, and I was relieved to be landing at my familiar Zurich-Kloten, where I was greeted by a fairly tepid climate.

I was born on April 6, 1942 in Brussels and spent my childhood in Switzerland and have lived in Montreal since 1967, where I was married, and where I worked as a flight attendant for Air Canada for 26 years until my retirement.

I met my husband Gabor, whom I affectionately called Gabi, and who was born on February 20, 1925 in Budapest, in 1975 through a friend who was also friends with a Hungarian. Gabi died in Montreal in 2008, after a long, full life, at the age of 83. As a successful engineer and philanthropist, he was loved by everyone, and therefore it was not surprising that both mother and Gabor were very fond of each other from the start, and got along extremely well during mother's long visit with us in Canada.

At the time of our last goodbye mother felt relatively well, despite her, in a few days, 97 years, and she was all smiles as I stepped to her wheelchair to welcome her with a long embrace. She felt relaxed, but it struck me immediately that since my last visit only a few weeks ago, she had become somewhat fragile in her movements. Her white, fine hair always smelled like fresh hay blossoms, and when I stroked her cheeks, I noticed that her skin felt even more transparent. She looked at me with bright eyes, which radiated happiness so great that I just had to press her once more towards me, which she let me do with a smile. In that moment I was overcome with a great relief, because my fear that my mom may not recognize me anymore was completely groundless.

It was typical for mother; how simple and admirably easy it was to take care of her in her old age. She never made requests and was grateful for every little thing. This, of course, made it easier and pleasurable to be there for her exclusively several times a year, since she became dependent on daily care many years ago. She never wanted to be burdensome to anyone, and tried to be independent as long as she could, and never let herself go or demand too much from her helpful son Freddy.

I remember well all those years, when mother, even as a young woman living in difficult conditions, had always been there for others, as if it were the most natural thing on earth. In my childhood I often witnessed how important it was to her to help others selflessly, to be there for them or to share with them what little she had, even in situations where she urgently needed help herself.

In joy and happiness, in sorrow, suffering, and deprivation, mother had experienced all facets of human life. On the one hand, the security of a carefree youth in a middle-class German family before the war, and on the other hand, in the prime of her womanhood, that brief stage of her life was even marked by some wealth, prestige, and serenity of success and beauty. The young Adele, who has been called Adi by everyone, was delicate and elegant, with her beautiful skin and shoulder-long, wavy, brunette hair. She was exceptionally pretty and graceful. Although she never liked to stand out, she knew exactly what she wanted, was inquisitive and full of curiosity, had a remarkable grasp of things, and pursued her ideals and goals with thought-out and healthy ambition. In the ease of her movements, expressions, and her bright personality she reminded me more of a charming young French girl than a smart German girl.

Even as a little child I was always very proud of my mother. I particularly loved her cheerful nature, the honest look of her bright eyes, and the wonderful feeling that nothing could happen to me when I was close to her. In addition, she was always surrounded by a delicate fragrance, which magically attracted me, and which may have been the other reason why I enjoyed her proximity.

It was mother's fate to meet the great love of her life, her future Jewish husband, Hans Koopmann, my father. I was his only child, but unfortunately I was never really able to meet him. As his half-Jewish daughter, I was born on April 6, 1942. My father, who was born January 30, 1905 in Düsseldorf, and died in Auschwitz in May 1943 at the age of 38, only knew me for one month. Because I wanted to hear it over and over again, my mother had to tell me a thousand times since my early childhood how proud my father was about the birth of his daughter, and how as a new father, he showered me with all his tender love and attention, as if he knew that he would only be granted a few weeks of this happiness. By the time of my birth, my father had already been suffering the odyssey of Jewish persecution, and was already on the run from the Nazis. I have no real memory of him. But the many remaining and very expressive photographs comprise my image of him, and mother also provided me with never ending stories, thus ensuring that my memories of my father were preserved to this day. This explains why on rare occasions I still believe to feel the warmth and comfort of my father, as if we had once lived together as a happy family.

Mother was already familiar with many hardships in her childhood during the First World War, and had to endure almost unbearable strikes of fate later as a young woman and mother in the Second World War. It is not surprising that until the end of her life, she was plagued by her greatest fear, the idea that her own beloved children, Freddy and I, had not enough to eat and would have to suffer hunger. Her previous bitter experiences had been etched forever deep in her soul and not released all life long.

Looking back on the last days together with my mother, I am convinced that she remained in a dreamlike state, transgressing the here and now, because of her temporarily absent, transfigured facial expression and the floating movements of her delicate hands. I was obliged to assume that she was accompanied not by onerous, but rather soothing and unique worlds, and that she must have felt very comfortable with that. In retrospect, it was comforting to know that she was taking leave from the infinite variety of different images of her life, in such a peaceful, almost perfect, and almost supernatural way that I could never have imagined.

On the late morning of March 4, 2005, mother was still deeply asleep when I came to her bed. She fell asleep very late the night before, so it was reassuring for me to find her sleeping so peacefully. I bent down to her, gently stroked her cheek and whispered softly into her hair that I would briefly go with the nearby cable car to Krienseregg, to take in some fresh mountain air, which would be good for my health. I got up, kissed her on the forehead and said softly at the door: "I'm taking you with me in my heart, mom, and when you open your eyes, I'll be with you again!" She slept deeply and breathed calmly as I left the room.

Both at the beginning, and even during my mother's ever-increasing weakness due to old age, we often stayed on the sunny plateau of the Krienseregg, in this beautiful place on earth, at the mid-station in the direction of Pilatus Kulm. Early in the year we would both head up there, into the beautiful nature, for

walks or to just sit in the sun and talk about life, inhaling the wonderful mountain air, drinking a hot tea or a glass of wine, and let ourselves enjoy the moment.

On that beautiful spring day, I was enjoying the warming sunlight after a short walk in the middle of this beautiful mountain scenery, I looked over the wide horizon in the deep blue sky, and felt more relaxed and healthy than I had in a long time.

I was happily thinking about how well Freddy and I had prepared for the upcoming birthday of our mother. The small birthday celebration would be held as always at her favourite restaurant, together with our closest mutual friends. I wished so much for mother to enjoy this significant day, and that she might understand what a rare birthday she was celebrating with her impressive ninety-seven years.

The ringing of my cell phone startled me out of the depths of my thoughts. It was Freddy, announcing in a choked voice, that mom had just died. After the exhausting, daily inhalation therapy, strongly recommended by the doctor, and just as she let herself fall back into the pillows with Freddy's help, it happened. Then mom inhaled deeply with her eyes closed, and exhaled very slowly, calmly and relaxed.

The news of mom's death hit me as a shock. Although I was long preparing for it, it was still unexpected. I sat motionless and the only thing I felt was my heart. It was moving noticeably with such intensity as if it were to break out of the oppressive narrowness of my chest in order to get rid of this sudden pain. I put both hands on my chest as if to calm it down, and made a desperate inner dialogue with mother, as if I had to hurry to give her a farewell with a few words for the road.

"Oh dear mommy, you have probably waited to die until I'm back from Canada, here with you, and it seems that you waited to be sure I was well enough and had recovered back to health. Even to the last moment you have always thought of others first, and yourself second, which you managed to do all your life, and even today, in the moment of your silent farewell. You deserve a very special joy and are now on the way to where you must finally be happy forever, my angel mommy!"

I walked a little dazed, slightly off the path back towards the cable-car station and made a stop again, where no one could see me. I sat on a large flat stone, moist from the earth, clutching my knee I put my head back and turned my face towards the sky. Mother's face shimmered past my mind's eye, as if through a pastel-coloured veil of fog. I recognized her mature, delicate face with the white hair, which a few hours before I lovingly caressed. Then this reassuring picture turned gently and almost slow-motion-like into a photographic memory from my early childhood, and I saw mother's thriving, young face smiling at me, which I was so much in love with as a little girl. In this dream-like moment when I felt detached from all earthly things, I mused to myself: "When the soul leaves the body after death, would mom then be passing over me right now, if she was not in a hurry, here, at the very top? Goodbye my dearest mommy, safe journey and greet father from me, he had to wait so long for you! I love you both forever and ever – and now hurry, it's getting cooler!"

On the one hand, the awareness that mother was allowed to die peacefully, reassured me, and lifted the great heaviness of my heart for the time being. I reached the cable-car station in this state of emotional roller coaster, which was accompanied by tears and pain, but also by a liberating gratitude towards everything spiritual and divine around me. Its sight took me from the wonderful world of the supernatural back to reality.

The subsequent long period of quiet mourning did not hurt as much because I granted mother the well-deserved peace, and I am still convinced that where-ever she is now, she is in very good hands. After her death, my mind was almost constantly preoccupied with her rich life, which healingly distracted me from my great loss. In the first period of mourning, I relived all stations of our life together. Her many life chapters before my birth, of which she told me since my earliest childhood over and over again, ran again through my mind like black-and-white photographs that came to life. And now I would like to record these chapters chronologically in memory of the unique life-story of my mother, and with that I would like to start from the beginning:

2. Family Tree

Mother's grandparents and parents:

Louise Frederike Dorothee Ebert and Karl William Erdmann were my mother's maternal grandparents. Karl was born on April 22, 1849 in Luisenthal, Thuringia and Louise was born on March 22, 1856 in Alt-Placht, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. They were married on December 7, 1876 in Gerresheim. Gerresheim was then a small suburb of Düsseldorf, about 3 km from the outskirts, and has since been long incorporated into Düsseldorf.

The ancestors of mother's grandmother Louise were Protestant Huguenots. The Reformed Church was founded about 1555 by John Calvin; however, soon thereafter, the Huguenots were accused of heresy and had to flee from France in all directions.

Because of the great shortage of artisans and workers in Germany at the time, they fled to Germany at the end of that century. They settled in the north of Berlin, in Old-Placht, where one can still visit a church today, which, in its design common in northern France, provides proof of the Huguenot settlement. When exactly my mother's grandparents settled in Düsseldorf, is no longer detectable. But they certainly were at the opening of the glassworks, founded in 1864 or shortly thereafter by Ferdinand Heye, a resident. The main street in Gerresheim is named after Mr. Heye. Along with Karl, several members of mother's and father's family worked in the glassworks. The glassworks were still operational in the 21st century and were only closed in 2008.

Louise and Karl had two girls. Elli was born on January 29, 1883 and Emma Melitta, later just called Melitta, was born on October 5, 1886. Melitta would become Adi's mother.

Grandfather Karl was a simple worker and his income was equally modest. The grandparents had only known thriftiness and had to restrict in all respects themselves all their lives. They could only afford meat on Sundays and this meal always consisted of the obligatory roast pork with roasted potatoes and seasonal vegetables.

Karl was a good husband, but strict with the children, yet on the other hand, also very proud of his daughters, and he loved them very much.

In old age he suffered from dementia and would often run away from home. Friends and acquaintances, who tracked him down somewhere, took him back home again, so that he was saved from potential accidents. Until one day, when he was almost run over by a street car, and was pulled back at the last moment by a bystander. Then Karl was placed in a care home, where in 1933, at the age of 84, he peacefully fell asleep forever.

Mother never told us much about her grandfather Karl, but she did about Louise, her grandmother. Even in old age, her memories were crystal clear and she could not emphasize enough how warm-hearted and kind her grandmother was – her one and all! Whenever possible, mother visited Louise, who fortunately lived only a few houses away, in immediate vicinity.

As mother matured into a young woman, she liked to go out with many young people. She also took grandmother regularly to the opera and the cinema. Particularly the opera had impressed the elderly woman, and a visit was always a true world event for her. It was the only time in her long life that grandmother could go out, because until then, there was not enough money for even the smallest pleasures.

Even though Louise was almost beside herself with joy about every invitation, she hesitated attending at first, because not only could she not afford a suitable dress, but was also very ashamed of her crippled fingers, which were the result of severe arthritis. Mother, however, always managed to talk to her and to reassure her. She also gave her a pair of very nice, medium-length evening gloves, which elegantly concealed Louise's sick hands and guarded her from the degrading looks of noble women. Louise wore them with great pride to the performances, without taking them off once. Mother also lent her necklaces and brooches to adorn Louise "best dress."

For a long time back then, women had to wear their skirts to the floor, which Louise could never really get used to, because it was cumbersome walking and especially climbing stairs. When it finally became fashionable to wear the skirts shorter, albeit only a few centimetres above the ankle, Louise was happy and felt that it was a downright redemptive liberation.

With age, Louise was left with only two teeth, but what could be done when there was no money for a dentist? Grandmother Louise only knew hardship in her difficult life. She was touched very hard by fate, and as if that was not enough, she fell ill with cancer a few years later. Mother recalled that the torment of the disease in Louise's last year was so great that the poor thing hardly came to rest, and screamed from pain almost every day and night.

On September 9, 1928 Louise was finally freed from her suffering. Mother had a difficult time overcoming this loss; it was even harder for her than losing her own mother, who had already passed away several years before. Understandably, it took a long time for mother to overcome the loss of her beloved grandmother.

The paternal grandparents

They were Johann Friedrich Daun and Pauline Ottilie Kühn. Johann Friedrich was born on January 16, 1852 in Rodenmannsgut (Czarnikau Country) and Pauline Ottilie Kühn on March 19, 1859 in Budsin, Posen, Prussia. Johann Friedrich was a bricklayer by trade. They married on September 25, 1879 in

Jankendorf. They both were reformed. Posen was a province of Prussia from 1815 to 1919. A part of Poland was conquered by King Frederick II in 1772 and the rest by King Friedrich William II in 1793. This was preceded by negotiations that took place in the spring of 1771 between St.-Petersburg, Berlin and Vienna about territorial gains at the expense of Poland. On August 5, 1772 a treaty of the final division was signed between Russia, Prussia and Austria. Posen consisted of rural communities, each with its own ethnic enclaves, such as Polish Catholics, German Protestants and Jews, slaves, colonists, a few nobles, merchants and wholesalers, who were scattered here and there. After the First World War, this part belonged to the so-called new Poland. Germany occupied Posen during the Second World War again, and this area was named Reichsgau Wartheland.

In 1945, all ethnic Germans were killed and the area was returned to Poland. This area was known as the "Polish corridor." Budsin (today spelled Budzin) now has about 2000 inhabitants.

Mother's paternal grandparents had seven children, among them Friedrich William, mother's father, the first born.

The parents

Friedrich William Daun was born on July 20, 1881 in Budsin, Posen, Prussia. Whether William (who was called by his middle name) initially came alone to Düsseldorf or with the rest of his family, is not known.

What is certain is that his address was registered at Derendorferstrasse 32, in Gerresheim, from September 24, 1903. Since he had learned the trade of baker and confectioner, he immediately found work at a bakery on Heyestrasse 127. As luck would have it, William was able to buy the bakery, including the building with a large mortgage after a short time. He had no qualms, for he was sure that through his exceptional commitment, his hard work, and the excellent quality of the products, he could manage a good business and thus repay the monthly interest rates without problems. The house had three floors. On the ground floor, at the front was the store and in the back the baking area with a small lounge area for employees. The upper floors were occupied by the family, as well as a maid and a cook.

William married the then 19-year-old Melitta Erdmann in 1905, when he was financially secure to start a family. They had two children, William Erwin, known as Erwin, born on June 25, 1906 and Adele Louise, my mother, born on March 10, 1908. Adele soon became Adi and kept that name all her life.

Operating a bakery at that time meant very hard physical work, considering that the dough had to be kneaded by hand. It had to be processed in a very large vat. Since father William could not manage it by himself, he had to hire two assistants. Every day William rose early in the morning at 3am, and also on Saturdays and Sundays.

The business was running extremely well and after a few years William could announce to his family with pride the following news: "Every sale we make after 9 am is profit." That meant that all the sales from 6:30 am until 9 am covered all the costs.

As was the custom at the time, Adi's mother Melitta only went to primary school. She was a very diligent student, and everything she did at school or in the household at home, she did with great attentiveness and perseverance.

After her marriage, Melitta helped in the store every day, along with two employed salespeople. She was efficient and practically very skilled; she was popular everywhere, and together with her husband made a good team. Later she was a very kind and devoted mother and inherited her kindness toward others from her mother Louise.

3. The Childhood

After the birth of her two children, Erwin and Adi, Melitta had her hands full dealing with the full management of the household, the daily help in the bakery, even on Sundays, and with raising children. The offsprings got on well with each other, filled the peaceful home with joyous laughter, and were both very attached to their mother, who tried to spend every minute with them whenever she could. Father William was rather strict with them, and they soon found out that they could impress their father with obedience and good behaviour. For that, they were often even praised, which of course inspired the siblings to be continuously obedient. The first years of the siblings' lives went harmoniously and happily with no remarkable events.

Once they entered school, a new life began for the children. They had great respect for the teachers, even though sometimes they were afraid of their authority. Adi, who liked going to school very much, turned out to be a diligent student, which could not be said of her brother. He raged around with his classmates rather than doing his homework and was ready for any nonsense. Adi got along great with him; they played a lot together and did silly things once in a while.

One day, Erwin had a glorious idea (in his opinion) and encouraged Adi to stick her head between two massive columns of the wooden railing in the stairwell, and promised her to pull her out immediately. It was easy to squeeze her head in there, but to pull it out proved to be much more difficult and cumbersome. To get out quickly again, Adi twisted and turned her head as best as she could in all directions and Erwin pulled like a madman by her shoulders, but unfortunately without success. Whether from a sudden fear or because her head hurt from Erwin's strong pull, it was after all despair that made Adi panic. She began to scream loudly, and the parents who were alarmed by this unusual and penetrating screaming of their daughter, rushed immediately into the stairwell, where they tried to pull Adi out of her predicament. But all their efforts were in vain and Father William had no other choice but to saw through the railing post, so that Adi was finally freed from the unbearable situation. Erwin's punishment was according...

At Christmas and birthdays, there was only one gift for each child. It also happened once, that the gift which they had so ardently desired was not under the Christmas tree, because something practical had priority. The parents were very careful not to spoil the children too much, although there was no shortage of money. Even in old age Adi had not forgotten how as a child she wished for a sled for Christmas. Her father's response at the time was: "What do you need a sled for, Adi? You can use your girlfriend's sled, you always play together anyway!" But Adi wished fervently for her own sled, which would remain an unfulfilled wish.

Mother never forgot that incident. Countless years later, when Adi was a mother herself and her two children, Astrid and Freddy also felt disappointed sometimes, when their dreams and wishes could not be fulfilled due to the financial position, they invariably had to listen to the sled story.

By this time, father William already owned his second car, a Ford. His first means of transportation was an open-wheel car with a stick for steering. His experience with the first transportation devices would come in handy later.

In 1912, there was a spectacular, for those days, interruption in the regulated life of the family. William had to undergo an appendectomy in the hospital. At the time, this was an extraordinary affair, which gave rise to much talk. The fact that William was healthy and strong from a young age, helped in his quick recovery from the surgery, and it was the only time in his life that he saw a hospital from the inside. Because he was never sick or too wary or bed-ridden, he told everyone how happy he considered himself to never be sick. But he also could not resist adding: "Yes, but I was once in the hospital with appendicitis!" With this sentence William always turned into the focal point of the company, and he enjoyed it over and over again, to direct all the attention to this event.

Thus Adi and Erwin passed the first years of their youth happily, carefree, and often with many exciting events. Due to a flour allergy, father William was forced to fully withdraw from his profession for some time. However, the allergy did not prevent him from looking for another job immediately. On July 18, 1913, the whole family moved to the nearby town of Krefeld, where in the city center, William opened a shellfish restaurant, with much enthusiasm and equal success. It turned out to be a good decision, and the whole family settled in very fast and had no difficulty adapting to new conditions. In the meantime, the bakery in Düsseldorf continued to be run in William's name by a manager and two employees, which for those days had been a very smart decision. Even during the war, and after William was cured of his allergy, he moved back to Düsseldorf with his family, and resumed running the bakery again. Later, the restaurant was profitably sold.

When in 1914 the First World War broke out, William was called into military service as a truck driver because he had known how to drive for a long time. At first this activity of course seemed safer than that of a soldier who had to fight in the front lines. Nevertheless, there were situations when even a skilled driver could get into serious trouble while driving a truck. So it happened that during a mission the brakes failed on the descent, the truck tipped over, and the entire load of unsecured hand grenades flew out on the road. William had incredible luck that they did not explode. In this accident he got away with a good shock, a few bruises, and a dislocated shoulder.

Whenever his allergy was somewhat less acute, William was also used as a baker. Because in these tough times of war all food items, including flour, were rationed, the baked bread was not in proportion to the number of troops. Thus, only the officers had been served bread, while all the soldiers had been left out.

During the whole duration of the war, William's bakery in Düsseldorf would remain operational and was only closed for shorter or longer periods during the flour shortage.

For the men at the front and the women and children at home this First World War was a never-ending drama. The great uncertainty and the unimaginable hardships of that time, which escalated to a desperate hopelessness, were also incredibly hard because of the lack of food, especially for the starving children. In addition to chronic anxiety, the horrific bomb attacks also produced deep despair, persistent fatigue, and a nearly pathological incapacitation. Although at this time Adi was still a little girl, she could never completely get rid of the terrible impressions that had burned themselves deep into her soul. To witness how during the bomb attacks many people were buried under the ruins, and dear friends and acquaintances had disappeared from one day to the next, was a terrible experience for a young life. This was especially true when such a catastrophe occurred in the neighbouring house, where friends and acquaintances fled to their basement believing that there, as many times before, they would be spared from the bombings...

By a provision of the government, which ordered that each resident had to wear a whistle around his or her neck, a little hope was scattered. The purpose of this whistle was that the buried survivors could be heard after a bombing, so that they could be immediately dug out. Ironically, however, there were practically no men left who could be obliged to do the excavations, because due to the long duration of the war, they all had been drafted into national defence.

In her later life, whenever Adi went through the streets of Düsseldorf, in her mind she could still hear the shrill sounds of life from the buried neighbours. She remembered with a shudder that sometimes the whistling lasted up to three days, until it gradually became shorter and quieter and finally was silenced forever ... Then every child knew that another human life was extinguished in a horrible way through injury, exhaustion, or as most often through suffocation. Even many years later, during World War II, this unforgettable experience still had consequences for young Adi.

To the infinite relief of the whole family, father William returned unharmed from the war and resumed his bakery in Düsseldorf. Very slowly, the family recovered from the direct impact of the war. Every single family member gave their best in the reconstruction work depending on strength and ability, in order to find solidarity and hope in a new normality. Much had to be undertaken internally and externally. The long lasting hardships made only very slowly room for recovery and the people could see a faint light at the end of the tunnel.

Because food was rationed not only during the war, but also long after, William decided to send Erwin to a farm that belonged to relatives in Prussia. The father wanted his son, who was still growing and constantly complained of hunger, to be well fed, and he recognized that his decision was essential for the boy. Adi, on the other hand, was rather small and delicate for her age and she did not often complain about having hunger. Had she been a boy, she would have surely followed her brother. It took

a whole two years for Erwin to return to his parents' house as a strong, big boy and Adi was glad to finally have him near her again.

Although in the first years after the war, due to insufficient quantity of raw materials, only the bare minimum could be established, the people were optimistic that the clearing of the rubble and rebuilding would also restore a decent, stable life.

Over time, William was able to buy more flour and sugar, and on top of the bread and rolls even restore the production of his renowned and popular cakes and pies, and even other fine specialties, such as marzipan. In the business household, they hired a maid and a cook again, and for the physically strenuous washing days a capable temporary help. Once a week, a woman came to sew torn-off buttons and to mend clothes. Later, when Adi told her daughter about it for the first time, Astrid could simply not understand that with so many women in the house, no one was able to repair something by themselves.

When Adi and Erwin had gradually outgrown their childhoods and quickly grew sensible and responsible due to their experiences of past, mother Melitta worked almost exclusively behind the bakery counter.

Financially, it went uphill, so that William could soon afford a new car. Right from the beginning, this impressive acquisition was called "the blank cartridge" by all. Predictably, the new car had the bad habit of letting one or the other tire burst at the most unlikely moments... Melitta's enthusiasm for the new acquisition was therefore limited, for she was always very uncomfortable in the passenger seat. And if William ventured to accelerate the speed up to 30 km/h, she warned sternly: "William, why do you race like that? Do not drive so fast!" One day he actually landed in a ditch. He was unscathed, but Melitta injured her shoulder, which was very painful for her. Therefore, it also came as no surprise that she wanted to hear nothing more of the car for a long time...

Not everyone fared as well as William's family at that time. Many had still not enough to eat, and so it happened one day that an unknown woman wanted to break into the shop to get something to eat for her family. The entrance door to the bakery had a sliding glass panel, and when the unknown woman was about to open it fully, she was accidentally caught by an employee, who reflexively closed the glass quickly from the inside. As it turned out, this was done a bit too vigorously, and as the stranger could not pull out her hand in time, the middle three fingers of her left hand were broken. Melitta, who was immediately hastened downstairs by the unusual noise, heard the many explanations and apologies of the unravelling and weeping woman, and felt a great sympathy for this desperate woman, who had been severely tested by life. The poor thing was then sent home with a bandaged hand and a big basket full of food. Before she went away, Melitta even offered her to come by every day before closing to pick up the leftover bread and rolls for her large family. Melitta found that the broken fingers were sufficient punishment and did not file a complaint.

Every year for hunting season, William rented hunting grounds in the Eifel. The animals he shot were each transported by train to Düsseldorf. Once the station master called at home and Adi answered the phone. She was very surprised and confused when the man left the following brief message: "Tell your father that he can pick up a large rat here!" As it turned out, in hunting language it meant a wild boar. A hunting colleague of William helped to dissect the beast, first draining the blood into a pot, and Adi was responsible for stirring it vigorously. Once the blood had coagulated, blood sausages were made from it. Adi really hated this task and was disgusted by it, frequently feeling nauseous. Every time she wanted desperately to faint, so that her father might have a little compassion and would rid her of this terrible duty. Unfortunately, this never occurred, and so she had no other choice but to remain obedient, because back then, children had to do exactly what they were ordered to do by their father. Despite this, and whenever Adi remembered her childhood in all the long years of her life, it was always in a positive way. She was very pleased and grateful for her beautiful youth in the protected and safe shelter of her good family. She was a happy child!

Her brother Erwin was predestined to take over the bakery one day. As much as her time and homework would allow, Adi also helped in the bakery. This was much more fun for her than any housework, which they could each get around with all sorts of excuses.

Since they always had a cook to take care of the family needs, Adi's cooking skills were not especially promising. The only thing she learned to make in the kitchen before her marriage was roasted potatoes. Only because it was her father's favourite dish and she wanted to impress him and to make him happy with it. Whenever his daughter put the tasty, steaming roasted potatoes on the table, her father praised her every time, happy and smiling: "Well done, Susanne!" Why he called her Susanne, Adi never knew. It would make sense if the house cook had borne this name. One could perhaps say that William was comparing the cooking skills of his daughter with those of the cook, which of course made his daughter happy!

4. The Teenage Years

Later, Adi always told her own children of the swinging 20's with a gleam in her eyes, although for most people they were everything but swinging. Only the wealthy enjoyed any life-enchanting benefits. Nevertheless, the great economic turmoil affected everyone, for it was a rapid inflation that swept over all of Germany in the years 1921 to 1923. In 1921, one could buy a loaf of bread for 1.35 marks; by the end of 1923 one paid the incredible sum of 80 billion marks for the same product. By 1924 in turn, it cost 35 Pfennig, not even half a mark. Without interruption, new currency was printed and people had to carry their money around in full suitcases when they went shopping.

At home, money was piled in laundry baskets in the stairway, for they no longer knew where to put it and one was also never quite sure whether the money would still have any value next day. To save money made no sense. Therefore, people bought everything that was available, even items they did not need. The hoarding also had the consequence that several major food or household items were always in short supply, and thus the production of ordinary everyday products could no longer be maintained.

Only for a short period, from 1923 to 1924, red-coloured and visually very impressive banknotes were issued, then called *Rentenmark*, which mother Melitta always fished out of the laundry baskets and hid well in the dish cabinet. She was convinced that these banknotes would one day have a great value to collectors. But William tried to make clear to her again and again how pointless that would be. However, Melitta could not be deterred, and the strong desire to believe in something good or to hope for better times remained her longing.

The general population at that time was getting poorer and poorer. Far too many people lost their jobs and unemployment was at its height. Although father William only had a basic school education, he possessed an innate practical intelligence, which led him to think wisely and logically about many things, and then make the appropriate decisions at the right time. So, after much deliberation and with a good portion of cunning, he decided to pay off the mortgage on his house in these economically unstable times. A smart move, as it turned out, because at the end of the inflation the property and another house that William had acquired were totally debt free.

Although Adi's mother had not been feeling well throughout the year, with only few exceptions, her sudden death on September 3, 1923 came very unexpectedly, and caused a great shock for the whole family. The decisive factor was the water caught in Melitta's lung, which could not be helped, and from which, in great sorrow, she could not recover.

For the 15-year-old Adi and her 17-year-old brother, the loss of their mother was a tragedy, especially in these difficult times. Mother Melitta, who was not even 40 years old, left a big gap and was missed

everywhere. Only through the mutual support of the siblings and the loving care of the already ailing grandmother Louise, the family could finally continue with the daily life, after many weeks of mourning.

But even crueler than the early death of their mother, was for Adi the death of her dearly beloved grandmother Louise five years later. Adi remembered her mother saying to Louise on her deathbed, "Mother, I will come to get you next!" And now the time had come, and Adi had to learn again to mobilize all her strength to cope with the immense pain of loss. This quality to cope with painful blows of fate, acquired early in her youth, had helped Adi later in life to pick herself up again and again, and to overcome difficult hurdles and heartache.

Although father William and his two teenagers had all conceivable help at home and did not have to worry about a regulated household and the related tasks, already 6 months after Melitta's death, William got married for the second time. On March 19, 1924, Frieda Litzenberger became William's wife and Adi and Erwin's step-mother. Although the new woman in their father's life was accepted by all, Olly, one of Frieda's younger sisters, had a much greater influence on Adi, which will be discussed in more detail later.

Already in December of that year, Erwin and Adi's half-brother was born. He was given the name William, like his father, but was called Willy, so that there was no confusion between father and son. The birth of the half-sibling brought on a big change, because Frieda devoted herself from then on only to her young son, and gave him all her love, so that little time and feeling remained for the step-children. Since Frieda had never really cared about them, the children were not particularly hurt by it and were simply content that Frieda treated them more or less fair.

Frieda's initial maternal love and devotion to her son soon became visibly diminished. Much of it was too strenuous and bothered her a lot. She wanted more time for herself and to finally be able to put her own interests first again. So it turned out that Adi took over the role of a mother for Willy, which she did not mind at all and which she found not very difficult because she adored her little half-brother and loved him very much. Whenever Willy had done some mischief in his earliest childhood, he ran not to his mother but always to Adi, and when he could not find her right away, he shouted on top of his lungs: "Adi, protect me!" With his father Willy also had a very good relationship. He was his great favourite.

Whenever he had to be punished, it was always done in annoyance by his mother, and therefore, Willy was also very clever to stay out of her way, and preferred to spend every free minute with Adi. Both did a lot together and sometimes she took him to see children's shows and even took him along on her summer vacation, which she always spent somewhere on the North or Baltic Sea islands.

One day, during the film screening of Hansel and Gretel, Willy asked, "Adi, when is the evil witch finally going to appear?" "Soon, Willy, just be patient," was her response, and as soon as the witch appeared on the screen, Willy was so scarred by the sight of her, that he jumped out of his chair, terrified, as if struck by lightning, and ran straight out of the movie theatre. It is no exaggeration to say that Adi

brought up her little half-brother by herself, and so it came as no surprise that Willy felt most comfortable when he was by her side.

Slowly Adi reached an age when it gave her great pleasure to regularly meet with young people from her large circle of friends, to go out together and to have fun. She was a very positive, happy girl, and because of her sweet and uncomplicated personality she was very popular and welcomed everywhere. She always gladly remembered these carefree times, which belonged to the best times of her life.

She did many things with her friends. Harry, a cousin of Adi was an outrageous clown, but could not handle money and would spend more than he usually carried with him in one evening out. He also knew no limits when drinking.

One Saturday evening, they were all together in the city to dance. The *Tabaris* or the *Crystal Palace* were the best known and most popular meeting places for the youth of Düsseldorf at that time. As countless times before, it also happened this evening that Harry had already spent all his money again before the night was over, so that he had no penny left for the tram ride home. Since his friends had often helped him out of trouble, for the first time that night, there was no lending anymore and Harry, for better or worse, had to walk home, a distance of more than 3 km. Because he was drunk, he did not realize that all his friends followed him the whole way home, and were amusing themselves listening to Harry cursing and swaying from one side of the street to another. When he finally arrived, his friends made themselves heard with loud laughter, by which Harry was not enthused. That was a hard lesson for him, but it had the desired effect that from now on he always had enough money to pay for the ride home.

Even as a young girl Adi was always very fashion-conscious and had most of her wardrobe made by a seamstress. Her good taste, her own, very elegant style and graceful, slender figure were always admired by all her friends. She was also glad to be asked by her girlfriends for her opinion or advice with their choice of clothes. As nearly all fashionable women, Adi also had a great fondness for beautiful shoes, which caused her some grief in her later life. As a young woman, she would have loved to buy something new more often, but as the children had learned from their father early on to appreciate the value of money, William fulfilled far from all the wishes of his two teenagers.

Even the older Erwin put much value on a neat appearance at the time, and already had a girlfriend. At the time, it was very chic for men to wear a moustache. To his great disappointment, however, it grew in a nondescript red color, which Erwin did not appreciate at all. So it came, that Adi caught her brother trying to color his moustache with a blackened cork, and at this sight, she could no longer contain herself and had a laughing fit. Erwin was so upset and offended that in his rage he abruptly shaved off the moustache.

Adi was done school by the time she was 18 years old, and her father thought it was about time for her to work full time in the bakery until she would get married. Back then it was not as common as today

that daughters received additional education beyond a certain level. William held the traditional view that his daughter would soon marry anyway. But Adi was not at all dreaming of marriage and wanted nothing more than to continue to go to school. After much back and forth with her father, he finally approved that his daughter could attend a trade school for a year. She was beside herself with joy and could hardly believe her luck!

One day, during her school time, Adi wanted to go to an exceptionally important meeting and stayed away from school for most of the afternoon with a good excuse. That very same day, her father decided to go for some errands in the city, which happened only very seldom. He thought to himself: "If I have to be in the city anyway, then I would also like to surprise my daughter and pick her up from school!" What a surprise awaited him! He was absolutely stunned not finding his daughter at school, and had a hard time believing it. How could Adi have told her father, that she secretly went to meet somebody? That evening she had to endure a huge lecture given by her father. He was beside himself with rage and disappointment. It had cost Adi's entire strength of persuasion to convince him to allow her to continue attending school. To be sure, the fact that she had always proven to have outstanding grades, and was an exceptionally good student in every subject helped to convince her father.

At the time, bobbed hair came in fashion and the ladies parted with their braids or their cumbersome, long hair with great enthusiasm. Of course, Adi had to follow this new trend and went at the spur of the moment to the hairdresser, without asking her father's permission as it would have been fitting for a well-educated daughter. So, upon her return, instead of admiring praise, Adi had to listen to a strong reproach with the clear statement that such arbitrary decisions would no longer be tolerated in the future.

Olly, her stepmother's sister, who was the same age as Adi, became one of her closest friends and it became the longest friendship of their lives. It lasted over many decades until Olly's death, with only one long interruption of 10 years, when Olly had mistakenly decided to join the sect of Jehovah's Witness. Until they were both married, they always enjoyed their summer holidays together with Willy or with a group of friends. They all had great fun together, and whenever Adi told her children about these times, she pointed out that she was convinced that in the old days, young people laughed a lot more than nowadays.

It was the summer vacation of 1932; Willy was already 8 years old and was spending his vacation time in childcare on a neighbouring island of Adi's holiday home, so that she could have fun with her friends. However, soon after the beginning of the holidays, the director of the childcare facility contacted the parents informing them that Willy was ill. Father William immediately contacted his daughter and asked her to visit the little Willy immediately to check on him. The question arose of how Adi could get quickly to the other island because the ferry across ran only once a week. Her father replied: "Rent a plane, no matter what the cost is, I will wire enough money to you!" When you consider that in the early thirties flying was still nowhere near as advanced as now, alone the idea of taking off from a small island to land on another small island was cause for goose bumps.

Adi discovered in her investigation that for this short air trip, there was only one small biplane available with two seats, one in front for the pilot and one in the back for the passenger... which did not contribute greatly to her reassurance. Even when booking Adi had very mixed feelings, for she knew no one with any flight experience, whom she could at least ask for advice on the practices in aviation.

At the agreed time before the start, she was given a leather cap and protective goggles, and off she went! For the young captain, it was the first time that he was allowed to fly such a beautiful young lady as a passenger, and he wanted to impress her, of course, by turning the plane after take-off in all possible directions. In her despair and utter panic of being helplessly at the mercy of her fate, she began to feel sick, and to make matters worse, she had to force herself not to throw up. Just imagine what a mess it would have been, if it had happened in the open air... She sent a grateful prayer to heaven, when she finally felt solid ground under her feet again.

After landing, the pilot saw his pale, barely standing passenger, and was overcome with great compassion and a guilty conscience because he was so reckless with his high-spirited antics, which caused the delicate young lady a big shock.

Willy's joy over the visit of his beloved half-sister was indescribable, and it turned out that he had no serious health problems. He prevented her from leaving right away with gestures and words, so she decided to stay with Willy until he was completely healthy again. When after a few days she boarded the biplane again with shaking knees, she was kindly reassured by the pilot to enjoy the flight back, as he would abstain from any further "tricks" this time.

In 1929, Erwin married Margaret Carpenter and a year later, his sweet daughter, Dagmar, Adi's niece, was born. Since "Grete" worked all day in the bakery, Adi was again used as a surrogate mother. Adi did not mind at all, because she loved her little niece and both were very fond of each other from the beginning.

At the time Erwin already had a car, and when Dagmar was three years old, she came running to Adi one day, out of breath, and asked: "Aunt Adi, can you give me two marks?" Adi nodded and asked the little girl, why she needed so much money? "Daddy has no more *Banzin* left," was the child's response. As it later turned out, Erwin could or would not grant the wish of his daughter to go for a car ride, and justified his refusal with the fact that the car had no more gasoline left. But it was obvious that Dagmar, even as a little girl, was smart enough to fix this problem immediately in order to still reach her goal...

5. A Fateful Meeting

It happened on a cold day in the fall of 1927, shortly before Adi's 19th birthday. There was a town fair in Düsseldorf, and she was amusing herself with her friends at the fairgrounds. The small group moved cheerfully through the crowd and marvelled at the decorated booths and stands; they all were enthusiastic about the puppet theatre and with tense anticipation and joyful dread had made their way through the eerie corridors and niches of the haunted house ride.

It was dusk and the thousands of colourful lights that hung in different coloured light bulbs on long cables across the fairgrounds, made it vibrant and comfortable, despite the noticeable cold. The sounds of the music box and the colourful carousel filled the crowded space with cheers and joy. The delicious smell of roasted almonds, cotton candy, and warm chestnuts made the festival visitors almost forget their red noses behind thick woollen scarves and cold hands in knitted gloves.

Adi was wearing her new winter coat for the first time, which she had picked up from her seamstress the night before. The dark blue colour suited her well and the slightly tapered shape revealed the outline of Adi's girlish figure. The little silver-grey fur collar flattered her delicate complexion and let her half-long, brunette, wavy hair appear even fuller. Her small feet in leather laced boots with elegant heels completed the picture. Even that day, in her cheerful serenity, Adi was not aware of how much her whole appearance drew many a male viewer into yearning and awe, or sparked a kindling gleam in their eyes.

So, the small group strolled cheerfully through the crowd, and when Adi spontaneously squatted to help a desperate boy to collect his small change off the floor, she bumped into someone. She immediately said cheerfully and without looking up: "Oh, sorry," and from above came at the same moment, as if with one voice, the same words: "Oh, sorry!" Amused, Adi lifted her head and looked directly into the warm eyes of a very elegant young man, who had already bowed down to gallantly help her up, amidst other words of apology.

Slowly they rose together, without taking their eyes off each other. While his hands still supported her arms, both remained very close to each other for a moment. People were jostling past them, but they did not feel it. Her hot breath left little white mists in the evening cold, which dissolved immediately in the warm aura of the newly born feelings: it was love at first sight, and for both of them it would be the greatest love of their lives.

The young man's name was Hans Koopmann, a stately presence, confident, with a sunny disposition, well-educated and from a good family. He was two years older than Adi and they soon became inseparable.

At this point, Adi and Hans could not imagine that they would be allotted a life of only 15 years together. Their shared life, beginning in 1927, which started at the fair in Düsseldorf, and after years of

deep love and belonging, ended in 1942, in desperate powerlessness before the gates of the detention center Breendonk, near Brussels, that was occupied and converted into a concentration camp by the Nazis.

Hans was the youngest of three children. His two older siblings, Irene and Walter, were already married by the time Hans met his Adi. Their father, Siegmund Koopmann was born in Uedem, a village near the Dutch border. This community had a good reputation in the traditional cobbler and wooden shoemaker trade, and has about 8,000 inhabitants now.

So, it happened that Siegmund and his wife, Jettchen Biermann, who was also from a small town called Michelfeld, opened a shoe store in Düsseldorf. Due to their efficiency, high-quality, large selection, and professional service they were soon known in town and the country, and had an excellent reputation.

The store was located in the old city center on the main street, and ran so well that soon another branch was opened, which was located just around the corner. In the main store, the sales areas were distributed over three large floors and the Koopmanns employed a total of 50 sales people. The store was extremely successful and was well frequented by both the common people of the middle and upper classes, as well as government officials, and the turnover was well apparent.

In 1926, the year before Hans met Adi, the brothers Hans and Walter were taken into their father's business and contributed greatly to its success. Just four years later, the entire business revenue amounted to over a million marks, an incredible success, which was mainly due to the good business sense and the tireless efforts of the whole family. No one could have foreseen that this was already the beginning of the end, and thus the last good year for the store, as the effects of anti-Semitic propaganda began to be already noticeable, if only subliminally at first, and then more and more.

The two lovers met mostly on Saturdays, to which they looked forward all week. Going out together or with their friends gave them heavenly joy. Their favourite activity was dancing, and so it happened that they passionately loved to take part in tournaments and competitions. With a strong sense of rhythm, temperament and natural devotion with which they merged to the sounds of music, they danced themselves into the hearts of the enthusiastic spectators, who could not get enough of the attractive couple. Most of their dances were valued so high that they almost always received a great price.

Since the beginning of their relationship, which in addition to their strong feelings for each other was also accompanied by a happy exuberance, a deep affinity developed at the same time, and both were convinced that they were made for each other, and that they would stay together forever. No goal was too ambitious, no future plans were unattainable, and the boundless optimism of their youth strengthened their dreams, so that no obstacles would ever be too great because they believed that their love had the power to move mountains or to change the world. This kind of thinking also explained their ignorance toward the danger that already lurked in the background in regard to the difference of their religion and would soon mark their life plans and ideals with painful limitations.

Hans was Jewish, and Adi's father recognized the danger immediately. He was also against all other religions, and tried every means to dissuade his daughter from that relationship. He strictly forbade her to bring Hans home, or any other potential son-in-law who was not Protestant. It was similar for Hans within his family, but in other respects. His family also could not understand that their son could get involved with a Protestant girl. His siblings had both married Jewish partners, as it was expected. So, the young couple had no other choice but to meet in secret.

After about a year, when the shock over the relationship of their son dating a Protestant girl subsided among the Koopmanns, Hans got permission to invite his beloved Adi for tea with his family. His parents were a bit more cosmopolitan than Adi's father and his second wife. The Koopmanns also enjoyed a far better and wider education, and belonged to a different social class. Adi's father came from a poor, agricultural area and had to work hard from a very early age to make money. His relatives were all simple workers, except for an uncle, who ran his own farm, and he and his siblings had only attended primary school. It was therefore very impressive, how far William had made it to that day with his innate perseverance, his hard work and dedication, and his keen sense for organization, money and business. As mentioned earlier, this resulted in a thriving bakery, a private commercial building and an additional profitable property, which provided a worry-free and very comfortable standard of living.

Adi had carefully prepared for her visit with the Koopmann family. Very stylish in a cream-coloured suit, holding a tasteful pastel-coloured bouquet from Düsseldorf's finest flower shop, she stood at the agreed time with a slightly raised heart rate at the door of the noble house of Koopmann.

The apartment was located in the city center of Düsseldorf, in a noble residential area, just near the well-known, idyllic court garden, which along with its picturesque castle *Jägerhof*, now the Goethe Museum, was established by Elector Carl Theodor of Palatinate. Over the centuries and to this day, the garden remained a popular location and attracted many strolling passersby and tourists with its old trees, and its well-kept flowers and plants.

A brass plate was attached at eye level to the noble wood of the Koopmanns' door, which indicated in fine writing the name of the owners. The minute she arrived, the door was opened by Hans, who had been expecting his beloved Adi with joyful impatience. He beamed at her encouragingly and took her immediately in his arms. Then he took her by the hand and led her over the silk carpets through the huge apartment that was equipped with fine antique furniture and paintings of famous old masters. As the family had already gathered in the main salon to assess the girlfriend of their youngest, before entering, Hans quickly gave his beloved a swift kiss on the forehead and whispered in a serious voice: "Whatever may happen today, my angel, everything will be fine, I love you!"

Adi nodded soberly and gave her Hans an affectionate glance. She breathed in deeply, and both remained a brief moment still, before Hans pushed the high door, and both appeared in the large door frame smiling, side by side, facing the astonished and friendly faces of the family members.

Hans put his right hand around Adi's waist and so they entered together, while Adi unpacked the nostalgically-bound bouquet of flowers from the silver paper, to present it to the hostess with a friendly thank you for the invitation.

Later, Hans proudly told his Adi that the family was very impressed by her, and mother had even commented: "This girl knows how to behave," and he added happily: "Adi, my dear, you've won, the ice is broken, now we have the family on our side, which cannot hurt."

Only Adi's father remained stubborn, and so, to keep him at peace, she let him believe that her friendship with the Jewish boy was over. So, the couple continued to meet in secret in the great hope that it would not be revealed and that God would protect them.

6. The Carefree Years

In the summer of 1931, Adi decided to spend her holidays with Olly in Switzerland. The two girls set out to go to Weggis for two weeks, an idyllic village on Lake Lucerne, in the heart of Switzerland. For the first time, they were crossing the German border into a neighbouring country, and in their great anticipation, they could hardly wait for the day of departure.

Finally, the awaited day had come when the adventure-craving young ladies, finely put together with their big leather suitcases, got on the train and headed for their destination. As Adi had secretly and passionately taken leave from Hans only a short time ago, she could now peacefully sit back in her compartment, and she was, just as Olly, in the best travel mood. The two girls amused themselves retrospectively about how on the way to the train station Father William had rolled the car windows down several times and called out cheerfully to the passing neighbours: "Today the young ladies are off to Switzerland!" They could not resist a slight chuckle at the thought of how cheerfully her father replied to their animated waving, as the train finally came whistling and moaning into motion. Magnificent was the sight, as William stood with an arched back and his head held high at the platform, proud as a bullfighter, one arm resting impressively on his waist and the other waving fervently in the air, until the last train compartment disappeared from his sight.

For William, who for most of his life never left his native area, it was already a big deal when he sometimes had to go to a nearby town on an errand or to Eifel for hunting. It was therefore understandable that long before Adi's departure, he proudly announced to all his acquaintances that his daughter would soon be travelling abroad to the beautiful, distant Switzerland. He painted each of his descriptions so colourfully that the astonished audience was given the impression that he was talking about at least a medium-sized world tour...

So, the girls arrived, after a long journey full of unique impressions, a little tired, but still in a very good mood, in the picturesque village of Weggis. To this day, its idyllic charm, the uniqueness of its wonderful lake and mountain scenery, has not been lost.

The sight of the posh hotel, which was located in the center, right on the shores of the magical Lake Lucerne, spurred Adi to exclaim from afar an enthusiastic: "Wow, how beautiful!". Olly, on the other hand, only sharpened her mouth, then put her head slightly to the left, then slowly to the right and could at first not decide whether she would be able to feel comfortable here, right on the main street. She explained that it would be expected with almost absolute certainty that a carriage or even a car may be passing here at least every hour, which would not meet her expectations of a relaxing stay...

It was quite clear, especially in spontaneous circumstances, how different the two friends were. On the one hand, there was Adi, the strikingly spontaneous, lively, and lovely young woman, very neat and delicately graceful in her movements, with her smiling eyes showing openness, curiosity and lightness. On the other hand, there was Olly, also a multi-layered personality, pretty and tall, sometimes

a little sheltered for her age, and oftentimes also pedantically instructive. She had an almost masterful accuracy for bad taste when it came to combining the styles and colours of her wardrobe. Her somewhat complicated way of thinking, which was also occasionally apparent in her manners and a limited sense of diplomacy, could sometimes lead to a bumpy awkwardness, which, however, did not seem to bother her.

But the difference in their characters in no way obstructed their friendship, which probably had something to do with the fact that both girls had a strong self-awareness and were clever enough, with their natural talent for tolerance, not to judge too hastily.

Conscious of their great privilege to be the first in the family to travel this far, they fully enjoyed the strong impressions of the first holiday on their lovely walks in the area and an unforgettable steam boat ride to the nearby city of lights Lucerne.

The weather was fine and the magnificent mountains could be seen in all its glory, especially at dusk, when the glittering silver mirror of the lake competed with the last rays of sunshine, and the foaming waves after the passing motorboats rolled over the lakeshore like little waterfalls.

At the time, the so-called high society was much more elegant than today, and so the two young ladies brought only the most exquisite articles of their wardrobe. To properly show off these clothes, they soon went out, dressed in their different, exciting outfits to the afternoon tea dance in the beautifully blooming garden, where in a white pavilion, a small orchestra played the most popular evergreen melodies for dancing. When the girls arrived, several couples were already moving to the rhythm of a Viennese waltz, and it seemed that the time had stopped. In this romantic setting, Adi thought longingly about Hans and her heart opened wide in the anticipation to see her beloved again in secret immediately after the holidays.

Both Graces were noticed while entering with respect to their youthful, blooming age and were examined intensively, which led to wonder and admiration, and to hidden amusement, because it was striking how differently the two young ladies dressed up. There was the petite Adi, who thanks to her discreet, secure fashion sense always made an excellent figure, and there was the tall, not to be overlooked Olly, wrapped in bright colours, and as if that was not enough, she also showed her preference for all kinds of ornamental nonsense, which she placed in her hair, at the neckline, and on the already lush clothing. Olly could afford the finest couture, but she regularly and accurately picked the most impossible combinations of clothes, and refused to be consulted by an expert or a seamstress every time she purchased clothing.

When Adi noticed the derogatory looks of the older, and therefore less tolerant guests, she would have preferred to send her friend back to her room to change, as she had done before when Olly dolled-up a bit too colourfully. Adi wanted to prevent her friend from being ridiculed. But after a well-meant, diplomatic, but unfortunately unsuccessful attempt, Adi had no other choice this time but to accept this situation with composure, and to stand firmly by Olly. As they went down the broad steps into the magnificent garden, the young people whom they had met that morning by the swimming pool were

waving to them friendly from a distance. They all enjoyed a pleasant afternoon in the most boisterous company with cocktails and dancing. They agreed to meet again later in the evening at a nearby dance hall, and then they all retreated back to their rooms to rest before dinner. And again getting ready was back on the agenda, and the two friends threw themselves with a lot of excitement into their great evening wear.

Nobody thought that this evening would turn into a very late night, or rather into a very early morning, for the cheerful company left the dancing hall at dawn the next day and this is how it happened. Back then in Switzerland, the regulation curfew was 1 am and all venues had to close by that time. This was far too early for the young people, and Adi asked a pharmacist's son from the area, whom the girls had met that afternoon, to ask the son of the hotelier to put in a good word for them and to ask for an exception, so that they could continue dancing to a gramophone.

To their great delight, that wish was granted, and the happy crowd danced freely, preferably to the sounds of wild Charleston music, into the early morning hours. Several of the well-bred daughters from good families even enjoyed smoking French cigarettes from a long silver mouthpiece, with languid eyes letting small clouds of smoke escape from their pointy lips. A spirited young beauty from Milan, dancing to the hot rhythms and to the enthusiastic applause of the participants, let her colourful feather boa slide over her bare shoulder to her slightly lifted skirt, where, seductively and as if by chance, the brilliant hints of a silk underskirt came to light. This sight caused the slightly intoxicated young men to look in fascination and to fantasize in temptation.

The whole night was one big excitement. For the young ladies, it was a chance to test out their seduction skills for the first time with gestures and looks, which resulted in the formation of some amorous couples, who then met in the following warm summer nights to walk under the moonlight and vowed eternal love and fidelity to each other.

On their way back to the hotel, the returning group enjoyed quite unexpectedly a unique sunrise, an almost supernatural event with a play of colours of incomparable beauty and intensity. This prompted Adi to longingly whisper a tender declaration of love to her beloved Hans in the warm morning breeze. Grateful and happy, she held on to Olly's arm and this brilliant day remained forever in their nostalgic memory.

Although Olly was still in her early twenties, she already paid very close and sometimes a little strange attention to her health. So, already after a few days, she decided to change their hotel in the center for, in her opinion, a quieter one, situated slightly higher on the hill, to treat herself and her body to a complete rest, as she put it. Even as a young girl, she had her little quirks, which rapidly increased over the years, and it is hardly surprising, that she was secretly called "the odd Olly" by her friends.

As the departure day was approaching, and all the new friends met at the invitation of Adi and Olly for a small farewell dinner, the new-found friends expressed their regret that their great time with the two great girls was coming to an end, and began to anticipate how much they would miss them.

When Adi asked for the bill after the happy hours of the get-together, and as usual when converting her German marks into Swiss francs, the hotel manager kindly pointed out, that due to a German currency crisis, a substantial devaluation had taken place, which meant that Adi definitely did not have enough money with her to pay the hotel bill the next day. That same hour she sent a telegram to her father and briefly described the new developments. William replied promptly and promised to send enough money immediately. For the two friends, this new situation was a fantastic change of events, because they "had" to stay another week in Weggis to wait for the arrival of the money, which led to an exuberant joy of all.

Hans also always liked to travel and had gone on some longer trips with his friend Maximilian, one of which had a very special place in his memory. Maximilian's father was a well known manufacturer. He not only owned a splendid villa in the suburbs of Düsseldorf, he also employed, along with the general staff, a butler and a private chauffeur for the family.

For the aforementioned trip, the two friends reserved a boat trip from Genoa to Madeira. Very shortly before their departure, the junior ordered his father's chauffeur to drive them to Genoa. The driver made no objections in return, as he was fully convinced that the request was in agreement with Maximilian's father, which Maximilian intentionally neglected to do. So the driver had to travel from Düsseldorf to Genoa and back again, which took several days.

Only in Genoa was the perplexed chauffeur confronted with the truth, and at the same time Maximilian ordered him to telegraph to his father to inform him of the facts. This action was a small, but vigorous "retaliation" by Maximilian on his father, who had accused him numerous times with harsh words of being unable to make personal decisions...

In the meantime, Hans and Maximilian embarked on their careless voyage. First, the luxury liner was anchored near Nice, and later in Tangier, where the young men spent a few days having a good time on land. To their great surprise, on the last day, in a shop selling postcards, they were offered discreetly hidden beautiful photographs of topless beauties. With red ears and a little inhibited, they decided to buy them despite the exaggerated price. Outside, they hid the photos in the pages of a newspaper, grinning mischievously and clearly proud of their courage, so that they could inconspicuously bring them back on the ship. And the trip went on to their dream holiday destination: Madeira. To this day, these particular photos are still preserved in one of the family's albums.

A few weeks later, after a glorious time, after disembarking in Genoa, they were looking for the chauffeur, but in vain. Apparently this was the revenge of Maximilian's father for his son's adventure, and for once, the spoiled young men had to make the tedious return trip by train, as all other average mortals.

Thus, time passed and life took its usual course. Adi and Hans were consistently inseparable and they continued to meet secretly as often as they could, without making it known to William. Since June 22, 1929, Hans had a driver's license and also bought a car. That was a good decision, because it gave Hans and Adi much more freedom to sometimes meet unnoticed or occasionally to take off for a day.

In the summer, Hans loved to play tennis at his Blue White Club. To his regret, he could not persuade or inspire Adi for this sport. Her passion for it came fifty years later, which will gladly be explained later. As before, Adi preferred to go swimming once in a week, and of course, the dance evenings with Hans were still first priority. He, in turn, also met his friends for a game of skat once a week, which he enjoyed very much.

As could be foreseen, Hans and Adi got secretly engaged and did not care what his parents would think. In any case, they responded neither surprised nor particularly pleased, but quietly accepted the decision of their son, and placed no obstacles in the way of the young couple.

Adi still felt forced to remain silent at home. It hurt her to know that she could not share her happiness and the great joy in her heart with her family. She especially blamed her father for his adamant insistence on religion, even though no one was really religious in the family. It disappointed her very much to know that her father did not judge people based on their entirety, according to their character and inner values.

7. Last Years in the Homeland

Since Adi and Hans had gotten engaged, they began going on vacations together, of course always accompanied by their close friends, as it was customary back then. They were still enchanted by each other and enjoyed a carefree time full of happiness and harmony.

Because of his age, Hans' father Siegmund, let his sons take over the shoe business in the late 1920s. Hans was a very clever businessman and mainly responsible for purchasing. He showed a keen sense for trends and innovations and his innate talent in the courteous dealing with people and his negotiating skills, made him a valued business partner who also enjoyed a high reputation with the customers. Through the hard work and commitment of the two brothers, success followed, which had the effect of an exceptionally good and profitable course of business.

On February 25, 1932, Adi bought her furniture from the company, *Gebr Schöndorff Nachf*, because the two lovers were deeply convinced and determined to marry as soon as possible, regardless of how their parents felt about it. Religion was still not an issue for the young couple, and they simply pushed away the already creeping, negative signs. But contrary to their hope, the situation did not calm down and there were noticeably more dark clouds on the political horizon, as it became obvious that the Nazis won more and more followers among the population. The Great Depression, which gradually had devastating effects on the middle class, and the constant fear of the population for their economic existence, offered Hitler the guaranteed opportunity to strategically and authoritatively usurp power.

At that time father Siegmund, who was also bothered by the political circumstances, was often travelling by train on business. That same year, on a hot summer day, Hans received a telegram from his father, who was back on the road, requesting to be picked up at the train station in Düsseldorf the next day. No one could explain in retrospect, whether father Siegmund's request came from a premonition or just out of a minor health concern. Although it was somewhat unusual for the father to ask his son for such a favour, Hans saw no signs of alarm in his request, which was probably the reason why he simply forgot about the appointment. This could only be explained by the fact that Hans had long arranged for a meeting with Adi at the same time, and in his excitement probably did not think to send his brother Walter to the station in his stead.

Hans would not see his father alive again. He died of heart failure just hours after his return, on August 26, 1932, at the age of 68. This terrible experience was the first bitter blow in Hans' life. It took a long time to shake off his guilt feeling, and asked himself over and over again the nagging question of why he was so silly or selfish to ignore his father's request. The idea that his father would have needed him in the last hours of his life did not leave his mind. Adi supported him as best she could and knew that she had to be a patient, supportive, understanding, and loving fiancée to Hans. The intensity, with which the two young people were confronted with the seriousness of life for the first time, left both of them to grow in their grief, and with time, they were gradually able to handle the incredible loss.

Already at the end of the year, it became noticeable, only barely at first, that the shoe business experienced a slight decline, and consequently the revenue began to steadily decrease. In January 1933, Hitler came to power and for the business that also meant the beginning of the end. Hitler made anti-Semitism to his advantage and ordered that people should avoid all Jewish shops, which had terrifying repercussions for Hans and Walter. By the end of that year the shoe shops of the brothers Koopmann were foreclosed. Even in the midst of this devastating blow, Hans immediately sought the permission to reopen the business.

Back in June, just before the decline of the business, Hans' mother died. Jettchen was physically in good health, but emotionally at the end. The last years were just too much for her. She could not bear the commercial bankruptcy and the subsequent loss of reputation and dignity, especially without the support of her beloved husband. All these misfortunes led to the fact that Jettchen's heart simply stopped beating. Each family member knew tacitly that the gruelling political situation had contributed massively to the fact that both parents had to die so early.

It was somewhat of a consolation to know that both parents still experienced the birth of their second grandchild, Claus-Peter, on July 1, 1931. The little son of Walter and his wife Gertrud was the sunshine and pride of his grandparents, and thanks to him the political and business worries in the house Koopmann were temporarily pushed into the background. This happy event gave the family once again carefree happiness for a short time.

Irene, Hans and Walter's older sister, had been married since 1914. She was 20 years old, and a year later in Munich gave birth to her son Fritz, the first grandchild of Siegmund and Jettchen. Irene was a cold-hearted woman, for whom the phrase "motherly love" was a foreign concept, although she had experienced its warmth in her parents' house. From Irene's perspective, she had fulfilled her husband's expectations with the birth of her son, delivering a successor. To her, Fritz was only "the child," as she called her son. Once he reached school age, he was immediately sent to a boarding school. It is not surprising that because of his mother's bad example and the loveless upbringing in which ethical values and character were never discussed, as well as because of the long absences of his father, he grew up to be an insensitive and selfish person.

Irene's husband, Joseph Schöneman, called Seppl, was an art dealer. He had a private, very prosperous art- and Oriental-rug business, first in Munich, and later in Düsseldorf, where he moved with his family in the 1920s. Later Seppl devoted himself solely to the art trade and the good business made him a wealthy man. So, the two families Koopmann and Schöneman lived success-oriented and content in Düsseldorf. Seppl was not only savvy in business affairs, but also politically, and figured that after the death of his mother-in-law Jettchen there was no future for him and Irene in Germany. So it happened that on September 13, 1933 he deregistered himself and his family in Düsseldorf in order to move to Amsterdam. But Seppl would not feel comfortable in Holland for very long. He soon began to see his move as a transit station, because he was convinced that he would not be able to escape the persecution of Jews here.

Already six months later, in late April 1934, he immigrated with his family to New York. Since it was impossible to take all his valuables, he had to leave behind most of the paintings and carpets, with the exception of a few small, extremely valuable paintings. That meant that he had to sell some very rare and expensive items as quickly and profitably as possible, which he actually managed to do. After that, Sepl wisely decided to put the proceeds from the sales into crisis-proof and secure gold bars. In order to bring the gold without risk to America, he had devised an absolutely brilliant plan. He asked a friend, a goldsmith, to melt down the bars and to process the liquid gold so that it could later be incorporated as reinforcement for the trunks. The former big, heavy trunks, which were so bulky that they could only be lifted by two people, were usually strengthened and stabilized with two either wooden or brass rods. Through the masterful work of the goldsmith, no one would have even dreamed that the brass rods were replaced with pure gold bars. That was a clever move on Sepl's part, so he could take his handsome fortune quietly and in confidence with him on the long journey and keep an eye on it.

Sepl was virtually followed by good fortune and even during the voyage, as an astute businessman, he managed to sell one of his most valuable paintings to a rich passenger and art lover at a fabulous price. This work, along with other rarities, was professionally installed at the bottom of his largest overseas suitcase, where it was just about to change the continent, hidden under a false bottom.

Just before they left for America from Amsterdam, Sepl and Irene tried one last time to persuade Hans to come along. But Sepl's fervent persuasion fell on deaf ears with Hans. He, the incorrigible optimist, could not imagine that Sepl would be right in his premonition and that the political situation would indeed escalate.

Even a few years later, when Hans and Adi were already settled in Brussels, Hans passed on his second chance to leave the country once again. The reason was his deep love and responsibility for his wife, whom he could never have left behind. His conviction to be secure in their new home in Belgium and his strong belief in justice and in better times, gave him confidence.

Immediately after mother Jettchen's death, the big, beautiful apartment in Düsseldorf was dissolved. The jewellery and a few paintings went to her daughter Irene, and the valuable furniture was divided among the sons Hans and Walter. Hans rented a two-bedroom apartment on Bahnhofstrasse 67, because until the death of his mother he had lived with her in the apartment that belonged to his parents.

When Irene first went with Sepl to Holland, long before their immigration to America, they could not risk taking all of the jewellery with them. Their own valuable furniture was initially also left behind in Düsseldorf. For Jews it was too dangerous to travel with larger baggage then. They were all strictly controlled everywhere, and thus it was very difficult for Irene to bring her beloved jewellery to Amsterdam. Only together and in agreement with Adi could they devise a plan. Because Adi was a Christian and still single, she could move freely and naturally could also travel anywhere. So it happened

that one day, Adi, decorated like a Christmas tree, went on a trip to Holland and was almost beside herself with nervousness. Thus, Irene could still enjoy her precious family jewels.

Now, besides Hans, only his brother Walter with his wife Gertrud and little Claus-Peter remained in Düsseldorf. Both brothers had no job and Hans was still waiting for the authorization to reopen the shoe stores. Thus on January 5, 1934, Walter reluctantly decided to immigrate to Prague, to a friend, with his wife and son and all that was left to him, to make a fresh start. According to the Czech laws then, immigrants were not allowed to engage in any self-employed ventures. So, together with his friend, as his employee so to speak, he published an advertising magazine, which, unfortunately was not a success. After Walter's financial resources were exhausted, the magazine was liquidated. For the rest of his stay in Prague, Walter made his living by selling the remaining inherited valuables. His great hope to make a worthy living in Germany or in any adjoining country faded more and more against the frightening and rampant Hitler regime and the ever-expanding political unrest.

So, with the support of friends, Walter decided to immigrate to Uruguay in order to build a new life in Montevideo for himself and his small family. Although it was extremely difficult to leave his wife and child for the time being, he overcame the separation for reasons of common sense and travelled alone. Once he had found a suitable job and an apartment, he would send for his loved ones as quickly as possible.

Walter could no longer afford to pay for his immigration and was initially supported by the Jewish organization *Joint*, which covered the first major expenses. Thus, Walter was able to stay afloat in Montevideo for at least half a year, and when after a long search he found a suitable job opportunity, with his last money he decided to immediately send for his beloved family that he missed so much. After this long troubled time and the many hardships and setbacks, the time had finally come! A peaceful and stable future became apparent, and the great desire to live a normal life was now within reach.

Since the last contact with her beloved husband only a few weeks back, every day Gertrude and Claus-Peter were prepared to start the long journey to their new home upon Walter's call. For Gertrude, it was a terrible time. The passive waiting for the redeeming news became a test of nerves and the political implications since the last contact with Walter pressured daily, almost hourly, for rapid action. It was a race against time, a race of life and death.

When the travel dates were finally set, Walter immediately informed his Gertrude of the redeeming news, with deep relief and full of anticipation. But Gertrude did not answer any more – it was too late. In that short time, his beloved wife and his young son were helplessly exposed to the Jewish persecution measures of Czechoslovakia. Both had already been deported, and shortly after were mercilessly killed in Auschwitz.

Only after a long, severe depression and a seemingly never-ending heartache and anguish, could Walter gradually and with great difficulty recover from the depths of despair and powerlessness, and numerous relapses. Life had to go on, and many years later he married another German woman in Montevideo.

Regarding the foreclosure sale, Hans was still waiting for the permission to reopen the shoe stores. The request was not directly rejected by the authorities, but he was also never granted the permit. It was a constant back and forth until Hitler officially ordered that Jews were now forbidden by law to be independent business owners. Hans could have foreseen that his optimism was hopeless because by that time the provision was already in place that the Christian population was forbidden to buy from the Jews. For this reason, the Jewish stores fell into bankruptcy, one by one, and therewith died for Hans the hope of re-opening the shoe stores. Another blow was the fact that he did not have permission to rent out the building. When shortly after he found the opportunity to rent out four of the store windows for exhibition purposes, it was promptly prohibited by the authorities.

The commercial building had a mortgage, and even though Hans was banned from occupying, renting, or selling this property, he still had to pay the mortgage rates. He was also regularly presented with outstanding tax charges, although one of his properties had long since been repossessed. He was also forbidden to object or to take defensive measures, because by that time Jews no longer had any rights in any business matters.

After a long and finally defeated struggle for work and justice, Hans had to look for a whole new money-making venture. The most obvious was a job that had to do with shoes, for he knew this business best. On October 19, 1933, he was issued a business identity card by the Düsseldorf police headquarters for twelve months, which allowed him to operate in shoe wholesales. The burgeoning hope would once again be short-lived.

Adi was still living with her parents and worked in the bakery shop. Her daily routine remained unchanged and she could still keep her love for Hans secret from her father and his environment. The couple met as always every Saturday with friends or they went out dancing. They could not get enough of painting their future together in the most beautiful colours and to dream of their own little family. They agreed that nothing would separate them in life and that they wanted to get married as soon as possible once Hans was able to find a regular job again.

One day the maid knocked on Adi's bedroom door with a tear streaked face and asked to be let in. She begged Adi not tell on her, because she had some bad news to announce. The two young women had always gotten along well, and Adi assured the girl that she could trust her. The maid told her that she went out with a Nazi officer last weekend, and that he told her that he and a few of his Nazi friends had agreed to ambush Hans next Saturday, to smash up this "Jewish pig," as he called him.

Adi rushed to the telephone in the hallway and told Hans in a whisper, but very seriously, that from now on meeting each other would be too dangerous, that he had to be careful in all circumstances and that at the moment he should better not leave the apartment. Hans promised, and both realized that political stability for which they had daily hoped for many months was out of question.

There was no other way for Hans but to get out of Germany as soon as possible. Two days later, he drove his Opel to the train station in Düsseldorf, left the car standing there and boarded the train to

Brussels without any luggage, so that no one would suspect that he was planning to stay away for a long time or attempt to escape. He left his apartment inconspicuously, as if he just quickly stepped out of the house. He left the valuable furniture and all valuables that he inherited from his parents, because there was no time to sell them. That was the summer of 1935 and Hans had chosen Belgium as his destination, because he was there as a young man for his professional training, and knew the city, and was well-versed in the French language.

For safety reasons, Adi and Hans did not meet prior to his departure. During their last phone conversation, Adi was reassuring and comforting, and assured him that she would follow him anywhere destiny would lead him. She kissed him through the phone and he felt her smile on the other end, as she whispered with a tender voice into the phone: "See you soon my darling, I love you and my heart is always with you!" Encouraged by trust and confidence in a strong love and the hope for a finally quiet, good life, Hans optimistically embarked on his journey.

8. Belgium

Full of new hope and zest for action, and with a firm conviction to be heading for a good future, Hans looked dreamily out the train window above his seat. But his eyes barely acknowledged the lush green of the meadows and forests rushing past. Lost in thought, he again remembered the last few days in Düsseldorf. He thanked destiny that he was forced to make a decision. Finally things were moving again in his life. He was painting many positive images of new possibilities and perspectives, and he decided to put them into action in Brussels. His optimism was boundless and allowed no negative thoughts. The thought to be forever reunited with his beloved angel made him close his eyes and sigh for a moment, and he felt his whole body flooded with gentle warmth.

At the German border with Belgium, Hans got a visa for 14 days, which was easily handed to him. Immediately after his arrival in Brussels, he tried to secure a residence permit. Already on October 19, 1935, he was issued a "feuille de route" by the Ministry of Justice, indicating that until November 10, 1935 he would have to cross the border back to Germany at *Hubertal in Liège*. Then Hans immediately submitted an objection with a request to prolong his stay by one month. This was approved and Hans repeated this action a few times, until months later, to his indescribable relief it was announced that he could stay in Belgium indefinitely.

At last he could look for a job, and although he had always worked in the shoe trade, he decided to try his luck in the fabric trade. In the first period after his arrival, he first lived with close friends in Brussels, whom he knew from his school days. After he was issued the aforementioned residency permit, he rented a small apartment in Rue Fosse de Loups.

This whole time, Hans and Adi stayed in regular contact through Hans' friends. Very soon Adi decided to follow her beloved Hans to Belgium as soon as possible. Of course it was hopeless to share her plans with her family. Her father would have never approved and he would have made every effort to prevent his daughter from going. What the implications of that would have been, Adi did not even attempt to imagine. One night while everyone was sleeping tight, she crept cautiously out of the house and took the next available train to Brussels. She left behind all of her possessions, which Adi had long left in the basement of her parents' house, as well as all other items that were dear to her. Only her cousin Irmgard, with whom she was always very close and to whom she had always confided everything from the beginning, knew of her plan. Later she also arranged for Adi's dowry to be transported to Brussels.

Finally arriving in Brussels after a long train ride, Adi was passionately greeted by her Hans at the station. He picked her up and whirled her laughingly outside through the scarcely illuminated, gray hall, where, under a clear and starry sky he gently put her down again. Adi's cheeks glowed, and in the warm safety of his embrace, she felt the wild beating of his heart, and for a short moment she fell into a deep

happiness, until she heard him say with a sigh of relief: "We did it, my sweet, welcome to Belgium – now life can start!" Closely entwined, they walked through the city towards their mutual home.

Hans established himself quickly and successfully in the fabric trade, and specialized in English wool fabrics, which he bought in London and then re-sold in Belgium in bulk. Soon, the business flourished and Hans could afford a large, beautiful apartment on the rue de Chartreux 19. Shortly before the move, on May 2, 1936, a long awaited dream finally came true. In the presence of two witnesses, Hans married his wonderful Adi in a small ceremony at the city hall of Brussels. Their happiness was indescribable, when deeply moved and infinitely proud after their vows as husband and wife, they received the congratulations of those present.

Now, a regular life could start and the simple, ordinary things of everyday life made them both happy and grateful. The ensuing period was full of love and harmony, despite the dark clouds that were spreading more and more in the distance. Since her arrival in Brussels, Adi had to run the household, for which she was not properly prepared at first. Except for a cleaning woman who came by once a week, there was suddenly no longer any domestic help available, as she was used to in Düsseldorf. Even the simplest preparation of meals was initially a real challenge. The concept of cooking was foreign to her, and so began Adi's career as a cook with the only dish that she could make really well, the fried potatoes that her father had praised so much.

Hans exercised leniency and smiled at the zeal with which his wife began to try preparing the simplest meals. Because Adi also repeatedly addressed the issue of family planning in their daily discussions, Hans responded one day to that question with a wink and a cheerful: "Yes, mommy!" Both laughed heartedly at that, and as Adi placed the overcooked Spaghetti on the table, Hans said with an exaggeratedly anxious voice: "Mommy, do we have to do this to ourselves?" With such encouraging and humorous words, Hans was immediately able to break the ice of the early, somewhat embarrassing cooking results. Thus it came that the initially jokingly-meant word "mommy" became Hans' favourite nickname for his beautiful wife.

The Spaghetti episode, however, brought back a smile for both of them even years later, remembering how Adi cooked her first pasta, unaware that it would swell, in a much too small saucepan with too little water. When the water ran over, she poured the whole mass into a larger pot with more cold water, until after changing pots about four times, the Spaghetti were totally overcooked and unsalted, and finally served as a doughy mousse for dinner ...

The French language gave her quite some trouble at first. She often had to describe with her hands and feet what she would like to buy in some shops. Once she wanted to buy egg white shells, in Germany known as "cream-baiser" (*Sahnebaiser*), which in French are known as meringues. Not knowing the French word, she demanded with many gestures a little bag of "cream-baiser," not realizing that the salesperson only shook her head and rolled her eyes because "baiser" in French means "kiss," and the shopkeeper's daughter was probably wondering why the young woman was asking for kisses in a

bakery... One would also have gladly been present when Adi wanted to make it clear to the butcher that she wanted to buy meat for a Roulade. After much back and forth, as well as plenty of grimacing and hand movements, the butcher finally realized that Adi wanted "des oiseaux sans têtes" (headless birds).

No one would have even dared to suspect that very soon Adi would become an excellent and very creative cook. She really liked to spoil her new friends with fancy menus. Every cooking instruction and every new recipe was collected in a folder and all the good tips were instantly written down and tested out. Her now fine cuisine was praised and appreciated, and it was literally a "treat" for everyone to visit this jolly, uncomplicated, and generally very popular German couple.

The new circle of friends of Hans and Adi consisted of both exiles and Belgian compatriots, and the communication was easy. Hans was already fluent in French, and Adi managed to learn the language with ease and used it almost playfully from the beginning. She could even have conversations in Flemish, and later also in Dutch and English, and it is not surprising that in this great repertoire, people often raved about her as Adi, the "linguistic genius." For her, the acquired strong language skills were a great asset in her social life, and it corresponded well with her lively personality to converse with people from different languages and cultures not only on a superficial level.

Those were beautiful, carefree years for Hans and Adi. Both were optimistic, Hans to a very high degree and Adi somewhat more restrained and cautious. Hans was very generous with his beloved wife; he spoiled her and carried her on his hands. She never had to ask him for money, he read her every wish from her eyes and made sure that there was enough money available for the household as well as for more exclusive purchases. Adi knew very well how to economize with the resources that were available. She soon became his financial manager. He trusted her and was relieved that he no longer had to grapple with the bookkeeping. She also held on to the money and sometimes stepped on the brakes, when in his generosity or sheer joy of life, Hans tended to become a little reckless with the money. They enjoyed life, laughed a lot, and often went out. Dancing was still their favourite pastime, and there was seldom a dance evening when they did not win prizes. Although the news from Germany were as worrisome as ever, they were both confident that they were safe in Belgium.

On March 4, 1938, two years after their emigration from Germany, Hans bought a car and they started taking short trips on the weekends. At that time, one did not require a drivers' licence in Belgium. One simply sat down in the car and went off. The motorists were only given a *Certificat d'immatriculation* and one had to carry it along, much like the license today. All that was not a problem for Hans because he already owned a car in Germany, and was experienced enough to get around on the Belgian roads.

Only very slowly and barely noticeable at first, would the beautiful and carefree life change. It was more intuitive that Adi was thinking that something may happen and Brussels could possibly become unsafe for Hans. The initial uncertainty was supported by an incident that happened in Germany on *Kristallnacht* between November 9 and 10, 1938. It was supposed to be a spontaneous retaliation of the German people against the Jew Herschel Grynszpan for the shooting of the German public figure Ernst

von Rath in Paris. Grynszpan was a 17-year-old boy whose parents were deported from Hanover. Hitler ordered to destroy the synagogues and to plunder the shops of Jews throughout the German Reich (Germany and Austria). Jews were attacked in their homes, humiliated, abused, arrested, or murdered. Western protests fell on deaf ears. A war was imminent and the outbreak was only a matter of time.

The fabric business was still going very well and Hans flew regularly to England to buy fabrics. Every time he left the country, he had to apply for a visa. Instead of a passport, Hans had a "certificate d'identité" because he was a political refugee. When on June 30, 1939, he received his visa for his business stay in England, eleven days later he flew to England as many times before. Adi must have had a sixth sense for she already suspected that from now on it would be too dangerous for Hans to remain residing in Brussels. Alarmed, she pleaded with Hans not to come back to Belgium right away, but to stay in London. She promised to follow him as soon as possible to England. In love as Hans was, he could not imagine being separated from Adi again for a longer period of time, and said reassuringly: "Mommy, it will not get any worse, believe me!" He just could not imagine it, which was a great concern for his loving wife.

On September 1, 1939, World War Two broke out, and only a short time later, in May 1940, Hitler invaded Belgium and no Jew was safe from him anymore. Hans still wanted to remain in Brussels, but an impressive incident quickly changed his mind. One evening he was out with Adi, and they ran onto a very good friend back from Düsseldorf, who wore German military uniform. Hans was about to walk towards him, but the oncoming continued to march sternly, looking straight ahead, past Hans. Adi noted with dismay that Hans turned pale, and that suddenly large beads of sweat had formed on his forehead. This incident opened Hans' eyes, and it became immediately apparent how dangerous it was for him in Brussels now. He decided to flee right away.

Shortly after, they stowed a few belongings into the car and drove off. Their goal was to reach Switzerland via France. Without any significant incidents, they passed Abbeville in France where to their horror they found that the bridge was blown up, and that it was no longer possible to continue the journey. For them and for the other people who were on the run, there remained no other choice but to turn back.

The long journey back was a nightmare. Demoralized and deeply shaken in their hope, they ran out of gas after a few kilometres, and to make matters worse, for miles there was nowhere to buy even the smallest amount of fuel. All the money in the world was now useless and the road side piled up with the most expensive and most beautiful cars, which their owners had to abandon in order to continue on foot with only the most important possessions. For Adi and Hans there was also no other way out, and after they had finished all the food they brought along, and after many tiring hours of marching, their hunger became noticeable, and they had to line up at a small village store for hours with other fugitives, hoping to finally get something to eat. Days later, when both now completely exhausted stood outside a shop, Adi fainted from hunger and weakness. A farmer felt sorry for her and offered her some meat and

vegetable soup. Although it was very tasty, unfortunately Adi had to vomit, for she had eaten far too quickly, which her stomach could not handle.

Totally exhausted, lice-ridden, dirty, and starving, they came walking back to Brussels. After this long adventure Hans was very uneasy and both were plagued with the worry in what condition they would find their apartment. They had left their fully furnished apartment just as they had lived in it, locked up with everything in it. They were tremendously relieved to find their beautiful home untouched after their long absence. This gave them a glimmer of hope again. When they slowly recovered from the shock of the last long nightmare and resumed their regular diet, Hans had to immediately look for a new job. He chose the diamond trade. It soon became clear how wise this decision was, especially in times of war. After all, whoever had some money left over now, put it into diamonds or other precious jewellery, because gold and diamonds were the only remaining valuables that could be carried easily in case of a flight.

Due to the recent negative events and experiences, Adi and Hans grew even closer. They were grateful to be together and could be there for each other. During the following months their courage was strongly tested over and over again due to the political situation. They also prepared themselves for several barren years of the war in the hope of being unnoticed and above all healthy. Despite the rationalization, they could afford to buy whatever was available on the black market. To their relief there were still enough good friends around with whom they could play cards and have small distractions in the evenings.

In these weeks and months the situation did not seem to deteriorate any further and so both were finally able to exhale a little. A day without any incidents was the norm again, which they welcomed as a good sign and as very reassuring. To Hans' great joy, Adi got pregnant in August 1941. A big dream came true and during the whole period of the pregnancy Hans was convinced that he would get a daughter. So it came that for the following Christmas he got for his future, yet unborn girl, a little fur coat in a beautiful gift box. That was quite brave because at that time the sex of an unborn child could not yet be determined. Adi was so delighted with this crazy, but sweet Christmas gift by the future father to his unborn daughter, and she took her Hans cheerfully laughing into her arms.

Adi experienced an overall good pregnancy. Only the first three months were a bit difficult at times because she felt quite nauseated sometimes. When that was overcome, she enjoyed the unalloyed anticipation and experienced quite new, intense feelings of a deep connection with the unborn child and her dearly beloved husband and future father of her child.

However, not all their friends were convinced that it was reasonable to have a child in times of war, after all the experienced worries, fear, and deprivation. When Hans ran into a former good friend while taking a daily walk with the very pregnant Adi, he was greeted by his friend shaking his head with the following words: "Hans, you're an asshole!" That was his honest opinion, and he felt it to be highly negligent that a Jew could take such a big risk during the war.

In the night of April 5-6, 1942, Adi went into labour and Hans immediately brought her to the hospital. Although she only gained minimal weight during the pregnancy, the baby took its time and the birth dragged out increasingly painfully for Adi. The gruelling labour pains took over fifteen hours, and finally it became so dramatic that the doctor and the midwife had to opt for a forceps delivery at the last minute. Deep blue in the face, with the umbilical cord wrapped around her neck, the tiny girl came into the world on the evening April 6, 1942, around 9 pm, and could finally be laid in the arms of her equally exhausted mom.

During the long hours of the difficult birth, Hans did not leave Adi's side for even a minute and went through all the ups and downs with his beloved angel. He encouraged, caressed, and supported her, cooled her hot forehead and rubbed her aching back.

When at last his baby, his little Astrid, had won the battle into life, Hans was deeply touched at the sight of this tender body, which was marked by the efforts of the last hours. An infinite gratitude and an almost reverential joy flowed through his heart and he swore deep inside to always protect his two women, to care for them, and to be a good husband and father.

Hours after the birth Hans was still enthralled, and in the exuberance of his feelings he would have fetched the stars from the sky for his Adi. He gave her a beautiful diamond ring and a warm fur coat. It took a total of twelve days for Adi to fully recover and to slowly regain her energy. The tiny Astrid was doing well, so that mother and daughter were finally able to leave the hospital, to return home to the safety of the young family. In order not to challenge fate again, the couple decided not to have any more children. The only shadow over their deep happiness was the fact that there still was a war going on with no end in sight.

Adi recovered rapidly. The deep happiness shone from her eyes and she provided for her little daughter devotedly with her innate warmth and ease. Hans was as always successful and enthusiastic about his work. One morning, he was only a few steps from the apartment, he returned, to Adi's surprise, with the explanation: "A Jew should not wear a diamond ring and draw any attention to himself." He took off his jewellery, changed and left the apartment again, as unobtrusively as possible.

Three days later, on May 9, 1942 came the fateful day. Hans was on his way to church, where he wanted to register Astrid for baptism. She was to be baptized in the Dutch Reformed Church, because Hans did not want his daughter to be raised in the Jewish faith. He probably did not realize that Astrid would have been baptized a Protestant anyway, because her mother was Christian. He often mentioned worried to Adi: "Jews will only have difficulties in this world." How right he was. Just before Hans reached the church, two SS men came towards him, stopped resolutely before him, and demanded his papers. After checking his identity card, Hans was immediately arrested, and without a word taken to jail of Saint-Gilles, from which a month later, on June 13, 1942 he was transferred to Breendonck.

Breendonck is on the way to Antwerp, near Brussels. At the beginning of the war, the fort of Breendonck served as a detention center for Jews and political prisoners. The first prisoners were transferred in 1940. Although, in the first months after the opening of Breendonck, they were still treated somewhat humanely. But after June 1941 the times had changed radically and the inmates were treated like animals. The great hunger, from which the prisoners also had to suffer, forced some inmates in their desperation to eat the grass on the prison grounds. It was also not extraordinary that executions by hanging and shooting were carried out. The most cruel prison guards were the Belgian SS men Wijss, de Bodt, and Pelle Mans. The prisoners had to live in cement bunkers that were cold and damp. Two buckets served for about 20 inmates as a toilet and medical care was out of question. More than 3500 people were detained in Breendonck during the war, but never more than 600 people at a time. Compared to other concentration camps, 600 prisoners was a relatively small number. That was a big disadvantage for the prisoners, because the guards had a much better overview and more time to think up and perform all kinds of torture methods. Today it is estimated that about 300 prisoners were killed there. Which might not seem to be a lot, but the inmates were kept there only for a few month before being transferred.

When later the Allies arrived in Breendonck, on September 3, 1944, the camp was cleaned up and remains to this day the best preserved concentration camp.

In January 2002, Astrid dared to visit the place, where her father had a painful time, and she was so surprised and shocked to find that after more than half a century, the memorial room still listed all the names of all the prisoners, who were incarcerated there during the war years. The names were printed alphabetically on brass plates, which spread over a large area, hanging across three walls. This direct confrontation with her father's past was emotionally indescribable for her. As if driven by an inner compulsion, she searched, to the rhythm of my racing heart beat, through all the names on the tables until in the lower half of the middle wall she could read her daddy's name – close enough to touch, at eye level ... Never in her life was she nearer to her father than at that moment.

After his arrest in the middle of the street, all of Hans' personal belongings were taken and confiscated. In addition to a *Longines* watch made of chrome steel, his house key was also taken away, and so it happened that two days later, without using the doorbell or knocking, two SS men suddenly appeared in Adi's living room. Startled and in terrible fear of losing her beloved husband, Adi was almost scared to death at the sight of the two men, because as it was often the case in these times, mother and daughter should have been arrested immediately.

Because the SS always operated in teams of two, it happened that one of them was a bit more human, and so they listened to Adi at first, while she showed them her papers and was able to identify herself as a pure Aryan. Although the older of the two wanted to make no compromises on the grounds that it was a damn disgrace for an Aryan to be married to a Jew, the younger one prevented an immediate arrest, asking his colleague to hear Adi out to the end. She quickly recognized her opportunity in this very

threatening situation, and she succeeded to remain calm with her last strength, by pretending to listen attentively and to answer the questions in a friendly, calm, and correct manner.

It was probably due to Adi's controlled behaviour that she was allowed to remain in the apartment, and she even managed to find out the whereabouts of Hans. What would happen to him next, she could not find out. On the one hand, this was a great blessing for the young wife and mother, because at that time the public was still far from knowing what fate and inhuman atrocities were going on behind the thick walls of concentration camps. Because Adi grew up very sheltered and had always been taught as a child that with reason there could be a solution for all problems, she once again clung to the hope that things would clear up and that Hans would soon return as a free man.

In retrospect, Adi considered it to be luck that she was home when the two men came. Had they found the apartment empty, it would certainly have immediately been confiscated. Besides, Adi was able to find out from them where Hans was and that the possibility of a visit in the camp might not entirely be excluded.

The very next day Adi warmly wrapped her little girl and they went to Breendonck. The hope for the longed-for meeting with her husband was shaken hard, when with Astrid in her arms she was stopped at the high gray gate of the camp, and strictly rejected by two uniformed men. A visit was impossible she was told and ordered to turn back immediately. Scared, she pressed Astrid tightly to her chest and left the camp with uncertain steps, plagued by a strong rise of dizziness and panicking fear that her legs would fail and that she could fall down with Astrid. After several glances back she could suddenly see her beloved Hans behind a maze of barbed wire. She stopped as if frozen and watched as he waved to them vividly with both arms before he was whistled at by a guard and violently forced to walk on. Chalk-pale Adi grabbed Astrid's arms to wave back. In her state of shock and overwhelmed by the desperate situation, her own wave and smile froze, and she proceeded deeply shaken and blinded by tears to go back, while Astrid fell asleep on her shoulder.

As a last saving attempt before a complete breakdown, Adi tried to repress what she just experienced with all her remaining forces. She clung desperately to the hope that this experience could not be the reality, and that these deeply dark delusions arose only in this traumatic form from her imagination because of the sleepless nights and the terrible fear for Hans. She told herself that everything would turn out to be a grave mistake. At this thought she pressed her little one close to herself and she managed to finally breathe calmly.

The first postcard from Hans came a few days later and brought Adi finally back to reality. In the message she read that he would have to do hard physical labour in the camp, and with a bit of dark humour he added that it would not be so bad for him. He wrote that he urgently needed a blanket and warm clothing, and gave specific instructions which clothes she should send him. The second card that Adi received was not much different than the first, except that he asked for even more warm clothes. Of course she immediately sent him everything and whatever food she could find. In her heartfelt lines, she

did not admit her fears, so as not to worry him, and encouraged him instead to stay strong until their reunion.

Adi felt very close to her husband and because they had grown together in recent years, she acquired a daily ritual as a survival strategy. She intensely imagined that Hans was currently only doing his professional work outside the home in order to return to the family after the work was done. To recharge on energy, to calm down, and to have the strength to raise little Astrid as unmarked by the events as possible, Adi needed these ideas. The repression also had a positive side because during that time Adi could remain a happy, focused, and loving mother to her growing child. She felt especially rewarded when she witnessed the daily progress of her little girl and with it also saw new and amazing resemblance to her father.

These were difficult months for Adi, and when she awoke in the middle of the night from nightmares, drenched in sweat and hopelessly discouraged in fear for her dearly beloved husband, she needed a lot of energy every time to more or less regain her inner balance. The desperate uncertainty about the near and distant future of the family must have been incredibly hard for both lovers in the time of separation...

Four months later, on September 5, 1942, Hans was transferred from Breendonck to Mechelen, to the collection camp Dossijn, where most prisoners could stay only briefly and where their future fate was determined.

The Dossijn barracks in Mechelen, built in the second half of the 18th century, were used as regular barracks at the beginning of the Second World War. During the war, the barracks were taken over by the Nazis and used for criminal purposes, i.e. as a collection point for Jews, who were then transported to concentration camps only days after their arrival.

The first transport of prisoners left the Dossijn barracks on August 8, 1942. From that day on, until July 31, 1944, the Nazis organized yet another 25 of these terrible transportations. Thus began the Final Solution of the Third Reich. About 50% of the Belgian Jews became their victims. On the whole, 25124 Jews were deported from the Dossijn barracks, mainly to Auschwitz. Among them were 5430 children, 150 of whom had not yet reached their second birthday. More than 95% of all Jews did not survive; most were killed immediately after their arrival in Auschwitz. In addition, 5034 Belgian Jews, who had fled to France, were arrested and also deported through Dancy to Auschwitz. Only about 317 people survived.

Hans must have felt that he would not be able to see his beloved family again, so he wrote the last card to his wife on September 9, 1942 (from the original):

"My dear beloved mommy & baby,

Well today I have another opportunity to write to you. Right after we got here I put in a request of contact for you and Astrid. But I have little hope from here. It may now be that I will not be able to see you for a long time. But for the endless happiness you have given me, I have now paid and will still need to pay ... it's so (two words illegible). What you do now, you have to know yourself; unfortunately I can't give you any advice. The main thing is that we meet again in good health. I am no longer afraid of the hard work; that I have learned and it has not harmed me. I heard that you look very well and that Astrid has very big blue eyes. All this gives me courage. Just do not despair, maybe it is good if we have to ... (2, 3 words illegible). I hope it won't be too hard for you with the child. You're still a baby, no, my baby. Mommy, one last heartfelt kiss, goodbye and trust in God.

Your Daddy."

And from these deeply melancholy lines Adi felt in the desperately unbearable pain the resignation of her brave husband, whose optimism and hope were forcefully broken, and the terrible images before her mind's eye plunged her into the deepest abyss of human torment and despair.

Since the very beginning of his arrest, Adi attempted to free him with all available means, supported by her Protestant faith and the knowledge that mothers whose children were not Jewish could never be regarded as Jews. But all the arguments and evidence were in vain, quite the opposite. Adi was threatened that she and her child would be arrested too if she would not restrain herself at last. She was informed that with her marriage to a Jew, she infringed upon the Nürnberg laws. So, her hands were tied so to speak, and she was not allowed to do anything even for the safety of her child.

So the only thing she had left was the belief that everything would still get better. Her thoughts were still circling around Hans every second, and at night she dreamed of a wonderful reunion, she missed him so much that sometimes during the day she stared transfixed at the door, in the hope that it would open, and her husband healthy and radiant would come in and close her in his arms.

On September 12, 1942, which was three days after the last dated card to his beloved wife, Hans along with many other prisoners, was taken away in the "convoy IX," a cattle car under the number 671, to Auschwitz.

Contrary to all the facts, Adi waited every hour, in a kind of survival strategy, for the return of her Hans, and did not give up the hope for a peaceful life with the reunited family. This was evident by fact that every three months Adi took Astrid to a photographer so that Hans could recreate the development of his girl upon his return.

Now, even more difficult times awaited Adi. The whole emotional distress, the fears, combined with the great longing for her husband, and the emerging uncertainty whether she would see Hans ever again, made her sick. She was alone with her baby and the war now raged in her immediate environment, and the bombings shook the earth. No one knew whether they would survive and how long this terrible condition would last. After Astrid's first birthday, Adi decided to baptize her baby daughter in the same

church that her father had selected for her. The small, solemn ceremony in the miraculously still undamaged church took place on May 23, 1943. That day, Adi felt a closeness with her husband and she was convinced that Hans would return someday.

From the beginning, Astrid gave her mother some concerns about her health, because the girl came with a nervous stomach into the world, which had the consequence that she simply could not eat properly. Although Adi could buy the best available products on the black market, the condition did not improve even after many months, so that Adi had to put the girl in the hospital for a few days with alarming underweight. The medical examinations and observations showed that the child could not digest the baby food, and as soon as she could have small amounts of solid food, her eating habits changed immediately, and she could eat with great pleasure and was able to digest it. Astrid became a really refined eater and particularly could not get enough of shrimps as a child.

Whenever Adi watched her sweet, spirited daughter playing, and saw how thoughtful and courageous she was with her toys and even tried to have a lively conversation with them, this sight drew a hearty laugh from her. It was almost tragically funny when the little girl, happily screaming, carried a photo of her father through the apartment, or sometimes tried to kiss it noisily, but in her zeal often missed the photo and the wet kisses landed in the air.

Such moments filled Adi's heart with love. She still refused to give up hope, and imagined on a daily basis, how proud Hans would be of his Astrid, when upon his return he could enjoy the liveliness and charm of his daughter, and in the happy exuberance of his feelings could spend lots of time with her.

After many setbacks and a long period of depression, Adi dedicated herself again to her friends and acquaintances. She also met regularly with Mimi and Dadame again, her two friends, who stood by her during the difficult times, comforted her and always gave her courage. "Dadame's" real name is not known. It was little Astrid, who called her that, perhaps because it sounded like "Madame." It quickly spread through the circle of friends and soon everyone called her Dadame.

Both friends lived nearby and whenever the alarm sirens announced a bombing attack, Dadame came running to Adi's apartment. She had been a widow for years and in these desperate moments always sought closeness with people in order to not stay alone in her apartment until the bombing was over. Dadame then fled with Astrid to the bombing shelter because she was convinced that there they would have the best chance of survival in case of emergency. Adi had a quite different view. She could never decide to go downstairs because she could vividly remember her experiences in the First World War. In her mind, she was still haunted by the shrill tones of the whistles of the buried victims, which again provoked shivers down her spine, and it still shook her when she realized that these poor people, in the absence of available helpers, were painfully tortured to death by their injuries somewhere beneath the earth. After these terrible experiences, Adi was convinced that it would be better for her to die immediately, than to endure helpless days of deadly agony. Thus she preferred to stay in her apartment during the bombings, and all three friends had been very lucky that their buildings were largely spared.

Since Hans was not there anymore, the huge apartment seemed almost a little scary. She felt lost in it, and above all very lonely, and she called her home "mon tombeau," meaning "my grave." Worst of all was Christmas time for Adi, and in desperate hours she seriously feared not to be able to survive another Christmas without her beloved husband.

But a change of residence was out of question in these times of war. Even if an opportunity would arise, she could never move. The idea that her beloved Hans would be forced to look for her new address after the war and upon his return from the concentration camp, weakened and perhaps injured, was out of question.

So she lived from one day to the next, and she was grateful when things stayed calm in the sky and she could go for a walk with her little girl in a stroller. It was important to her that Astrid got fresh air every day and in all weather conditions. When she got a little bigger, the two spent every day in the Royal Park. There Astrid was able to get to know other children and play with them, and make her first, very important social experiences with her peers. This was very important to Adi for the development of her daughter, because her apartment in the center of Brussels had no balcony and no garden where Astrid could run around, and Adi was the only person around at home.

In bad weather it was difficult to do something, and Adi often animated her girl with her father's blank accounting books, which she was allowed to fill with her scribbles line by line. It was wonderful to watch the little one clutch the pencils between her little fingers, caught in sheer concentration and dedication, panting loudly and driving her tongue over her lips, as she quite simply forgot to close her mouth. Sometimes she just knelt on the chair, scribbled a few lines, then supporting herself on her little arms, looked very critically at the "written" work, moving her head from left to right, to then immediately continuing to "work." And when Adi called her asking from another room: "Astrid, what are you doing?" She answered: "Je joue au bureau, maman!" It also got loud and merry when Astrid rushed through the rooms and hallways on her tricycle or scooter, sometimes cutting the curves, sometimes tipping over and getting back up again, and happily squealing continued the race. Once, Astrid could even go to the children's cinema with Adi's best friend's son. That did not go so well because she cried through the whole performance, longing for her mother.

Like all children, Astrid also occasionally caused some worries. In her curiosity to explore the environment and her great desire for movement, freedom and *Wanderlust*, Astrid decided one afternoon to visit her "aunt" Mimi. It was after Astrid's third Birthday, when she, without telling her mother, unceremoniously left the apartment, crossed the busy Place de Brouckere, and then completely innocently rang Mimi's doorbell in a side street. Mimi got a big shock, took Astrid in her arms and immediately went to call Adi. "If you are looking for your daughter, she is with me!" Adi was flabbergasted because she had not even noticed the absence of her daughter in the big apartment. From then on, the apartment door was always locked and the key was hidden.

One day, Dadame called and wanted to speak with Adi. Astrid immediately took the call and as her mother did not hear the phone, said without greeting Dadame: "Mami se fait beautiful, elle va au cinema," which of course was not true, and she immediately hung up, without letting Dadame speak. All of five times Dadame had to call back and got the same answer over and over again after only one ring, and then was quickly hung up on again. At the sixth attempt, Adi finally heard the phone ring, saw how Astrid swiftly tiptoed and inconspicuously disappeared in the office, and immediately picked up the receiver. With the words: "Your daughter will cost me a fortune," Dadame told about Astrid's prank, and Adi could not resist a smile...

Most of Adi's acquaintances and friends spoke only in German amongst each other, but at home mother and daughter spoke exclusively in French. When Astrid was born, it was clear to her parents that they wanted to stay in Brussels and therefore they found it not necessary to bring up their daughter bilingual.

In these times of war, Adi, like many of her fellow-sufferers, was often very sad and depressed. Sometimes she was really overwhelmed by her pain; the uncertain future and the great longing for her husband brought her close to a breakdown at times. Trying to hide her grief from Astrid, she often sang on days like these the same songs: *J'attendrais toujours* and *La vie en rose*. But every time Adi struck up one of these songs, Astrid began to cry and asked her mom to please stop. The girl must have sensed early on that a great sadness was connected with these songs.

Then the wonderful day in May 1945 came. The sun was shining and the sky was cloudless and deep blue. Adi was out for a walk with Astrid and everywhere in the windows and on the balconies hung colourful flags and Astrid's eyes could not get enough of all the colours. "Why are there so many beautiful flags, Mama?" Adi lost in thought stroked Astrid's silk hair and replied softly and moved: "The war is over, my child!" Astrid was too young to understand the enormous significance of this statement and simply rejoiced in the decorated houses and streets, and the many people who crossed their path with beaming faces. This day made a memorable impression in Astrid's little heart, so that she remembered it all her life and its images are still strongly rooted in her consciousness as if it was yesterday.

For Adi, a nerve-wracking time began now. The great hope suddenly returned with such incredible intensity that she sometimes struggled to get her impatience and nervousness under control. When would she see her beloved husband again – would she ever see him again?

Adi's emotions knew no bounds and she went through the highest highs and lowest lows, and sometimes she felt so close to her dream, only to fall back into deepest doubt and indescribable fear.

Time passed ever so slowly without any news and there was no sign of life or news from Hans. Then, after months, finally a few prisoners of war came back to their last place of residence. Amongst them were a man named Mr. Jacob Najhaber and another named Mr. Levie Israel, who were held as deported

prisoners in the concentration camp Auschwitz. Both confirmed that they saw Hans become seriously ill, only a shadow of his former self, and finally taken to the gas chamber of the camp ... This devastating news reached Adi like a cannon shot and tore her heart to pieces and with it any ever so tiny glimmer of hope. But life went on – minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day...

Even during the war, every Wednesday, Adi had to check in with the police because she was a foreigner. On October 25, 1945 she received a notification informing her that she was “libre de tout controle.”

Immediately the following summer Astrid was hit by a severe cough and the doctor advised Adi to send her child for several weeks to the seashore. She found an appropriate children's sanatorium in Blankenberge, a picturesque town on the Belgian coast. Even as a little girl Astrid responded well to reasonable arguments, so it was not too difficult to endure the prescribed three months without the constant presence of her mother. Adi visited her as often as she could and was pleased with Astrid's good progress.

Sometimes Adi also brought Olly along, with whom she had lost touch since her escape from Germany and during the long war years. At the time, Olly was still married in London and Adi had often missed her. The reunion came just at the right time and with it a new chapter of life that brought Adi out of her deep emptiness.

The two young women always loved to revel in memories, especially those of their holidays together in central Switzerland, in the beautiful village of Weggis, where they spent unforgettable days and nights in their youthful carelessness. Related to that was of course the memory of the start of Adi's great love with Hans. It had blossomed right around that time in all its strength, and there was this intimate and wonderful base for a strong, deep, and unique connection that lasted beyond death. The sadness that still arose from these memories hurt Adi very much, even though she had found for herself a personal survival strategy that enabled her to largely make peace with her destiny. She told herself with conviction: "What is over will not destroy me any further – It was a gift from heaven that I could experience it, that it happened at all!" She remained a part of Hans, and he a part of her, and the thought of him gave Adi the force for each new day. In the hard-won inner peace, Adi was carried by her comforting sincerity and conviction: "Love is stronger than death, and there will be a reunion in another dimension!"

To the delight of all, Astrid's health was improving. During the last visit, Adi and Olly took little Astrid to their favourite beach restaurant for lunch. While the two women were talking animatedly after their meals, Astrid must have gotten bored and asked for permission to leave the table to play in the sand close-by. Only after a while, the two women noticed that Astrid had disappeared without a trace, and immediately began searching for her. All the people nearby were mobilized, including some Amies, who were still stationed in Blankenberge. For hours all searched in vain for the little girl, and every volunteer went out of his way to cover the large area. When Olly walked past a distant church, she thought that here she could ask God in a brief prayer to assist her in the search for Astrid. She opened the heavy

church door and gasped: all alone, in her blue and white polka dot bathing suit, with a long willow stick between her folded hands, Astrid knelt gracefully in the middle aisle before the altar, and watched in amazement the ornate, golden church treasures, whose brilliant abundance cast a spell over the little girl.

In the meantime Adi was near fear and panic, when she was infinitely relieved to see the two approaching from a distance. Astrid was then also happily greeted by some fellow searchers, and a small group of Amies cheered her up encouragingly. Incidentally, they were very popular with the children and of course with Astrid. This was not surprising, because every time Astrid was out with the supervisor and several comrades in the city and ran into the American soldiers, they waved to them smiling and Astrid greeted them with a perky: "Hello boys," which often was rewarded with a piece of military chocolate.

During the worst period of the war, Olly was on the west coast of England, where many rich people spent the war years. Because she lived in her own sheltered world there, after the war she was often stunned to learn about the raging devastation of war and the Nazis in this country. She could hardly believe that something like this was even possible. Shortly after the war, Olly got divorced and lived for a good year in London. That was the time when she came back into contact with Adi and often came to visit her in Brussels. After her marriage to a Swiss man, she lived with her new husband in Zurich. Not even in her dreams had it occurred to Adi that Olly's marriage and thus her new residence should have such serious consequences for Adi's future life.

As was known from their vacation in Weggis, Olly cared almost excessively about her health ever since her earliest youth, which increased over the years, and even led to some obvious exaggerations. Olly's thoughts were also often a bit strange, and so she intermittently became the amusement of her friends behind her back. No matter where she was, her morning routine lasted a minimum of two hours. It began early in the morning with an hour of exercise, followed by a 20-minute hot and cold shower. Then she brushed her hair for 20 minutes with a hair brush made of pure natural bristles, and then it took at least another half an hour to care for the face and body, and pick out the right wardrobe.

In her large apartment in Brussels, Adi only had a bathtub, no shower, and no hot water. But that didn't pose a problem for Olly, and during her visits she always calmly lay in ice cold water, much to the astonishment of Adi, who always boiled a few pots of water for her bath. Olly could only shake her head because she was convinced, and preached it to everyone that nothing could be healthier for good circulation than to lay in a tub of cold water preferably every day.

After the war, Adi could go to a public office in Brussels, where personal belongings of Jews who died in Auschwitz or other concentration camps could be picked up by their relatives. It was mostly only jewellery pieces that were not made out of precious metal or precious stones, for the really valuable things were long seized by the Nazis and never returned. When Hans was arrested, he only wore a *Longines* watch made of chrome steel on his wrist. Nevertheless, it was very valuable, because even then the *Longines* brand was very popular among watch lovers. When Adi came to the aforementioned

office, she was faced with a giant wall fully decked with countless watches, bracelets, rings, and trinkets of all kinds. In front of the wall was a long counter with even more objects. Adi was asked what her husband had on him at his arrest. When she mentioned the *Longines* watch, the clerk replied: "Oh dear, it will be difficult to find the right one among the hundreds!" To the astonishment of the employees and even for Adi it was like a miracle when with a single glance from the distance of the counter to the wall, Adi recognized Hans' watch and could clearly identify it. Adi accepted it quietly and reverently, discreetly pressed it to her chest, and hastily left the building...

Through all the years, Adi's cash reserves gradually came to an end. She applied for a pension in Brussels, but with no results. During this time she also learned that Hans' family home in the center of Düsseldorf, was put up for sale by the mortgage creditor, for failure to pay the mortgage for several years. Although Hans and his brother Walter would have liked to pay a few years in interest, after the shock of the seizures and the ostracizing of the Jews, they did not dare make themselves more conspicuous or to draw attention to themselves. Together with her brother-in-law, Adi then tried to get compensation for Walter and for her daughter Astrid, which they were denied even though they were the rightful heirs. The compensation law was not established until years later.

Meanwhile, Olly was happily married in Zurich. She was a very open-minded, modern woman and not at all shy. Wherever she happened to be, she got on well with people and could quickly strike up conversations, and thus established a large and colourful circle of friends in her new homeland. Among them was a young Swiss fellow named Alfred Bächler, still a bachelor, who at that time lived in a furnished room in St. Gallen, Switzerland, and traded with electrical accessories, kitchen and bathroom lighting fixtures, and various electrical cables, which were both essential in existing buildings as well as in the newly built ones. "How fitting," Olly must have thought when she was introduced to Alfred. She contemplated fast and thought: "Adi and Astrid alone in Belgium, and Alfred, alone in Switzerland, that could be helped!" And so she immediately began to arrange a match and as it turned out later, with success! Perfect as Olly was, she also thought that this prospective couple would at least have no problems of religion, since both were Protestant.

After informing Adi very directly and not very gently of her contact with Alfred, he was already busy preparing for a trip to Brussels. He expressed to Olly that he was not opposed to marriage, on the condition that the right woman would come along. After Olly had spoken to Alfred of Adi, of course only in the best words, he was already generally interested in her and wanted to meet her as soon as possible. Adi, however, did not know how she felt about it and took Olly's well-meant advice very sceptically at first. Gradually, however, she had to admit that Olly was at least in theory right, that in her situation, a marriage would be an advantage.

Of course, Adi long wished to turn her back on the city of Brussels, where she had known so much misery, to move away just to finally escape the painful memories and to start a new life. Slowly, her savings were exhausted and her great concern how to provide for herself and her little one caused her many sleepless nights. Out of inner conviction, she could definitely not bring herself to return to

Düsseldorf. Her father would have surely helped her, but her moral convictions made it impossible for Adi to move back to her countrymen, who were responsible for the brutal murder of her innocent husband.

Understandably, the thought of a move to Switzerland was not unwelcoming, and gradually Adi began to imagine how she and Astrid could finally come to rest in that peaceful country, and find a new home and maybe even some happiness and security again.

Even before the meeting with Alfred took place, she was very directly prepared by Olly that Alfred, in his whole appearance, should not be compared with Hans. She would have to be willing to make a few compromises, for which she and Astrid would be taken care of in return, and she could incorporate all her good domestic qualities and her sunny, positive personality into the family.

A thousand thoughts raced through Adi's head as she stood across from Alfred for the first time. Physically, he was the exact opposite of Hans, who was tall, slim, and always very elegantly and carefully made up. Hans was also very charming, had a fine, clever eloquence and expression, was good at conversations and a good listener, generous, humorous, attentive, sensitive, and a very attractive gentleman. Alfred, on the other hand, was stocky, not very well groomed, had coarse facial features and a rather proletarian nature of speech and behaviour. In retrospect, it may only have been despair and fear of the future that let Adi, with Olly's persistent efforts, to get involved with this man at all.

Initially, Adi had very strange feelings towards Hans, who would never leave her heart, almost a guilty conscience, as she met Alfred. She experienced it as a kind of betrayal of her beloved husband, and she needed a great effort and reason to see the positive in the new meeting.

Nevertheless, Adi decided to marry Alfred a year and half later in Brussels, to then move with him to Switzerland. But before that all the papers had to be put in order and the running around to all the public offices began. First it had to be proven that Hans was really dead, since Adi had no death certificate. For that, evidence had to be brought to court. The gentlemen Jakon Najhaber and Perl Levie Israel had to testify under oath about their experience with Hans Koopmann in the concentration camp Auschwitz, and all that they had seen with their own eyes. The court considered the statements as evidence that Hans lost his life by gassing in Auschwitz and the relevant papers were issued to Adi on May 10, 1947.

Even so that already two years had passed since Adi learned about the cruel death of her beloved husband, it was precisely in such sober and rational situations that the whole pain of the tragedy made itself felt again. How fortunate that she had long built a small armour, behind which she had set up a mental comfort oasis, where great pains were denied access. It was simple, as Adi had her Hans deeply and untouchably embedded in her heart, and the comforting knowledge that nothing painful could ever happen to him after death, made her look into the future more free and confident.

After Adi received the confirmation from the tax department that no tax liability existed, Alfred and Adi married at a civil registry office that same year in Brussels. As Adi had gotten used to Alfred in the meantime, she decided to do everything to be a good wife to him. She wished so much that he too would come to appreciate the feeling of family security with time, and hoped that he too would become more sensitive as a result.

Through marriage, Adi automatically became a Swiss citizen and immediately got the Swiss passport. At last she had found a new sense of belonging, an identity, for which she was very grateful, because all these many years in Brussels she only had a "carte d'identité," in which under "nationality" stood a rubber stamp with the remark: "Allemande nonennemie."

Because Alfred had not adopted the then 5-year-old Astrid, the girl remained stateless and had to spend a few months in a children's home in Brussels, until all the papers were collected which allowed her to finally move to Switzerland. At the same time, Adi's whole household was transported by the company Danzas to Switzerland, where it was placed in storage until the completion of Alfred's new apartment, which was still under construction. Adi tried to hide and not let on the disappointment of having to live in Alfred's sparsely furnished bachelor pad for the first while. She had imagined the beginning of her marriage quite differently, but she consoled herself that it would only be a transitional phase.

9. Switzerland

In the beginning, the path of Adi's new life was rather rocky and she had to get used to many things. But she trusted her inner voice, which said that in this exemplary, neutral Switzerland nothing bad could happen to her anymore. She was certain to find peace here for which she had longed so much in recent years. Ever since her vacation with Olly in Weggis and also during all the past years in Brussels, Adi often dreamed of repeating the vacation in this wonderful country at some point in life together with Hans. That Switzerland was destined to become her new home, she would have never imagined in her wildest dreams.

The fact that Adi had to leave her little daughter behind in Brussels at first was very hard for her. Every day she hoped for the news that the paperwork from the Belgian authorities had finally been completed and that no other obstacles would be in the way of Astrid's immigration. It was also aggravating for Adi that her arrival in St. Gallen was not exactly desirable for Alfred's landlady. It began with the fact that Alfred did not consider it necessary to inform the home owner of his intent to marry. The woman responded quite negatively when she realized that from now on her furnished room would be inhabited by two people. Adi understood too well that she was not exactly welcomed in her new home.

It was several weeks before Astrid finally received all the papers that allowed her to leave Belgium. The longing for her mother was bearable because Astrid knew that the time in the children's home was limited, and thus was able to enjoy her stay together with the other children. It was good for her health to daily play around with the others in the big garden as much as she wanted and in any weather.

Adi went straight to Brussels to take up the journey to their new home with her small, brave daughter. The train to Switzerland was crowded and at first they had to travel standing in the walkway between the seats. Adi would have liked to use this trip to talk to Astrid in peace about everything and to encouragingly prepare her for the new life, and to forge their future plans. But it was impossible amidst all the people and all the noise to understand a single word.

Since Astrid was very small and thin for her age, Adi asked her to sit on her suitcase. The girl did as she was told and gripped Adi's legs the whole time, while her mother tenderly stroked Astrid's hair and face. Deeply happy about this comforting closeness, Astrid kept falling asleep, because the long journey turned out to be very tiring for her.

A fellow passenger in the seat next to them had long been observing them and kindly offered his seat to Adi. She accepted gratefully and could finally take her girl on her lap, press her to her heart and reassuringly put her arms around her child. At that moment both were flooded with happiness and Adi was again painfully aware of how much her little girl had to go through in her young life. Exhausted but satisfied they drove towards their new home and Adi was deeply relieved in her heart to finally be able

to turn her back on Belgium and Germany forever. She wanted to forget, to confidently give her life new meaning, to be a good mother to Astrid and a patient, attentive wife to Alfred. She wanted nothing more than to keep the few wonderful years with Hans with gratitude in her memory and to forever forget the whole bitter rest. Still lost in thought, she noticed as Astrid blinked and tried to open her eyes, as if trying to orientate herself. With a sigh of relief, the little one recognized her mother's face close to her, snuggled deeper into her arms, and the intimate smile that both shared came from deep down of their hearts.

Adding Astrid into Alfred's crowded, small room brought the barrel now finally to overflowing, and the landlady approached Alfred resolutely: "How many people are you intending to let move in here?" Alfred ignored the woman, just leaving her stand in the stairway, as if she was not there, and went out undisturbed and whistling softly to himself. Meanwhile, Adi was plagued by guilt, and the strange behaviour of her husband simultaneously surprised and shocked her. She summoned all her courage and tried talking to the owner. Apologetically, Adi explained the situation to her in a few words and she managed to calm the woman down. She also explained that it would not be long until they would move to Horw, into Alfred's new apartment. In exchange, she received an oral permission that all three were allowed to stay in the rented apartment for that time. Adi thanked her kindly and went relieved back through the hallway to her room. Secretly, she was still ashamed of Alfred rude behaviour towards his landlady, for which in her opinion there was no excuse.

During the first years of marriage with Alfred, Adi wondered how almost evil his response to the most banal, everyday occurrences could be. Unfortunately, she began to recognize that this behaviour was a downright bad character trait, against which its victims were powerless. So she dared not to draw Alfred's attention to it directly or to ask him to hold back a little or to work on himself. She had to proceed much more diplomatically in order not to snub him.

So it was inevitable, of course, that not even Adi was spared from his moods and also occasionally became the target of his harassment. One Sunday morning, Alfred decided to go for an outing up the mountain Säntis. What she did not know was that Säntis was not just a hill easily reachable by car, but a mountain between the Swiss Appenzell and Toggenburg that could only be reached with good hiking gear. Adi had never been hiking in the mountains before, and thus never even thought about how to prepare. She just got dressed for a leisurely Sunday "walk" and left the apartment with Alfred wearing a pretty dress and high heels. Seeing her fine dress and elegant shoes, he did not mention a word about how unsuitable they were for their adventure and that she would never make the hike. Alfred let his unsuspecting wife walk into a trap. At the foot of the Säntis, Alfred parked his car and off they went. When Adi saw the first part of the hiking route and looked sceptical, Alfred replied laughing: "You can do this, no problem!" The ascent was quite steep from the beginning and became even steeper after the first bend in the road, so that Adi lost both her heels after only a few minutes, while Alfred, in his high laced-up boots, powerfully and with ease ascended the mountain path with an ever-increasing distance. It took more than an hour before he returned, grinning from afar when he saw Adi at the edge of the path on the ground. Without a word, they returned down to the car.

Finally, after three long months in the stifling confinement of Alfred's room, came the redeeming day when they all could move from St. Gallen to Horw. Adi, who had spent her entire life in big cities, saw her new place of residence, with its maximum of 4000 inhabitants, as a small-bourgeois, snobby village, where everyone knew everyone else, the neighbours always observed and controlled each other, and where they gossiped behind people's backs.

It did not make matters any better that Adi was a foreigner, because at that time the locals were very closed-off especially towards Germans. On top of that, she was a Protestant and was even more shunned; no one wanted to have anything to do with her. Horw was almost exclusively Catholic and the Protestants could be counted on one hand. Although Adi really liked Lucerne which was only a few kilometres away, and was very grateful to be close to the city, she was struggling with the Swiss mentality; people did not even try to conceal their antipathy for foreigners. How often she had to hear, whether directly or indirectly, the expression: "die chaibe Usländer!" which meant as much as: those damn foreigners. The rudeness of the villagers was felt significantly stronger in Horw than in the urban population. Adi, who was raised in two big cities, equipped with a good education and strengthened with an intellectual horizon, had many things in common with the urbanites: a more tolerant way of thinking, the natural right to independence, a good quality of life, and the preference for an urban environment in relative anonymity.

Another obstacle was Adi's German mother tongue, which of course always revealed her origins everywhere. The Swiss German dialect caused her great trouble and she could simply not remember it, which astonished even her. She never had problems learning a foreign language, neither French nor Flemish; Dutch, and later Italian and English. A friend of Alfred's gave her this well-meant advice with a wink: "Adi, never learn the Swiss dialect. It is a true throat disease!"

As new residents in the village, the family of course became noticeable, and for some people, particularly for the women, the elegant, well made-up and well kept Adi was sometimes a thorn in the envious eye of some fellow women. Adi understood to supplement her few, but very tasteful clothes with discreet, small details and thus to adapt to current fashion trends, which of course did not escape her fellow townspeople. She had always been a really pretty woman with her graceful, slender figure and her sunny, charming, and friendly personality. It was almost a gift from God that her natural charm and the noticeably positive aura that surrounded her, had remained undamaged even after all these fateful years.

For Astrid the move to Horw was pure paradise. The time in Brussels seemed to be quickly forgotten, and finally she could play outside and run around like all other children as much as she wanted. In Brussels, she only had the opportunity to go to kindergarten for half a year and only three times per week for two hours. She now could appreciate her new playmates and of course behaved accordingly lively and playful. In addition, she was allowed to spend mornings and afternoons in kindergarten, and to the amazement of her mother, had absolutely no problems adapting. She was immediately accepted

by kids and observed with childish curiosity and interest. In the beginning, for a short period of time, she tried to converse with the children in French and with all kinds of gestures, which was not an obstacle and even brought much amusement to the playground and the kindergarten.

In no time Astrid learned to understand and even speak the Swiss dialect, with many errors, but after all with a considerable daily progress. For Adi, however, it was important to speak French with her daughter at home, in the hope that this valuable linguistic asset could be preserved between them and for Astrid's future education. Alfred however, did not speak French, and spoke High German to Astrid. Together with the Swiss German in the street and in the kindergarten, the many different languages were a real mess, a true language salad, but it never really caused the bright Astrid any trouble.

Six months after their move to Horw, Astrid started school and soon she began to slowly answer her mother only in Swiss German, which Adi had always understood reasonably well. Even Alfred no longer tried to speak High German with Astrid, which was difficult for him anyway, and in French, he could only say three words: "bonjour, merci, and au revoir." Alfred said that the school was now responsible for language lessons, and reverted back to his dialect. One day it was suddenly over, the era of the French communication between mother and daughter, over and out – for good. Astrid could barely understand her mother and often had to ask, "Mommy, what did you say?" Adi capitulated, and with sadness she realized that another beautiful part of her shared past with Hans was now over.

Although Adi was a very open and sociable woman, it was not made easy for her to make friends in Switzerland. Many weeks passed before she could strike up a conversation with the saleswoman from the small grocery store in the neighbourhood, while buying her daily groceries. Through Mrs. Wollemann Adi learned many interesting things about the village and its people. Through her, Adi also made the acquaintance of Mali Stalder. She was also a foreigner, attractive, well-kept in appearance, lively, humorous, and open-minded, exactly as Adi. As it soon turned out, this encounter was great luck for both young women. Mali had to fight with the same problems as Adi upon her arrival in Switzerland, and in terms of personality, the two women could not be better matched. Mali was married and her husband Seppi worked in a sports shop. She herself was a dressmaker and had a successful small fashion atelier in her home in Lucerne, which was regarded as an insider tip by the fashion conscious society of the city.

The acquaintance soon turned into a close friendship and Adi met with Mali regularly, once a week, in the city. If the weather allowed, they always went for a short walk, and then enjoyed a cup of coffee over an animated conversation in a tea room. So it was natural that Mali and Adi became inseparable, close friends.

Through Mrs. Wollemann Adi also met Silvia Wirz, who lived not far from Adi. Silvia was married and her husband worked as a senior clerk in an insurance company. The couple had a daughter Barbara, who was a year younger than Astrid. Silvia was a real artistic type, and put little value in her appearance. She traveled a lot, mainly to Hungary, where she bought antiques in order to sell them later at fairs and

exhibitions. Years later, she also dealt with the renovation and restoration of old furniture, after she and her husband built a large house outside the village, with a huge work studio for Silvia's creative work. This charming house was in a beautiful idyllic place on the edge of a forest, and was surrounded by a huge garden with a patio and play area. In the summer, Adi and the children spent many memorable hours with their dear friends in this beautiful landscape, which was still untouched and unspoilt.

Astrid, who by that time was already ten years old and was very alert, noticed right from the beginning how differently her mother and Silvia Wirz were dressed. One day, when they all went shopping together in Lucerne, Astrid and Mrs. Wirz had to briefly wait for Adi, who still had a quick errand at the pharmacy. When Adi came out, Astrid exclaimed in a cheerful voice: "Here comes my beautiful mommy!" These words probably came out a little too loud, because a few passers-by glanced around amused, and Astrid was a little embarrassed for Mrs. Wirz...

For many years, Silvia had been taking singing lessons in the hope of becoming a recognized concert singer. But whenever she went to auditions or was invited to audition, she got a rejection; to her great disappointment one tried to explain to her in a more or less friendly manner that her voice was not strong enough for that career. But Silvia stood firm, hoped on, spent a fortune on singing lessons, continued to audition and was rejected over and over again in the end. Especially in such moments, Adi was always there for her friend, to listen and to comfort her. That was quite natural because both were connected by a strong friendship.

Since they lived not far from each other, they visited each other often. Especially for Adi, it was always an experience to visit Silvia, because her friend knew half the world, and as a living artist always had an open house for new and old friends, for acquaintances, artists, individuals and other fascinating personalities.

The first years in Switzerland passed relatively balanced, despite initial difficulties and some permanent limitations and disappointments at the partnership level, and everyday life took its usual course. Adi was thankful, and appreciated this regulated daily routine, which was above all good and healthy for Astrid's development. With Adi's hard work and good housewifely qualities, she easily managed to create a clean and comfortable living atmosphere. Although Alfred never said a word of appreciation in this regard to Adi, the new regulated life had real advantages compared to his bachelor years.

The great distance to Brussels allowed Adi to set a healthy distance to the past hard years. Even when she was hurt once in a while and felt sad and lonely, she plunged into her soothing dream worlds that consisted of colourful memories of happy years, from which she always drew comfort and hope. Thanks to this power source, which she had skilfully developed over years, she miraculously never fell into a real depression. Many of her suffering comrades who had lost a loved one, or had permanent war trauma, or could not recover from their shocking experiences due to bodily and spiritual damage, were marked by traumatic injury or eaten by sadness and depression. There were countless people who could never find

their way back into the real life. Adi was preserved from this sorrow and it always filled her with much gratitude.

The apartment in Horw was located in a four-family house and Adi appreciated the harmonious neighbourhood among the residents and the good, amicable agreement with the owner of the house. She also always kindly offered Adi help with the big laundry. A washing machine, as Adi was used to in Brussels, was not yet available in Horw. Everything remained old-fashioned. The laundry was still washed by hand, and then wrung out by hand in pairs, using long, thick wooden sticks, which was extremely exhausting. The same procedure was then immediately taken up again, after the final rinse, just before hanging the laundry. Adi could not understand that in this new house, where there was otherwise no so-called shortage, one had to wring the wet laundry between two rollers in order to squeeze out the water after the main wash with excess soap, and then the rinsing water as well.

In a large copper bucket that hung over a special wooden stove in each laundry room, the laundry was soaked in heated water the evening before each laundry day, in order to be brought to a boil the next morning. After this process, the boiling hot laundry was fished out with a long, thick, wooden stick from the bucket and juggled into a steel tank, where it was then rinsed, again with a lot of bodily force. This incredibly exhausting procedure was also dangerous, because a single wet sheet weighed several kilos, and back then it was almost a daily occurrence that housewives often burned their arms or had other burns from the boiling water. Not to mention the back pain it caused.

If the laundry was still not quite clean after boiling and washing, it had to be treated separately on a steel board at the basin or scrubbed with a brush. As Adi was very small and dainty, and the kettle reached up to her chest, it was quite impossible and extremely dangerous for her to balance the wet, large sheets with a wooden stick. Thus, she was immensely grateful for the home owner's help. Once the laundry was finally clean and rinsed several times, it was hung outside in the garden on the clothes line, weather permitting or otherwise in the laundry room. So it was very understandable that Adi dreaded the monthly laundry day with extreme horror.

Once a year, during spring cleaning, it was customary for the housewives to hang their home rugs of all sizes in the garden on a carpet rod and beat it vigorously on both sides. When hanging Adi's carpets, the help of the house owner was required again. This hard work really made no sense because at that time every family owned a vacuum cleaner.

Adi's social life was very limited. Alfred worked independently by selling mainly kitchen and bathroom lamps and pipes for new buildings. The professional socializing with people was enough for him and he had no interest in personal friendships. So on Saturday nights, they sometimes went to see a movie or on a Sunday in summer time, somewhere for lunch on a terrace, together with Astrid. Alfred, when his mood permitted, at times decided to go for a ride into the blue, where usually both passengers, in the truest sense of the word, experienced their blue wonder. Because Alfred travelled a lot for business, he had to rely on his own car and had long been driving a Citroen. Most of the time, he raced like a

madman through the streets and villages, cutting corners so much that Adi and Astrid were constantly thrown around in the car, pressed from one side to the other. Both often felt very sick several times during the trip, to the point where they had to ask Alfred to let them out, in order not to throw up in his car. But Alfred made no effort to slow the pace. Even the anguished pleas of the two, met on deaf ears with him, and it seemed as if he became slightly insane in the intoxication of the speed. This was especially evident when he scornfully tried to cover their anguished screams with his high, diabolical laughter. Even his frequent car accidents did not bring him to reason, and so it followed that Adi and Astrid came along less and less, which left Alfred relatively cold.

So it was always a nice change and a great pleasure for Adi when Olly came to visit. The two women took long walks and when the weather was nice, Olly liked to sit on a bench or better yet, right on the green grass. Every time she unbuttoned the top of her blouse, leaned back, supported herself on her elbows on the ground, stretched out her upper body, holding face, neck, and chest with closed eyes to the sun. The first time, Adi asked, laughing and amazed: "Olly, what are you doing?" And Olly answered: "I'm taking the *Hamol* position." That was supposed to be a little joke, because *Hamol* was a well-known and popular sunscreen at the time that was used for tanning in the sun.

Olly owned a car early on because her second husband was a garage owner in Zurich. Her extensive circle of friends in Zurich amused themselves about her driving style, and it surprised no one that Olly only barely passed the drivers' test after the third attempt. Adi was always worried when after a visit Olly drove off in the evening at dusk, asking her to call immediately when she arrived in Zurich. One evening, it was long overtime and there was no call from Olly. Just as Adi asked Alfred to check with the police whether an accident had occurred, the call finally came. Olly proudly announced that she safely arrived at home and only briefly got lost and thus instead of taking only one hour, took 2.5 hours for the trip home. But where she got lost, she could not tell Adi for the life of her...

Slowly another bad personality trait of Alfred overshadowed the family life. Adi had to be alert, because Alfred no longer tried to hide that he was hot-tempered and behaved otherwise increasingly weirder. Even though at the beginning he made an effort to be nice to little Astrid, he made it clear to Adi several times that he would in no way be responsible for her daughter and care or pay for the child in case something should happen. Astrid was confused by the erratic and increasingly capricious behaviour of her stepfather, which became evident in her occasional insomnia. From the beginning she childishly trusted him and called him Daddy, as he had wished it at first, and for Astrid it was only natural that Alfred was now the father. How else would she have thought of it? She never misbehaved, was always obedient and wanted to please Alfred, be it with small handouts after work or with nice drawings, which she either put next to his bed or beside his plate on the beautifully set table. Nevertheless, the girl had feelings of guilt and after a while no longer knew how to behave around her father. Adi consoled her and at first told her daughter that it was because he had a lot of work to cope with, and that everything would surely be well again soon.

Then came the fateful day when Adi realized she was pregnant. That was anything but a pleasant surprise, it was a fully-fledged shock! Alfred never wanted to have his own children and Adi nearly lost the nerves at the thought of going through another difficult pregnancy and a life-threatening birth, and this without any support and security from her husband. Although both had looked into it, at that time in a small Catholic town or elsewhere in Switzerland, it was impossible to get an abortion, which was also illegal and extremely dangerous.

Thus, Astrid's half-brother Frédéric, affectionately known as Freddy, was born on January 6, 1950, at the St. Anna Hospital in Lucerne. Although he was a healthy, strong boy, Alfred could not warm up to him, remained unimpressed, and was left cold by the birth of his heir. Adi experienced just the opposite. She was overjoyed, filled with happiness and gratitude for her sweet son, and relieved that everything went much better than expected. It was again a difficult birth, and so Adi and her little son could leave the hospital only after fourteen days. Back at home, Adi overstrained herself, and remained very weak. Despite her best intent, she was still not able to take care of the household. In her desperation, she contacted Dagmar, the now grown daughter of her brother Erwin, and asked her niece to assist her in the first weeks with baby care and the household. The young girl agreed at once and came immediately and full of anticipation from Düsseldorf. Although both had not seen each other for years because of past political and personal circumstances, they reconnected instantly. Dagmar stayed for two months in the family and proved to be of great help to all.

After Freddy's birth, Alfred became increasingly malicious towards Adi. Sometimes they had a few quiet days, but God help them when he came in a bad mood from work. Financially it went more and more uphill. He had every reason to be happy, because he was successful in his job, had a healthy son, a thrifty wife, who had an impeccable household and was an excellent cook. Nevertheless, Adi had to endure almost daily verbal abuse and insults. One of his favourite phrases was, "You can do nothing, you have nothing, and you are nothing!" It was not surprising that the home atmosphere became more and more oppressive. It hurt Adi to think that Alfred only married her to get a cheap housekeeper and to profit from her considerable dowry, the nice furniture and all the household items.

Although Adi always tried to keep the many frictions between her and Alfred away from her sensitive girl, she only partially managed to do that, and Astrid was increasingly plagued by nightmares that tore her from her sleep. Then she silently slipped to her mother's bed and touched her very gently. Each time, Adi instantly became wide awake and brought the girl back to her room, where both usually tried to fall asleep together in Astrid's bed until morning.

Shortly after Alfred became more aggressive towards his wife and little Astrid, and his strokes came often surprisingly without any reason and out of the blue. The situation was often so unpredictable that Astrid had a reflex of lifting her arms in front of her face and head when Alfred came close to her. So she avoided her step-father when he came home from work as best she could, and spent a lot of time in her room reading. Thus she was no longer constantly witnessing Alfred's verbal or tangible attacks against

her mother. The poor child must a very good student, and later as an adult, could cope remarkably well with the childhood experiences.

One evening, after Astrid was roughly grabbed by her stepfather again, Adi explained to her gently in a comforting conversation that Alfred was not her real father and that Hans, her real father, has long been watching over her from heaven. Although Astrid could vaguely remember that her mother often spoke about her wonderful father in Brussels, she could not manage to understand the full implication of that. How could she? For years Astrid had not been asking any more questions about her daddy and so Adi decided to postpone the conversation about her father until much later, when Astrid had matured.

Alarmed at the fact that Alfred had become Astrid's stepfather, a much bigger concern suddenly overcame the girl and she asked her mother in a trembling voice: "Are you not my real mommy either?" Adi was everything to Astrid, and it came as a relief when her mother carefully and deeply moved took her into her arms and softly whispered into her hair: "Of course I'm your real mommy, sweetheart!" Hesitantly and in a few sentences, Adi spoke about Hans again, the good-hearted father, who loved his little girl more than anything else, but unfortunately died in the war. She also told Astrid about the many photographs of her father, which, as a little girl, she carried around and kissed in the Brussels apartment, and about her father's accounting books, in which she joyfully scribbled. Astrid only vaguely remembered it, but thought that her mother's stories were very exciting and beautiful. Adi did not want to explain more at this time, because with her eight years old, Astrid was still too young to learn the real truth.

Adi never received household money from Alfred. Everything she needed for daily life, she always had to get it in the same shop on credit. That way, Alfred always controlled Adi's spending, which he mockingly remarked on at the end of the month when he paid the bill. Every four weeks Adi was given 50 franks by Alfred for pocket money. This money was intended for her personal expenses like clothes and also had to suffice for all the purchases for Astrid. This so-called pocket money was however nowhere near enough, and it always took a lot of strength to convince Alfred that from time to time she had to buy shoes and clothing for the children. Even for Freddy she had to fight with his father for every penny.

Even before her school enrolment, Astrid could already read, and did so with total devotion. In a rare fit of generosity, Alfred gave her a small electric lamp once for Christmas, which could be clicked onto a book. For Astrid, it was an absolutely wonderful invention! With it she now could dive under the covers undisturbed in the evening after the lights went out, in order to continue to devour her children's books, without even the smallest ray of light betraying her. But after a short time, Adi noticed that her daughter had more trouble getting out of bed in the mornings and seemed very tired. When Adi began to have serious concerns about Astrid's health, she happened to solve the nightly mystery of the passionate bookworm, which led her to temporarily seize and lock up the coveted reading lamp.

Gradually, Adi's financial hardship became a disaster and so bad that she knew no other way out but to confide in Mrs. Wollemann in the grocery store. The two women hatched out a plan, and so more goods

were written up for Adi's groceries than she actually bought. Thus, at the end of every month, when Alfred had paid the grocery bill, she could obtain a small amount from Mrs. Wollemann, which she then could spend on important purchases for the two children. Very few times it happened that Alfred was generous and in a good mood, and brought a few things for his son to wear. But mostly the size did not fit or Freddy looked so ridiculous that he was embarrassed to wear the clothes. Adi had no other choice but to ask Alfred to exchange the stuff for something practical and wearable.

This eternal battle for the dear money was for Adi, especially at Christmas, very unnerving. Months before, she started to save some change to make one of the children's wishes come true. More than one modest gift was not possible, since Alfred did not agree to contribute anything extra for the children. He gave Adi just a little more money for the festive dinner and he watched carefully that this was actually only spent on food.

Adi knew very well how to prepare a festive dinner with relatively little cost. This was also very important, because Alfred was a gourmet and when the plate was well filled, he was usually in a good mood, which in turn was good for the whole family. Although the money was only enough for a small Christmas tree, usually a spruce, and the Christmas decorations and candles were rather sparse, Adi knew how to make small miracles with home-made decorations.

Astrid could never forget a Christmas present from her childhood: weeks before the holiday her mother found a shabby doll stroller at a used store and bought a cheap doll to go with it. Over a longer period of time, while Astrid was at school, Adi was very hard at work and very creative trying to restore this stroller, to embellish the exterior with new glossy paint and the interior with various precious fabric scraps, which she got from her dressmaker friend Mali, and to equip the stroller with a new mattress. The initially insignificant-seeming doll was dressed in beautiful, newly sewn dresses and became a little princess, and Adi could hardly wait for the moment to surprise Astrid with her completed work. Since Adi had no sewing machine, she had to make everything by hand and that took time. But the most difficult thing was to keep all the work secret from her daughter. But everything went smoothly and many weeks later, on Christmas Eve, Astrid stood with shining eyes and the happiest smile in front of the most beautiful Christmas present of her life...

As it turned out many years later, Astrid and Freddy never noticed anything of the great limitations their mother was under, and they never felt disadvantaged in any way, probably because Adi was committed to treat both children equally all their lives and to share everything equally among them.

Even at a very young age, Freddy would often witness how his big sister and his beloved mother were brutally beaten by the father. When Alfred came home in a bad mood in the evenings, roughly pushed the door open and stumbled through the room, Freddy regularly broke out in tears. The little boy felt instinctively that his father, when acting so rude, would let his rage run free again, and it would only be seconds before there was a terrible blow somewhere in the apartment again.

Then came the memorable evening when Astrid got a terrible beating from Alfred for the very last time. When Alfred for once came home a little earlier, she was in the kitchen, stirring the evening meal in the frying pan on the stove until Adi came back from the cellar. Suddenly she heard Freddy cry loudly, which by now had become the unmistakable warning sign that Alfred entered the apartment in a bad mood.

Even before Astrid could disappear into her room, Alfred was already behind her at the stove and screamed about the fact that the food was still not on the table. In that moment Adi was back from the cellar, quickly picked up the frightened Freddy from the playpen, and lost her breath when she saw how Alfred grabbed the girl by the shoulder and beat her so hard that she flew through the kitchen and hit her face on the sharp corner of the kitchen table. The impact caused a short cracking sound, as if something broke in Astrid's head. Even as the girl tried to raise herself, Alfred was standing next to her again with a raised fist. Suddenly and completely stunned by the sight and the amount of blood, which had left deep red traces all over the table and the floor, Alfred backed off, and when Adi with little Freddy in her arms protectively bent over her injured girl, she shouted full of disgust and with eyes full of hate to him: "Now you've gone too far, you monster, I'll call the police!" These threatening words that came out dangerously quietly and with each syllable with an almost spelled-out emphasis from the chalk-pale, terrified Adi brought Alfred to reason. When he saw the bloodied face of little Astrid, and the deep, cut-like injury on the upper jaw was clearly visible despite the blood stream, this sight brought him to swear by all the saints and to promise for all times, never to do something like that again in his life. Later in the emergency, Adi indicated that her daughter hurt herself while playing...

These and similar events also left Freddy with many incurable wounds. As a little boy, he wet his bed much longer than other children, and later he became more reserved and introverted and let no one come near him. Even Adi's very loving and understanding upbringing and her warm motherly love no longer affected Freddy, which was highly problematic for his mental and spiritual development.

This last incident had affected the otherwise relentlessly brutal Alfred so that he kept his promise and never raised his hand against Astrid again. Adi also had a few months rest after this terrible incident, until Alfred became violent with her again.

After all these incidents, Adi was very intimidated and scared. She felt existentially dependent on Alfred because of her children, and contrary to every protection and any sense of justice, she was at his mercy. She was helpless against her wicked husband, who had a strong criminal energy; she was mentally and physically threatened and exploited, and the awareness that women even at that time in Switzerland had no say and could not do anything without the consent of the husband, made her powerless, discouraged, bewildered...

For Adi, it was inconceivable that at that time the free, independent, and progressive Switzerland was described as democratic, even though women had no say in their own country. Adi called this state half democracy, because only about half of the adult population, that is men, had the right to vote and consequently only they had all the power. So Adi had her own thoughts: men had come up with all sorts

of things to keep the women from having their own opinions. In arguments with their wives, they often quoted the motto of the Catholic Church, which at the time was still cited in any religious marriage ceremony, which had to be heard and signed: "The woman should be subservient to the man!"

At the same time, for years, Adi had to hear from Alfred over and over again that it would be ridiculous to grant voting rights to women, the weaker sex, and that women due to their obviously smaller brain had less ability to reason, and were thus not intelligent enough to think logically, not to mention politically. Women were also prone to extremism and that would be a public danger, considering that they could possibly enforce their own campaigns without any regard of their husbands. Voting rights for women would not contribute to equality on account of their gender, because in case of a pregnancy, they would not be able to make it to the polls anyway. And in this state, they would hardly be able to engage publicly and politically. And how humiliating it would be for the men, if ever, in the distant future, the absurd case should occur and a woman would be elected to politics? In the end it would come so far that men would be required to stand in the kitchen or at the ironing board, or to perform inferior housework themselves, or even push the stroller – while the women would be out, in their work, earning the livelihood of the family. In the late 1940s the thought of such a scenario was almost hostile to men and totally unthinkable – pure science fiction!

But it took decades for women to get the vote, and so it is understandable that among the slowly emancipating female population, the desire for participation grew also in the hope to finally escape the oppression and domination of the supposedly stronger sex. But back then, the early 1950s, the laws were still written by men for men, and what that meant, Adi would still bitterly find out.

To conclude: Switzerland was one of the last European countries to grant full citizenship rights to its female population. On November 27, 1990, canton Appenzell Innerrhoden, the last Swiss half canton, had to grant women voting rights at the cantonal level against the will of the male voters, because the Supreme Court in Bern had finally ruled that it was unconstitutional to exclude women from voting.

Among the many very serious problems and increasingly deteriorating, hopeless family situation, Adi feared more and more for her life. It was about time to do something about it, especially in her responsibility for the welfare of children. If Adi continued to endure Alfred, the downfall would become inevitable, and this realization gave her the strength to take advantage of the last real survival chance, and to consider a separation from Alfred while she was still capable and not completely destroyed in body and soul.

But how would Alfred react to her decision? Would he lose it again and would it now come to a life-threatening escalation? Would the children be at risk? What about financial support and alimony in a separation? By law, a divorced man had to financially support his wife and children. But how could one know beforehand if this support would ultimately work out, and who could guarantee that the injunction would be observed? At least since Freddy's birth, Adi knew how devious and unprincipled Alfred was, and that he would never hold to a fair solution, especially not when money was involved.

The more Adi was under pressure at home with the children, the more courageous she became. She took the initiative and began to get informed whether any provisions had been established in Brussels in the meantime for a financial settlement for the relatives of war victims. At the same time, she also tried to find out whether it would be possible to get anything from the house Koopmann, at Mittlestrasse 3, in Düsseldorf, at least for Astrid, the daughter of one of the former house owners, Hans and Walter Koopmann. There were also rumours that Germany would pay compensation to the surviving family members of Jews who had lost their lives in concentration camps. Of course, this research and investigations would take up a lot of time and Adi thought it best to start as soon as possible. If it was actually possible to obtain any compensation or a pension from the past, then Adi would have a chance to go through the separation from Alfred quicker and provide for the children herself at first. Propelled by this promising hope, Adi worked obsessively to revive the contact with former friends in Germany in all possible ways, in the great hope of getting some interesting and useful information.

Apart from the obstacles laid in her way, the difficulty of providing the required evidence, and to find the desired witnesses, Adi soon had to realize that it was impossible to progress in this matter alone. It was largely a matter of money, and Adi came to the conclusion that without the assistance of a lawyer in Germany she had absolutely no chance of ever receiving a pension.

But where should she find so much money? She briefly considered asking her father in Düsseldorf for support, but she rejected this idea immediately. She had to admit that she was too proud on the one hand, and on the other hand, she was not comfortable to openly state her financial misery. So, the only way remained to contact Irene in New York, Hans' sister, and to ask her for help. The sister-in-law, who was usually known for her distinctive avarice, surprisingly agreed and offered Adi some money for starters. At the same time she also gave her the name of her own lawyer in Germany, whom Adi could contact. For the first time in a long time she could breathe again, and could optimistically take the issue into her own hands.

Right at the time when it seemed that she had some time to breathe and gather strength, a call came from Düsseldorf. The news hit Adi like a fist blow to the heart. Her beloved step-brother Willy, whom she had lovingly raised as a young girl, had died after a long struggle and agony from bone cancer. He was only 37 years old. In the end, he could no longer be kept in a hospital bed because at the slightest movements he suffered from more broken bones. He was then put in a hard shell, a kind of cast bed, where he could no longer move, and where at the bottom in the middle of the shell was an opening to relieve himself and ensure some hygiene.

It must have been a long, miserable death, and the fact that Willy was still mentally alert and thus could feel everything, drove Adi almost crazy. Quite unbearable was the idea, that in such hardship, one's dignity was hardly taken into consideration – how would that even be possible? So in her deep mourning, Adi only had the memories and a heart full of intimate thoughts: "My great, little brother heart, my brave angel, you've earned a particularly luminous, warm, and love-filled place in paradise!

"I'm with you Willy and I will protect you as before, when you were a little boy, and I will never forget you!"

Indeed, destiny has many faces!

Irene and her husband Seppi had become multimillionaires and very anxious to almost pathologically keep their money together, or only spend on themselves. Although Irene made it clear to Adi that the money was for the lawyer in Germany, as if it were a charity for her poor relatives, it surprised Adi that she even received a reply. She was used to these kinds of insults from Alfred for years, and therefore they also bounced off her, as if nothing had happened. Nonetheless, she thanked her sister-in-law sincerely and gratefully.

When years later, Irene also could have applied for a compensation pension, it was not even worth the trouble for her to inform the authorities that she would decline it. Adi also remembered how on their European visits, Irene and Seppi wanted to visit her in Horw at least twice, to show her that despite their power and wealth, they still accepted Adi as a former family member, albeit reluctantly. However, to spare the travelling couple the embarrassing confinement of the modest apartment, both times it was agreed to meet in Zurich, where after a big lunch, offered by the visitors, they extensively strolled through Zurich's Bahnhofstrasse. Adi smiled at the memory of how in front of the classy display of the famous fur trader Victor Goldfarb, she pointed out a fur coat for astronomical 10,000 Swiss francs to her sister-in-law, to which Irene replied: "Oh, for such small penny it can surely be nothing good!"

Around the same time, Adi received a message from her brother-in-law Walter from Montevideo. He informed her that he had heard about state financed support in Germany, which was granted to family members of Jews who died in concentration camps. Walter was not professionally successful in Uruguay, and therefore was not well off financially. He worked alternately as a taxi driver and hotel concierge, and to make matters worse, ever since the terrible crimes against his beloved young wife and his little son, he was still not quite well. The sensitive Walter was exactly the opposite of his brother Hans, who until the violent end of his life had always remained a strong fighter and an incurable optimist. The brothers had only one, but very valuable, common characteristic: they were both very pleasant and good-hearted people.

Back in the Düsseldorf days, both brothers had a common lawyer. Any letter from the law firm designated to the clients was copied by either Walter or Hans and sent to the other as information for safekeeping. Thus both brothers were equally informed and always kept in the loop. At the time, this was mentally a great support for both, and the knowledge that they were not alone in their struggle for justice gave them hope and strength. After Hans' death, it took years before the lawyer was finally able to provide something that would benefit the surviving brother Walter, but unfortunately nothing yet for Hans' half-orphaned daughter Astrid.

Only later, with an official document from the District Court of Düsseldorf, dated from April 2, 1951, Adi was informed that Astrid, the daughter of Hans Koopmann, was allocated compensation by the regulation and management of pending reparation funds, and the letter read as follows:

Appointment of a guardian for the compensation:

"Victor Jacobs from Düsseldorf, Kreuzstrasse 32, is appointed the guardian for the minor Astrid Irene Koopmann, born on 04.06.1942. His legal obligations include the representation of interests of the minor Astrid Irene Koopmann in Horw, near Lucerne, because of the prevention of representation of her interests in the country through her legal representatives due to the great distance.

The appointment is intended to serve as identification for the guardian. It is therefore to be preserved carefully, and in all cases when the guardian needs identification, especially in dealings with the authorities, it is to be brought and presented. After the completion of the duties of the guardian, the appointment of the guardianship is to be returned to the court."

Victor Jacobs was also simultaneously appointed legal counsel of Walter, as he was also living abroad, in South America. As a letter of February 14, 1952 indicated, Mr. Jacobs' correspondence to Walter not only referred to the financial reparations case, but also to very different interests. The following is an excerpt from one of his letters:

"... If you, dear Mr. Koopmann, send me some coffee, then please send it in a mixed package, so I don't have to pay any customs. If you only send coffee, then each recipient in Germany pays customs ... but probably interesting for you to know that the Restitution Act will soon be passed."...

Over all the years in Düsseldorf and Brussels, Adi had preserved all important documents such as invoices, receipts, and correspondence, and neatly stored them in a folder, organized by date. Perhaps it was her feminine intuition, along with her strong sense of order, which prompted her to collect all the documents that could eventually be useful in life, which now actually seemed to be true.

After many long months and many letters, a settlement was finally issued for Walter and Astrid. The total amounted to 25,000 marks, of which Astrid's share was calculated at 10,000 marks, which was actually a ridiculous sum for a three-story house in a prime location in the old city center of Düsseldorf. Therefore Adi, representing Astrid, did not want to agree to this sum, since it was an absolutely minimal percentage of the total property value. However, Walter pleaded with Adi to accept the offer because otherwise he no longer knew what to do to keep above water. Adi could well empathize with his condition and finally agreed with a heavy heart. Because she was also financially very badly off, she wanted to continue to fight for a larger settlement, for it was in her nature not to give up so easily.

On July 14, 1953, a restitution law finally came into force, and now Walter had to fight another battle for a pension. Adi herself was excluded from a compensation pension, because as a result of her second marriage, she was not entitled to it by law.

For Walter, it was a rare chance that two of his friends from the Düsseldorf time also lived in Montevideo and even Adi could benefit from that. These two people, Hans Silberberg and Klara Schnapp, born Nephut, gave the information requested by the authorities, a testimony under oath that consisted of information and details about the former shoe store Koopmann in Düsseldorf, independently of each other, confirming the same statements as follows:

"I, Hans Silberberg (as well as in writing by Klara Schnapp, born Nephut, presented in a separate letter), living in Montevideo, confirm for the purpose of submission to courts and authorities, in good faith, under oath as follows:

From early childhood until my emigration, I lived in Düsseldorf. The shoe business of the family Koopmann was, to my knowledge, the largest there. In the 1920s, I, Hans Silberberg, had the opportunity to get to know the family business Koopmann better through a very good friend of my parents' (and the best friend of Mrs. Schnapp), who was engaged to Mr. Walter Koopmann. The main store was in the building in Mittelstrasse 3, on the ground floor; the first floor housed more commercial space, and the second and third floors were taken up by the storage and administrative rooms. The warehouses were filled with stock, so that the provided shelves were not sufficient for all the quantities of goods. The company hired a manager or a lady for each department, that is, for men's, women's, children's shoes, and slippers, who was entrusted with the leadership of the departments. The sales and administrative staff was accordingly large, which I assessed at 50 to 60 people, at least. In the second half of the twenties, the company opened a second store, located at Graf-Adolf-Strasse, in a renovated, modern, new store. I remember very well that sometimes the rush of customers was so strong, that uniformed police officers were needed to let the customers into the store in limited groups. I was also aware that the company Koopmann sold an average of some thousand marks worth of shoes a day, and so I also knew that the company had to maintain a large stock. In the forced closing down sale of two businesses in 1933, discounts were offered of 50-66 $\frac{2}{3}$ percent. Mr. Walter Koopmann had his private apartment in the best residential area of Düsseldorf, which was very elegant, and decorated with very valuable tapestries and paintings and very tasteful furniture.

The second affidavit was almost identical, except for an additional paragraph:

"... In the later years the company S. Koopmann opened a second branch in Graf-Adolf-Strasse, where at the time the very well-known shoe brand "Lingel" was for sale. The turnover of the company was estimated in circles that were close to the family, to be more than a million marks a year."

Since Adi had moved to Switzerland years ago, she slowly took up correspondence with her father again. Through a slow approaching and careful probing both managed to forge a positive exchange, free of any accusations or reproaches in regards to Adi's nightly escape from the family home and her subsequent marriage to a man of a different faith. Gradually, with a great mutual understanding more and more trust was built, and after Freddy's birth, father William was gently informed that the marriage between his daughter and Alfred was not going so well. Soon after the first letters, William offered his daughter

and grandchildren a vacation, which, however, due to the dramatic family situation could not be accepted for a long time.

When much later Adi finally struggled to accept her father's holiday offer, she timidly informed Alfred of her plans by trying to explain to him that it was time for the children to finally meet their relatives. His objection did not surprise her: "You will not get a single penny from me!" The approaching departure suited Alfred well, especially when he calculated how much he could save in these three weeks in household money. But even more important for him was that he could now devote himself exclusively and undisturbed to his extramarital affairs, which he had for a long time, without any consideration, and with full knowledge of his wife. On the other hand, these humiliations had the advantage that Alfred was only seldom violent towards his wife; still Adi never turned her back to Alfred, so that she could protect herself from his unpredictable fits of rage at any time.

Adi had not seen some of her relatives since 1935. So it was about time to revive the contacts again, especially now that she had nothing to lose and no longer needed to maintain the appearance of an intact family. The long period of false pretences, to preserve an outside image of the family, was long over.

Adi had briefly met her father and the immediate family members two years earlier, after an eternally long time, because Alfred had then expressed the desire to meet his parents-in-law and the family. Unfortunately, at the request of her husband and for the sake of peace, Adi had to place the children into a home for a short time, without really explaining to them why they had to go there. Alfred was in no way ready to travel together with the children, which would only make him nervous, as he rudely explained. The result was that Astrid and Freddy could not yet meet their grandparents. Therefore, it was not surprising at the first meeting that father William's joy of the reunion was limited, and one could see his disappointment at not being able to meet his two grandchildren. The meeting was also overshadowed by Alfred's rude and abusive behaviour toward his wife, which made the family uncomfortable and left an almost frightening impression.

After this first short visit home, William pointed out in his next letter to his daughter that in case of a possible divorce, he would provide an apartment for Adi and the children in Germany. On the one hand, it was a comforting thought, which Adi quietly accepted in her heart, and full of gratitude to her father. The awareness that she would never end up with the children on the street, calmed her down for now. On the other hand, it was like a vow in her soul, never to consider Germany as her home again. She would have found it unfaithful to Hans to return to the country whose citizens had betrayed, tortured and killed her beloved husband and father of her child.

Finally the summer of 1954 was approaching, and thus the first major holiday for the children. When Alfred was not at home, they let their joy run wild. Many days before the departure, the two were very excited and could not wait to finally leave. Astrid was now twelve and Freddy four years old, and Adi was very confident that her son was old enough now to go on a longer trip.

A year earlier, Adi already thought about the fact that her daughter would eventually need a passport to easily travel abroad later. Since Astrid was not adopted by her stepfather, she was considered officially stateless under the former laws. In the meantime, Adi sent an application to Brussels and received a "Carte d'identité" with the remark, "prisonnier politique." At the same time, she was informed without any reason that a passport for Astrid could not be issued until the age of eighteen, which Adi could not understand. Although Astrid never lived in Germany, but her whole family over generations came from Germany, Adi had no other options but to write a detailed letter applying for a passport for her daughter in Germany. It was an incredible relief when her application was approved and a new German passport was issued for Astrid right away. Thus, nothing stood in the way of their trip to Germany and the siblings could not wait to finally get to know their beloved relatives.

The long awaited trip could finally begin. In Basel the trio had to change from the comfortable electric Swiss trains to the German steam engine train. Once customs formalities behind them, the heavy locomotive began to move, panting and puffing and the journey continued. The trip to Düsseldorf dragged out. Freddy had probably asked a dozen times: "Mommy, how much longer will it take?" Astrid pressed her nose against the window pane and was blown away by all the fascinating impressions of the passing landscape.

But the further the train continued moving into the interior of Germany, more and more frightening images appeared before her astonished eyes. These were souvenirs and mementos of a poignant time in history. Nine years had now passed since the end of the war, and still one saw dilapidated building ruins, the sight of which left the viewer with a shudder of the force with which the bombs of the Second World War had caused destruction and misery. It was also difficult to imagine that after nearly a decade in many places rubble clearance had not yet taken place, and thus the devastation was still visibly pronounced.

Astrid looked out the window as if frozen in disbelief and taken aback by the sight of the enormous destruction that had taken place here long ago. There were remains of the walls of a bombed housing development, which partially stood without roofs and looked extremely neglected in the barren landscape. Unbearable was also the sight of mouldy rooms, where the remains of fabric or wallpaper scraps and parts of smashed furniture were visible. Right next to that, was a charred building that used to be a house, with its roof now sparsely covered with primitive materials and housing a large family with kids, which was hard to believe. Again and again Adi had to relentlessly answer questions to her small, bright daughter, until she managed to distract the girl by turning the conversation to the people who waited to meet them in Düsseldorf.

As a pastime, Adi told her children some funny stories from her youth, and with these refreshing stories even Freddy forgot to continue asking the same question about the duration of the trip and fell into short naps on Adi's lap. Awake, Adi tried to make the trip as enjoyable as possible for the children. She told of grandpa and all her loved ones, and at the same time, she asked the children to be well-behaved

and decent towards their relatives. She insisted that when greeting grandpa, uncle and aunt, Freddy had to bow and Astrid do a graceful curtsey. To their great amusement, they were then asked to practise it between their seats, and so the long journey went suddenly in a flash, with lots of laughter and tangible anticipation. For Adi, it was overall a very emotional experience, as it was a journey into the past, with all its countless beautiful and painful memories and she was amazed at how close the past was still to her...

There was only one shadow over this memorable train ride. Since it was summer time, the windows were opened at times and this provoked that especially Astrid's white blouse, to her utter horror, turned slowly grey due to the thick soot and vapours from the German steam locomotives.

Finally the train arrived in Düsseldorf; Adi was suddenly overcome by an unruly sense of happiness, which came with strong heart palpitations. The soft blush that spread on her cheeks from the joyful anticipation, and the sparkle in her eyes, strongly reminded of the fresh, happy, young girl she once was.

The whole family had taken the trouble to come to the station to greet the returning relatives and the joy was immense when at last everyone fell into each other's arms. Astrid instantly felt close to her grandpa, and little Freddy more to Uncle Erwin, Mama's brother, who had long been the successor of his father's business, and continued to run the bakery and pastry shop in the same tradition with great success. Until his eightieth birthday, father William went daily into his shop. He still knew no sickness, not even a cold. The only thing he had to endure in his life was, as mentioned before, the removal of his appendix, which before the First World War must have been a very adventurous thing. This whole story remained very memorable for William; how could it be otherwise, he still told it full of fervour whenever he heard the keyword "health" and without any regard whether anyone already knew his appendix story by heart...

Adi's brother Erwin had remarried after his first wife, the mother of his daughter, Dagmar, had died at a young age from a serious illness. The present wife had been employed in the shop for years, and brought an illegitimate daughter into the marriage. When after Freddy's birth Adi saw her niece Dagmar again after many long years in Horw, she was amazed even then how pretty the girl had become in the meantime. So she was not surprised during this visit that Dagmar was already married and moved away, but which was also a shame because the two women would not see each other again. Adi only knew that Dagmar had also become a mother and that shortly after her marriage she had abruptly broken off the connection to her family. Adi would never know the reason for this break.

Only decades later, when Astrid was researching her "mother's life story" from Canada, she also did an intensive family research, and managed to find out where Dagmar moved to after her marriage. She found out where she lived, and that she had a son named Dietmar. To Astrid's great joy, shortly before Adi's 95th birthday, it came to a first telephone contact with Dietmar. But unfortunately Astrid found out with greatest regret that Dagmar had died at age of 53 from breast cancer. Dietmar also told frankly that after his mother's divorce, the contact with her own father was re-established, and that he himself

was already a teenager when he finally met his grandfather Erwin. It was Dagmar's husband, who forbid his wife and son to stay in contact. More about the personal meeting between Adi and Dietmar later.

The time in Düsseldorf just flew by, and for the children it was pure paradise. All the nice people were smitten with them, and literally read all their wishes from their eyes. They also had full access any time to the many beautiful sweets in the bakery, which of course was widely used. For Astrid and Freddy it was an indescribable paradise vacation, and the children blossomed in the constant and loving affection of the whole family, and developed an amazing amount of trust and self-confidence in that short time. To see and witness that was Adi's long-awaited fulfillment of her heart's desire, and at the same time, it nourished her hope that both children would be given the necessary power to handle the dramatic events of the past well, and to be protected from future psychological damage.

Adi and Astrid particularly enjoyed this wonderfully easy time, without family pressure and the never-ending fears and insecurities. When in addition Father William offered them to spend a few days by the sea after the Düsseldorf vacation, they were all blessed with joy. William was of the opinion that a little sea air would be good for his daughter and the grandchildren, and he remembered how Adi as a young woman spent almost every summer at the Baltic or North Sea, and each time returned home with a healthy complexion and generally well recovered.

Throughout the whole vacation, the three lived in Adi's parents' house, which had not lost its warmth and cosiness in all the years. For many years, Father William owned a new multi-family house in Morperstrasse, which was only a short walk from the bakery. There he lived with a housekeeper in an apartment, for, after the death of his second wife, he no longer wanted to remarry.

For Astrid, it was a very special experience going with her mother for a tram ride several times from Gerresheim to Düsseldorf. Past the streets and squares of Adi's childhood and youth, where every corner, every place, and every house still reminded of the olden days, despite the fact that some buildings here and there were razed to the ground by the war and had not yet been rebuilt.

Adi had already told her daughter about her childhood in Germany, and as a little girl, Astrid wanted to hear the interesting and beautiful stories over and over again and never got enough of them. Adi's years of story-telling about her parents' home and family, about school, friends and the many fun events, led Astrid to recognize surprisingly many parts of her mother's stories now. She guessed right away where Adi, as a young girl, had met her friends, and where her mom later met her dad, where both had spent happy hours dancing on the weekends, and in which venues they had won prizes at tournaments. Astrid also recognized the place where her parents got secretly engaged, and she went for a walk in the same park, where her parents had dreamt of a small family and a daughter...

During these holidays, as if by a miracle so many memories came back to Astrid of Adi's earlier stories. It seemed that Astrid had developed a personal defence mechanism in recent years because of the bad experience with her step-father, and Adi could only explain it by the fact that her girl wanted to protect

herself from the painful memories of the never-returning, wonderful times. So, during this trip, Astrid was able to reconnect with the repressed past, which meant a great progress for her psychological development.

As mother and daughter were again out together and settled on a bench after a walk, Adi tried very carefully to explain to her daughter that she was contemplating to separate from Alfred. To Adi's surprise, Astrid reacted not very surprised, quite the opposite. She clutched her mother's arm, took a deep breath, and expressed her relief, saying: "Oh, you know mommy, it would be so nice to never have fear again, and to finally live in peace, like all my classmates." When Adi asked if she could imagine leaving all her friends in Lucerne and perhaps move to Düsseldorf, where grandpa would give them a big apartment in Morperstrasse, Astrid replied: "I would not mind, and you know mommy, it's so exciting to experience something new!" Little Freddy was still too young to talk about it, but for Adi it was clear that a divorce in these circumstances could only be to his advantage. As it turned out, it would only remain a bitter sweet dream.

The departure from Düsseldorf came much too quickly, yet all three were very excited about their beach vacation by the sea. Adi still knew all the islands from before and she picked Borkum, an island she hadn't been to yet, but had heard and read many nice things about. She chose a family hotel on the beach, and as it turned out, it was a very good choice. The children could not believe their eyes and fell silently in awe upon their arrival, as they stood on the beach for the first time and saw the unending vastness of the sea, where the red of the setting sun had spread in a stunning play of colours over the deep blue of the sea.

The very next day, both were quickly connecting with the other children their age, who were also staying at the same hotel. These days became a unique and unforgettable experience. Especially the exciting feeling of trickling the soft sand through the fingers onto the stomach until it tickled, and to let it be washed away by the gentle waves; for both children that was the funniest and most refreshing pastime ever! Freddy could not swim yet, and therefore romped with the other children on the beach, or built some bizarre sand formations, which he then gladly trampled with his little feet to his heart's content. He was crazy about the fine sand and could not get enough of seeing his hand and footprints, or attempting to bury himself in it.

At the slightest sun exposure, Astrid got a beautiful light tan without having a sunburn, but Freddy was just the opposite. Even when he was sitting in the shade, or the sun was hidden behind the clouds, the little one turned red as a lobster. Since it did not hurt him, it gave rise to much amusement, and Adi gave both children pet names, and called Freddy "my marzipan piggy" and Astrid "my chocolate doll"!

On a rainy evening Astrid played a game called "hurry slowly" with a German boy in the hotel lounge. They spoke High German and Astrid was convinced that she spoke the language fluently and accurately. After all, each week at school she had several lessons of German, and Adi spoke German with them at home for years, which gave Astrid the impression of having mastered the German language very well.

In daily conversation with her mother and with her peers, Astrid always spoke in the Swiss dialect. She had made a habit of translating phrases or individual words she did not know well directly from the vernacular language verbatim into German. For example, the word "to cheat" in the Swiss dialect was "bschiesse" (akin to shit). Translating it literally into High German, drastically changed the meaning, and could bring the person using it unwittingly into a very stupid situation, which was also the case that evening. Astrid noticed soon after the start of the game that her little feisty opponent attempted to cheat. When the fraud was obvious, in her outrage, Astrid shouted spontaneously and rather loudly: Günther, you can't always "bescheissen" (literally, "to shit on"). From one moment to the next, it became perfectly quiet in the room. Adi sat there petrified, looking incredulously at her daughter, and Astrid could read in her mother's horrified eyes that she wished she had sunk into the ground. When Adi could speak again, she apologized to all the parents present in the hall, and tried with more or less success to explain how it could come about that her daughter used that word. Astrid no longer understood what was happening, and later in the hotel room Adi explained to her distraught girl what that word meant for German speaking people, and that it was pretty much the most vulgar and the worst thing that a well-bred, young lady could say.

All too quickly these last glorious vacation days came to an end, and the thought of returning to the interpersonally oppressive and threatening cramped apartment in Horw, filled mother and daughter with worries.

As it was expected, nothing changed in the meantime at home with Alfred. He hardly greeted the family, did not even ask the children how the past weeks had been for them, and did not thank them for the beautiful postcard that they all signed. He did not notice that his son Freddy grew a little, gained some weight, and made much progress in the meantime.

Adi immediately began to clean the apartment, tidy up the kitchen and put away all the things Alfred left lying around. Because of a foul odour, Adi had to take out the garbage and to collect the dirty laundry. Alfred used to be quite organized and tidy, but this time, he wanted to demonstratively show that he could do as he pleased in his apartment, and above all, who the boss was in the house. All had to obey, and with his evil grin he showed that he enjoyed to humiliate his wife.

At the end of Astrid's primary school, Adi had another major concern. To their great surprise, Astrid failed the secondary school exam, even though in all report cards from all six primary school years, she had without exception only good and very good grades. The girl always loved going to school and did well on all the tests. No one noticed that for years Astrid had to carry a heavy load because of her unpredictably brutal stepfather, and so often in her young life even during school days she had to suffer from insomnia and anxiety. Adi tried to be a source of support, to help and protect her, and to intercept Alfred's pathological outbreaks as much as possible or to re-direct them onto herself. Perhaps many things contributed to the fact that at the crucial moment and in acute awareness of the importance of

the Advanced Level Examination, Astrid suddenly was taken by a previously unknown fear of tests, which resulted in her missing the goal by only half a grade.

Because of her grades in all the school years, there was no reason why Astrid could not pass the secondary school exam. Adi immediately went to the school administration, but could not change anything. She could have guessed it, as she realized what small-bourgeois, politically clever, and manipulated by the Catholic Church, dependent people were in control of the school board. Among the five Protestant students, only one passed the exams, the daughter of a well-known businessman and big taxpayer. That Astrid, as a German and a Protestant, of course was not given another chance to prove herself, became quite obvious in these poor conditions.

Discouraged, Adi told her friend Mali what happened, and to Adi's great astonishment, she suggested that she should consult the Institute Rhaetia in Lucerne, and talk to the mother superior about it. It was certainly the last thing Adi wanted for her daughter; a Catholic, private institution run by nuns. Mali noted factually: "Adi, you won't lose anything by just going to speak to them!" Adi had to agree, false pride would not be appropriate here, and she had no other choice but to try everything possible. So without pretence, after a telephone appointment, she went, as always very well attired and groomed, to an interview with the mother superior, Mère Fries.

Already during the first meeting, even before the nun shook Adi's hand, Adi noticed the smiling eyes of the friendly nun. They radiated such a warm light, so much kindness and love, that Adi instantly forgot all her fears and prejudices. Prompted calmly and lovingly by the mother superior, Adi began to tell her of all her problems and the associated life history, with full assurance to be well understood. Adi did not leave anything out, and told her what happened in Belgium, and of course that Astrid's father was Jewish, and Adi also commented with a heavy heart on their experiences in Horw, about Alfred, and all the suffering of years of the hopelessly dysfunctional family situation. Listening attentively, sensitive, occasionally nodding her head, and without interrupting, Mère Fries listened and said at the end: "Mrs. Bächler, register your daughter here and I promise you that neither you nor your daughter would ever regret it!"

Before accepting the offer, the mother superior advised her to think over the many new impressions, sleep on it in peace, and Adi still wanted to speak with Astrid, to hear her opinion. This step also had to be carefully considered because it was a private school, which meant large costs.

Once at home, Adi told her daughter about the meeting and the long conversation with the kind and sympathetic Mother Fries, and Adi stressed again how very important a good education was for every young person. Astrid listened excitedly, and when Adi asked her if she would be willing for to pay the school fees out of her severance pay, Astrid immediately agreed. Thus Astrid spent her secondary school years as an excellent student in the Catholic school in Lucerne, and she could not have made a better decision. It proved true that Mère Fries was right, and so the next years were some of the happiest in young Astrid's life.

At the beginning of the school year, Astrid was told that each day she could come fifteen minutes later to school, because each day would begin with a religious story or a lecture. Astrid, however, voluntarily decided to participate because she did not want to miss the opportunity to walk with her new school friends from the bus stop to the institute, which was a 15 minute walk.

Shortly after the beginning of Astrid's second year, Lucerne experienced a severe flu epidemic, which affected almost half the urban population. In all the businesses most of the employees were missing, bed-ridden, including half the teaching staff at the Institute Rhaetia. However, the sisters decided to keep the school open for the few remaining healthy children, and for the time being only cancelled those subjects that did not affect anyone's timetable, such as drawing, gymnastics and singing. Due to the absence of some teachers, the students who excelled in certain subjects could assist in teaching the lower grades. Geography was one of Astrid's favourite subjects, and after the religious lecture was also cancelled, Astrid was asked by the mother superior to take over the geography lesson, according to the instructions. She explained her decision also with the fact that Astrid expressed herself particularly well and eloquently in the German language. It came as a great advantage now that her mother always spoke High German to her.

Astrid even suggested to Mère Fries that along with the geography lesson, she would like to take over the daily 15-minute religious lecture for the class. The mother superior thanked Astrid, and pointed out that she first should ask her mother for permission. But Astrid replied laughing that it would be a waste of time to ask her mother, because the answer would anyway be yes. With a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, Mère Fries told Astrid that she would still ask, because that was the proper thing to do. So when the mother superior returned after a brief telephone conversation and Astrid saw her satisfied face, she said, playfully: "You see Mère Fries, didn't I predicted that ...? I know my mother very well!"

Adi's original answer to the question was that of course she had nothing against the lecture, and if that was the voluntary wish of her daughter, then of course it was ok for her.

10. Separation and Divorce

Half a year later, at the beginning of 1955, Adi was mentally and physically exhausted. Years of daily tensions with Alfred and the severe physical and mental suffering he caused her and the children were no longer bearable. When she told Alfred that she would definitely separate from him, he replied with a cynical grin that he would make her life a living hell – and he should carry out his threat.

Simultaneously, in the many sleepless nights Adi repeatedly fell into panic, and her existential fears plagued her day and night. One should not forget that she never had to fear for her livelihood before, and now she and the children were without money, job, without hope of financial support, with nothing. Now she had to find a job fast and an affordable apartment. By chance, she was soon able to rent a small, cheap apartment in Kriens, a small town also near Lucerne. She would have wished to move with the children directly in the city, but even the cheapest apartment in Lucerne was unaffordable.

From the beginning of the long three years of the divorce, Alfred cold-bloodedly submitted forged book-keeping documents to the court. He was thus able to convince the judge, without any scruples, that his business was not doing well at all. For this reason, the court decided that Alfred only had to pay 100 francs per month for Adi and his son. That this would also mean a life in poverty for the little Freddy was of no interest whatsoever to his father. Of course, Astrid, who was now in her teens, was completely left out, since Alfred had refused to adopt her from the beginning. So it remained at the agreed 200 Swiss francs per month, which was not even enough for cheap rent, and thus the social decline was inevitable.

Although Adi had brought all her furniture into the marriage, Alfred was able to convince the court with his false statements and documents that he owned everything, so that Adi was allocated only about half of her household items. The other half Alfred had to return to Adi only after years of litigation, according to court verdict. The whole energy-taxing battle for Adi's furniture would turn out to be the least of her many problems.

The move to Kriens was on October 14, 1955. When packing, Adi found in the lower half of her bedside table a couple of very old, black, waterproof shoe covers that women used in the rain over their fine pumps, instead of rubber boots. Adi had not used them for many years, but she did not have the heart to throw them away. As most people of her generation, she always hoarded almost all of her belongings in the belief that one could never know if the things would be needed again in an emergency. On closer inspection, to her great astonishment, Adi found an old fifty-franc note in one of the pump covers, which she had hidden there for bad times and then forgot about. Unfortunately, the bank notes had long been taken out of circulation and replaced with new ones. Consequently, to her dismay, she could not redeem the found treasure, having missed the bank's deadline for exchange.

Right on the first day after the move, Adi began to work as a sales woman at the *Wylar Company*, a well known fabric and ladies cloth store in Lucerne. With her 47 years, it was the first time that she had to work for a salary to support the entire household. She initially started out in the curtain department,

because she knew the handling of materials and the related calculations from her time with Hans in Brussels, where he used to deal with imported fabrics from England. Since she was an outgoing person, she loved to be surrounded by the customers and strike up a conversation.

Adi's starting salary for a 100% employment was 480 francs per month. Together with 200 francs alimony from Alfred she could barely keep herself and the two children afloat. But already two months later Alfred was behind on his alimony payments. Because he was unreachable either by telephone or in writing, a renewed struggle for survival began. Adi had to regularly reclaim the money via her lawyer in court, and rarely with success. Alfred, however, complained to the judge that he was anything but well off, and that it caused him the greatest difficulties to scrape together the monthly alimony. It was incomprehensible to Adi that none of the authorities ever carried out an investigation to verify Alfred's statements. In her bitterness it was not surprising that she had the impression that the laws were not only made by men but also for the benefit of men...

Only many years later did she find out unexpectedly that Alfred kept all his money, which was partially earned under the table, in a bank account in Germany. That way he could prevent that the tax authorities in Switzerland found out how wealthy he really was. And since Alfred always went to Germany on business anyway; no one suspected anything. Because Adi had no money for an investigation, and a suitable witness was not available for a deposition in court out of fear of Alfred's revenge, she unfortunately could not gather the necessary evidence. Consequently, it became clear why it was possible in divorce cases to have the stories of the poor husband accepted so simply and easily in court. One had to have a very dubious character to be able to deceive the court for so many years.

Even after the divorce, Alfred convincingly played the poor man for the rest of his life. Later, at the beginning of his retirement until his death, he even succeeded to get an additional pension for the under provided from the state. When Alfred died in 1992 of old age, his fortune remained anonymous in a German bank, which meant that it was the bank who "inherited" all and not his son.

Only once in his life, although much later as a young adult, Freddy was able to put his hand on some of Alfred's money... In time of despair, once again deeply hurt and humiliated by the filthy, repellent behaviour of his father, all the pent-up anger and disappointment broke out of Freddy with such force that he could no longer control himself. Now, finally, he wanted to get back at his father exactly where it hurt the most, for all that he had done to him all his life long. Freddy had found out in which Swiss bank Alfred had an account for everyday use. Decisively, and desperately thinking that there was nothing else to lose, with an air of indifference, deliberately unobtrusive but confident, he stepped up to the bank teller, forged with a peacefully guided hand his father's signature, and after asking the courteous clerk for the exact balance on "his" account, withdrew 10,000 francs.

A few days later, what came crushing down on Freddy in terms of foaming hatred and the hardest threats was still nothing compared to the direct verbal attack and the grossest insults to the deadily scared, unsuspecting bank official. By failing his control duty and due to his fatal credulity, the clerk was solely made responsible for Freddy's scam and Alfred's financial loss, and held accountable accordingly.

If the whole story would have been a detective comedy, entitled "Criminals against Criminals," then perhaps one could mock it – but the way things were, it was more of a tragedy, which, considered objectively, had only losers!

Coming back to the beginning of Adi's work at *Wylor* in the fall of 1955, the prescribed daily working hours for full-time employees in sales were nine hours, 5.5 days per week. Even longer were the working hours during the seasonal sales, which took place twice a year, over several weeks. There was always additional overtime and hardly any time for a break. Since it was custom that the stores closed between 12 and 2 pm, Adi had to rush home daily for lunch, in order to finish cooking the meal in the short time available, which she had started preparing early in the morning. Grocery shopping was also done in the early mornings before work, for it was customary at that time to buy all the essentials daily. Because of the 20 minute bus ride one way, Adi always lost some valuable time and it was almost a disaster if she happened to miss the bus. In every aspect, it was very difficult for a single mother to meet all the obligations and requirements of the daily survival struggle and to manage to hold everything together with a full-time job.

Freddy had to be brought to daycare every day. It was located halfway between Kriens and Lucerne, which was extra time consuming for Adi, but which she never let on. At noon he was picked up by his sister for lunch and dropped off again before Astrid's school start in the afternoon, and picked up again in the evenings. Astrid did that gladly for her mother and she never complained, because it was natural for her to be there for her little brother. Freddy was not very happy in the daycare. He constantly lived in fear of being forgotten, and not picked up again. It was very difficult for mother and sister to convince him of the opposite, and he was too young to really understand why he had to stay there during the day. He was always almost surprised, beaming from ear to ear, when he was picked up for lunch and dinner!

The little free time that Adi had with her children during the week was daily spent with much tenderness and closeness. The children found balance in the newly acquired, rejuvenating domestic peace, and the family closeness, without fear or pressure, which was an unspeakable relief and compensated for the many limitations in daily life. Adi made a point of taking the time, along with the house work every evening, to make a game for the children or to read them an exciting story, or just comfortably sit together making something or listening to each other's daily experiences.

Although Adi long suspected that the divorce would take a very long time, she never expected that her way to the longed-for inner peace and freedom would remain closed for much longer than she hoped. Alfred increasingly outdid himself in his spitefulness and elaborate nastiness. The way in which he always tried to destroy, disadvantage, and discriminate the life of Adi and the children with new attacks was inconsiderate and vicious.

It hit Adi like a blow, when Alfred decided to treacherously change his residence and at the same time his district (canton). He moved to Horgen on Lake Zurich. Cunning as he was, he knew from the beginning that the Horgen court would now be in charge of the divorce case, and that the proceedings would have to start from the beginning again, which was a great and timely advantage for him. Since

such a procedure was of course connected with great expense, partly because the existing divorce lawyers in Lucerne had to be exchanged for new lawyers in the canton of Zurich, Alfred's intention was clearly to dry Adi out financially and to ruin her completely, in the hope that she would give up and not lay claims to any alimony or furniture.

As Alfred calculated, due to Adi's work and transportation restriction, it was extremely difficult for Adi to appear in Horgen in court on the agreed dates and time. Although the distance from Lucerne was only slightly more than 40km, the train connection was very bad, and with the transfer and the waiting times, Adi lost valuable work time, to say nothing of the costs. Moreover, her employer was not at all satisfied when she missed work for these reasons, despite the fact that it was deducted from her wage or vacation pay.

Before long, Adi's small monthly salary was literally eaten up by the many new extra costs, which meant that the money was not enough for either the daily necessary food or for Freddy and Astrid's winter clothes. Besides that, with the much too high rent for Adi's present condition, she could no longer manage even with the strictest budgeting, and so it was not long before Adi had to turn to the Swiss Winter Relief in her distress. Since the children had grown so quickly, they each needed bigger winter coats and boots for the cold days. Astrid would never forget how her mother brought her last well-preserved shoes to the shoemaker, asking him to cut a hole in the front of the leather, so Astrid's toes would fit. In this way the girl could wear her outgrown shoes for several more months in dry weather. In Adi's utmost need she also politely asked Irene in New York, whether she could spare some old clothes. Precisely because Adi knew that her sister was very self-centered and greedy, this request took a lot of courage, and it was much more than just humiliating to know that she had no other choice. To her great surprise, very soon Adi received a few items of clothing sent from America, which she accepted with deep gratitude. The inevitable accusatory and insulting remarks in Irene's accompanying letter about failure and charity were at that moment just another unfortunate side effect for Adi, which in comparison to her other big problems, she could live with.

Fortunately Adi's loyal friend Mali was immediately willing to change Irene's clothes to Adi's girlish dress size. Even though Mali was also not well off financially at that time and she also had to be frugal with her money, she only asked for a small symbolic contribution for the alterations and sometimes even did it for free.

Very hard times followed, when Adi literally had to turn over every cent of the daily food cost twice before she could spend it. It was a great blessing that Astrid, who was still growing, was not a big eater to begin with and neither was Adi. Both were satisfied with very small portions. With the growing, sturdier Freddy it was very different. Often, he was still hungry when he left the table and his appetite was not always appeased, which Adi could hardly bear. This fact, which had far too long been a permanent condition, triggered additional feelings of guilt in Adi, and brought a constant, overwhelming, never-ending fear for present existence and the future. Again Astrid remembered for the rest of her life how her mother asked a thousand times in an anxious and low voice, and even years later in better times: "Children, have you eaten enough?"

Perhaps it was the repressed knowledge of her own experience with hunger that made Adi empathize with her children's struggle for food, so much so that it became her life's obsession until her death.

Since Alfred took advantage of his visiting rights only at the beginning of the separation, and even then only in large, irregular intervals, these contacts also slowly stopped after he moved to Horgen. He would call to check in only rarely and briefly, and Freddy never received any congratulations on his birthday or a Christmas gift from his father. Thus Mr. Wirz, a former neighbour from Horw, volunteered to be Freddy's mentor. Both families had maintained a good relationship and Mr. Wirz stood up for the boy; he was able to demonstrate and explain many things to him, and they both got along very well. But when Mr. Wirz died much too early, Freddy really lost the ground under his feet for a long time, and it took a lot of Adi's attention and patience to help her son to get over this great loss.

Adi's health had been increasingly attacked by all the effects of her hard daily life, and she could hardly endure all the physical and mental problems. Even the heavy bolts of fabric at work, which she had to lift up and down from the high shelves several times a day, became too much for the graceful woman. The only relaxing thing was for Adi to let herself fall into bed at night, and the children remembered all their lives how their mother always exclaimed with the same deep sigh of relief every single night: "Who invented this beautiful bed?"

At fourteen, Astrid decided that she was now old enough to prepare lunch, to help out her mother. Adi explained the basic rules to her with a lot of patience. But since Astrid was behind the stove, Adi could not understand why she became hungry faster between the meals while working than before. It turned out that Astrid always cooked without butter or margarine, which of course had the consequence that the feeling of hunger returned somewhat earlier.

Luckily, Adi had a sympathetic boss, who was also very satisfied with her work. It was a great relief for her when he suggested that she temporarily switch to the office because of her poor health. On the advice of her doctor, Adi had to organize her stressful daily routine anew, and to get her strength back, she decided no longer to rush home at noon during the week, but to have lunch with the children in a very simple tearoom in the city. It turned out that this was a good decision, especially because she could now enjoy a little break at lunchtime. Fortunately, Astrid offered to pick up her brother for lunch from daycare and then to bring him back again. This changed with Freddy's start of school, when he was able to independently take the bus. The decision to eat out brought the added advantage that Adi could better budget the food expenses, and thanks to the one-time payment at the end of the month, was no longer short. Nevertheless, the financial circumstances remained catastrophic.

Unfortunately, the restaurant would serve rather small portions, and no seconds. Thus it often happened that Freddy was still hungry after eating there. Adi then had to hand him some small change in order that he could buy a bun or an apple fritter at the bakery.

Twice a week, even simple meat dishes were on the menu, which for financial reasons had not been on the family table for years. Only at Christmas, after the modest presents, to everyone's great delight, Adi would prepare the Christmas dinner, which consisted of horizontally cut butter croissants and would be

filled with thinly cut strips of ham, cut exactly to the size of the croissant. Then they were heated up for a few minutes in the oven. That was a real feast! But there was always one fresh fruit, daily, according to the season. The fruit was always placed on a large glass plate on the dining table and Adi always felt it was important that she and the children were able to eat one fresh fruit daily. Two pieces of fruit were already beyond the budget.

Even during the divorce, Alfred anticipated that Adi in her need would immigrate with the children to Düsseldorf. It was not difficult for him to calculate that the three could have led a much better life there, which he knew to prevent from the outset with a diabolical plan. Astute and driven by a destructive obsession he held the strings in the background, and his sadistic sense of purpose with which he sought the destruction of his family filled him with abnormal satisfaction.

So it happened that he again tried to intimidate Adi. During one of his increasingly rare calls for Freddy, he threatened her: "Think carefully about what you are doing. I will never let you move Freddy to Germany, he must remain in Switzerland, and I will do everything I can to get custody!" And that despite the fact that Alfred almost never took care of his son, either personally or financially. He wanted to give the court the impression that he worried about his son, and stated that Adi would neglect her parental responsibilities and was not a good mother at all. A woman who left her son at daycare during the day and took him to a restaurant for lunch, while also pursuing full-time employment could not be considered a good mother. This situation would in no way be beneficial for the welfare of his son, because it would cause him serious psychological harm. To Adi's great shock and to the astonishment of her lawyer, Alfred actually managed to arrange for the boy to live in a children's home in Aegerie, near Zug, during the divorce period for two years. It almost tore Adi's heart. The fact that Freddy was very unhappy left his father cold, and he did not find it necessary to visit his son even once in all that time.

What Adi had to go through over the years cannot be described with words. She could never come to rest and would have preferred to spend every free minute with her son. In fear of losing her job, she decided not to inform her employers about the new family situation. However, since she had to ask her boss for more time off so she could visit her son as often as possible, she had to eventually tell him. To her great relief, she was granted reduced working hours, which unfortunately came once again with a corresponding loss of pay or was subtracted from her vacation pay.

The difficult rail and bus services to Aegerie were just as complicated and time-consuming as those to Horgen. In the 1950s, the public transport service running to the smaller towns and villages was very unstable and involved additional travel costs, which again strained Adi's budget.

To this day, Astrid remembered well how they were once surprised by a strong rain upon their arrival in Aegerie, on the way to see Freddy. Due to the huge storm, it was pouring buckets from heaven, and after a few seconds Adi's feet were all wet and ice-cold. To her horror she noticed only now that she had a hole in her shoe sole. Since she could not lose any time, Astrid had the good idea to buy a newspaper in order to line her mother's shoe with it. Adi was grateful and felt much better, and so they went, swift as two weasels, the short distance to the children's home.

The clothes that each of the children were given by Winter Relief only lasted one season, because they both were growing rapidly at that time. So, Adi always had to come up with something new to dress her children according to the season. In her spare time, she began to knit with the wool from old or worn-out sweaters, which she took apart and broke up the stitches to get some strands of knitting wool. Thus to the delight of the children, small art works were created, and no one could ever tell that they originated from makeshift old clothes.

When Adi had a good sale opportunity at work to get a very cheap piece of fabric, now and then she sewed a pretty dress for her growing, graceful daughter, and to her pride and joy, and that in the absence of a sewing machine, all by hand, which would be hard to imagine today.

To the delight of her mother, Astrid was a very affectionate, almost problem-less child, very independent and reasonable for her age. She was an intelligent, smart, very helpful, and friendly girl, who took on a lot of her mother's household chores even without being asked. Despite the many harsh experiences and hardships in her young life, it was all the more amazing how happy, peaceful within, and how thoughtful she was in everything she did. She was very careful and attentive with her personal belongings, especially with her few clothes and shoes.

Of course it always nearly came to a financial catastrophe if something unforeseen came up, such as a new purchase, a repair, or even just something small in between that was not planned. Then the whole budget was messed up. Therefore Adi always reminded her children to not damage their clothes when playing outside. Astrid was a tomboy. She liked to climb trees, and so it was not surprising that one day she slipped and tore up her skirt. This had an unfortunate outcome for Astrid because, as a punishment, she was forbidden to participate in her desired school trip, since the allocated money had to be used to purchase a new skirt now. From Astrid's point of view, that was the harshest punishment ever, and in no comparison with the "theatre" she experienced once, when as a teenager she secretly "borrowed" her mother's nylon stockings and returned them with a run in it... After all, this damage could easily be fixed for very little money by a competent woman, using a very fine crochet hook to lift the stitches one by one up the stocking, which in today's disposable society would seem unfathomable.

Since major financial problems had long been running like a red thread through Adi's life, and every cent was spent thoughtfully, it was long taken for granted that only the cheapest deals could be considered when shopping. Adi learned to pay attention not only to the lowest price but also to the weight and especially the quality. A small example: There was a choice to buy pickles in either a glass or a tin can. As far as quantity and quality, both offers were equal, but there was a price difference of 20 cents for the pickles in the glass jar. Of course, Adi chose the can; that was not a question. And so it was with many other products as well.

Unfortunately, Adi possessed only an outdated can opener, with which one first had to hammer a hole into the can to lock the opener in, and then only it could be turned to remove the lid. But since Adi had no hammer, she always used another "method" to open the can. She took her biggest kitchen knife, firmly held it blade up by the wooden handle, and hit the can opener to make a hole in the lid. This

always worked smoothly, until the day when the wooden handle slipped from the force of the impact, and the blade almost halved her palm. The blood literally flowed in streams, and a short time later the wound was successfully stitched and Adi was allowed to gratefully leave the emergency of the Cantonal Hospital of Lucerne with the firm conviction never in her life to engage in such a negligent recklessness.

For school enrolment, Freddy came back from Aegerie, and finally they all were able to start an organized and much less hectic family life. The regular visits by his mother and sister at the children's home, and the other contact through letters and telephone calls, had the effect that Freddy was able to get used to the situation quite well, and he was no longer afraid to be left alone or abandoned as before in the Lucerne daycare. When he was enrolled in school, it quickly became apparent that he, unlike his sister, did not develop any great enthusiasm and that his desire for knowledge was very limited. Even Astrid's willingness to help him with his homework was rather difficult for him, and no one could really excite him about his new role as a student. Adi then tried to explain to her daughter, for whom the indifference of her brother was incomprehensible, that Freddy would need slightly more time to adjust and that in time he would certainly be interested in school.

In the meantime, Astrid had successfully completed secondary school. Only French gave her some trouble, even though it was her first language in the early years in Brussels. Adi was aware that for her daughter's future education, she should be proficient in the language. After much consideration and with a heavy heart, she again decided to ask her sister-in-law Irene for help and described the whole situation to her in a long letter with impressive words.

So it actually came that Irene was convinced of the importance and need for a boarding school for her niece. Her generous decision provided Astrid with a French residency at the institute Montmirail, a very short distance from the lovely city of Neuchatel. Although it was a place for mainly spoiled daughters from higher social classes, and even that Astrid could in no way compete with these young ladies, she really liked that year. She was always happiest sitting behind a school desk. If it was up to her, she would have liked to stay in school for many more years or to continue studying at a university. But unfortunately due to her circumstances it proved not possible, and she had to quickly stand on her own feet and find the quickest way for an apprenticeship.

Since Astrid had already read several books on stones, gems, and geology, and could not get enough of it, it was her biggest desire to first start an apprentice position in sales in a jewellery business, to build a basis for future studies in geology. Adi, however, was of the opinion that in regards to future study plans, her daughter would be better off to get a base in business education; not least because during the education Astrid would receive a better apprenticeship wage. Overall, Adi was not wrong, and so it came that after her successful exchange, Astrid found a good apprenticeship and started a three-year commercial education.

11. Light and Shade

Adi's new job was a hit! Mr. And Mrs. Weingarten's recognition and kindness was a new experience for her. The joy of life, that she believed to have lost, which was so much part of her character, was brought back to life and gave her new strength to start every new working day happy and inspired.

Thanks to her strong and confident fashion sense, her love of interesting and personal details, and with her ever new and exceptionally inspiring ideas, Adi could inspire the demanding customers over and over again and enjoyed an excellent reputation. Her attention and patience, coupled with her sound and kind advice, made her unique and indispensable. It came so far that customers, who happened to be shopping on Adi's days off, came happily back again to be served exclusively by her. Of course her dedication led to exceptionally high sales, which the business owners saw with double pleasure, and to show their appreciation, she was soon promoted to head saleswoman.

When a short time after she was also offered to come along on a shopping trip as a buyer, Adi felt she had attained her professional dreams. Before she could accept, she asked for some time to consider whether it was feasible for her to be away for this major fashion shopping week at least twice a year. Since it meant longer absences and even multiple days abroad, in the end, she had to decline this tempting offer with a heavy heart, because both children were still in school and Freddy had not yet reached his teens. It would not have been a problem for the independent and reasonable Astrid, but Adi did not want to burden her with the responsibility of taking care of Freddy, on top of her own school work, especially because her younger brother became increasingly difficult and had many problems at school in the daily contact with everybody due to his very bad manners.

Although Mr. and Mrs. Weingarten were disappointed by Adi's rejection, they showed understanding. On the other hand, they were also extremely grateful to be able to peacefully go on their shopping trip, knowing that a reliable and competent saleswoman had everything well under control in the store in their absence. Adi's good taste was almost legendary, and it proved season after season that no one knew the wishes of the customers so well and no one could bring the latest trends as convincingly to the women as Adi. So it happened that the Weingartens never went on their shopping trip without first consulting their best saleswoman about the new merchandise to be brought.

Over time, Adi's supervisors had grown accustomed to rewarding their gifted saleswoman for her exceptional service by sometimes handing her a few banknotes in the evenings, after a long work day with good sales, and again on the weekends. Every Saturday they told her: "Adi, have yourself and the children a nice weekend!" Oftentimes she got some money from both Weingartens on Saturdays, because neither of them wanted the other to know about it – sometimes it was almost tragically comical! Of course Adi was very pleased and sincerely grateful for their generosity that boosted and

inspired her motivation. With the extra money that she always put aside down to the last penny, she financed the annual family vacation. To Adi's great delight and gratitude, at the end of a fiscal year there was also an extra bonus and a huge box of fine chocolates.

Weingartens' marriage was childless and very difficult. It was known that Mr. Weingarten was not very considerate of marital fidelity and always had extramarital affairs. Adi and Mrs. Weingarten got along particularly well, and when Mrs. Weingarten had to go through a very difficult time again, she confided in Adi. After a particularly harsh incident, Adi allowed herself to ask Mrs. Weingarten why she would not get a divorce. Her answer was: "Oh child, due to the Swiss legislation, I simply cannot afford it. After all this hard life's work, building up the company with all my personal investments, I would only get a small percentage, and given the legal situation, it would be almost impossible to keep the company!"

Adi, however, always got along well with both owners, which was not difficult for her because she personally felt grateful to both of them. She was also convinced that she would not have been able to find better working conditions anywhere else. So, it was only natural that she could well and wholeheartedly imagine long-term employment, ideally until her retirement. That the Weingartens would sell their successful business for reasons of age, just before Adi's retirement age, did not enter her mind at that time.

The years passed, sometimes up, sometimes down, and no matter how tight Adi's finances were, over time she saved one *Goldvreneli* (Swiss gold coin) after another, until over time she had twelve of them. She bought these for her children as an emergency reserve in case they should go through really bad times again, or in case of another war. She still remembered past bitter experiences, and was convinced that her children could keep afloat for some time with these coins if needed.

In the first years at Weingartens, Adi became friends with Trudi, a younger colleague, who occasionally worked as a temporary saleslady. The two women got along very well and so a refreshing friendship was created. Both loved sometimes going out on the weekends together, or taking a little trip. Since Trudi came from a good middle-class home, she could enjoy her carefree lifestyle and devoted herself to her true passion, travelling. There were times when she was gone for months, preferably and very adventurously on a freighter ship.

Over time, a deep friendship developed between Adi and Trudi. They even spent their holidays together, and especially their interesting trip to Yugoslavia remained very memorable for both of them for years. Trudi also always happily accepted Adi's annual invitation to the St. Nicholas celebration on 6 December. She enjoyed the tradition of celebrating the advent in her friend's festively decorated home with delicious gingerbread biscuits, dried fruit, various nuts, and tasty mandarins. For Adi, it was a delight to spoil her loved ones with little surprises, and in return now and again she accepted Trudi's invitation to eat out with enthusiasm. Every little pleasantry gave her such a joy and whenever she could enjoy an excellent cuisine together with her friend in a nice atmosphere, those were the most memorable and enjoyable times!

As Trudi had a car, the two women also often drove to Zurich, where on one occasion Adi introduced Trudi to Olly. The two also got along very well, and so it was not unusual that they met for coffee in the afternoon at the elegant Hotel *Baur au Lac* or in the traditional *Grand Hotel Dolder*. How they enjoyed these hours - not only because of the good coffee. They admired and revered the somewhat older, charming bar-pianists, who created the dreamy atmosphere alternating between swinging rhythms and yearning melodies, while conveying the impression to be playing just for them...

With a smile Adi also remembered a different story: Once on a Sunday morning, Trudi invited her and Freddy, who at that time still went to school, for a ride. Suddenly he said very undiplomatically: "Trudi, did you ever buy a cheap car!" But Trudi was not short on remarks and replied boldly: "If it does not suit you, young man, you can just get out now!"

During this time, Trudi lived in Hergiswil by the lake, a very privileged suburb of Lucerne, where she liked to host guests in her spacious apartment. Adi could never forget Trudi's cooking skills, especially one particular chicken specialty that was her favourite. The secret was that before cooking the chicken Trudi always marinated it with dry vermouth and delicious spices, and brought many guests to awe with the beautifully served meal. Adi would then proclaim: "Trudi, your divine chicken is the best I have eaten in my whole life!"

Although by that time Astrid was already a young lady, now and then she liked to join the two jolly women in her spare time. But most of her time she spent with her best friend Marie-Louise. Both girls were often seen out, where they turned a lot of heads, and thus explored the emotional stages of crushes and of falling in love, with all its ups and downs, but were relatively harmless.

Already early in their friendship Adi met Trudi's mother, Mrs. Schärer, who was only two years younger than Adi. These two women also got along extremely well and met from time to time either for coffee and gossip in a restaurant or during the week, on Adi's day off for a little trip.

When years later Mr. Schärer died of old age, they all met regularly in their homes and Adi was able to give the two women much comfort and confidence due to her great empathy and experience of life. Through this event, the many infinitely painful losses that Adi had to suffer in her life resurfaced again and came into conversation, which Trudi and her mother could appreciate quite well. They both took Adi and Astrid as great role models for their grief. They learned that they were not alone in their pain and that many people in this world had suffered far more terrible pain. Both women would never forget how much Adi stood by them during this difficult time, and helped to find acceptable ways out of grief and come to accept the loss, resulting in a slow but steady recovery.

Years back, shortly after Adi's divorce, due to the painful arthritis in her hands, her family doctor prescribed for an annual two-week cure in the thermal bath of Montegrotto in Italy. The expenses were

covered by Adi's health insurance and it was amazing how good this treatment was for her each time and how she remained almost pain-free for a long time after her return.

For Adi, it was almost a happy coincidence that her colleague, Mrs. Wolf, was facing the same health problems at the same time. Thus, both women agreed to travel together for a cure and did that regularly for many years. The husband of Mrs. Wolf accompanied his wife each time, and when he could no longer travel with her for reasons of age, his wife stopped the annual treatment because she did not have the heart to leave her husband at home alone. Because Adi did not like traveling alone, (as opposed to her daughter, as it should turn out later) she broke off the prescribed treatment prematurely, which she later regretted very much, especially when the arthritis became more painful and began to spread to her feet. This brought Adi more concerns, which was not easy for her.

As a still very vibrant and attractive woman with a distinct aesthetic sense of her body, she was used to wearing high heels since her youth, and in her opinion, this was an absolute necessity. She could simply not imagine ever having to do without, especially since as a dainty little woman she seemed to rely on it. She always had a great weakness for elegant shoes, and it was part of her look, just as much as neat clothing, a touch of makeup, some lipstick, nail polish, and of course a bit of jewellery that she still wore daily in memory of her beloved Hans.

When a few years later, during summer vacation, Adi broke a toe and with her high threshold of pain did not take medication nor wanted to see a doctor, it was not surprising that the toe grew together bent and with her existing arthritis the toe became totally crippled. When Adi's foot no longer fit into any shoe, she had to get medical help after all. The astonished doctor, who could not resist a slight shake of the head while listening to the whole "story of complaints," had to inform with regret that after his examination there was no other way but to amputate the toe. According to Adi, the healing process took an eternity, but after all her patience was rewarded by the fact that later she could still wear slightly higher heels again... This, of course not always completely pain-free, and when a friend advised her under the circumstances to wear the comfortable, and now visually more appealing health shoes, Adi replied, laughing: "I do not wear old ladies' shoes – only over my dead body!"

Astrid also remembered another episode, much less spectacular but no less amusing: when as an adult, she spent a few relaxing, free days with her mother in Kriens, the weather was quite miserable in the first few days. It poured day and night, and the two women decided to spend one of those grey days in the comfort of their fluffy dressing gowns with good conversation, a glass of wine, and a game of cards. Only in the middle of the game did Astrid notice that her mother was wearing lipstick, and that under her terry cloth coat, she was wearing some jewellery on her wrist and neck. When Astrid asked smiling for the reason, and jokingly wanted to know whether madam had something mysterious or festive planned for the day, or expected a grand visit, Adi replied coquettishly: "Oh you know, child, without jewellery I just feel totally naked, and without lipstick I look like milk soup!" What could one say to that? Whether Adi also possibly wore sleek leather shoes under her long robe, is still unknown to this day...

The older Freddy got, the more difficult it was for his mother and sister to lead a reasonably normal life with him. He lied at every opportunity and not only stole from his classmates but also from his mother. Adi and Astrid never came to rest. Although Adi never gave up hope of a turnaround and always allotted a lot of time for Freddy, and with every rare positive moment hoped for stability in his character, she finally had to admit in resignation that all her intensive efforts had no effect. Living together became more and more unbearable, and all three were equally overwhelmed by this difficult situation.

Adi's monthly pension, which was a big and important part for the preservation of the hard-earned, modest standard of living, was always brought to her home by the postman at the beginning of a new month. Sometimes Freddy was home to receive the money. Later it happened once that the pension had not arrived, and in response to his mother's question, Freddy lied in cold blood and tried to convince her that he was clueless and had accepted no money because, as he claimed, he was at school this particular morning. In retrospect, Adi asked herself if Freddy had been intentionally skipping school in this time period, to wait at home for the postman at the beginning of the month... After all, Freddy always spent money above his means. The fact was that Freddy selfishly kept the pension for himself and spent the money on random stupid things. At last, he no longer made a secret of it and admitted without batting an eyelash that all the money was already spent and gone. In response, Adi sent a letter to Germany, requesting the pension to be transferred directly into her bank account in Lucerne in the future.

Freddy's school performance increasingly declined as he got older. In desperation she consulted a psychologist with him to determine whether the poor performance might have to do with lower intelligence. However, the opposite was the case, and the psychologist tried to talk some sense into Freddy, to appeal to his reason, and advised him to seek contact with his father, which Freddy also subsequently tried. But his father was unavailable, and when finally after days of calling he managed to reach him, his father was very annoyed and short with him. When Freddy nonetheless un-intimidated began to speak about his school problems and the visit to the psychologist, Alfred replied offensively: "It is only because of your mother! I always knew that she could not raise you properly, and now leave me alone with such trifles!" Adi could only guess what Freddy must have gone through in such moments of rejection and what must have built up inside him over the years.

As a final attempt and in the hope that Freddy would finally open up, following the advice of the psychologist, the school board decided to transfer him to a private boys' school for a year. Adi was torn about this from the beginning, and she feared that Freddy would interpret the transfer as punishment, rather than stimulation of his abilities, and that it could even be counter-productive. But she had no choice but to go with the decision.

Even before the change of schools took place, Freddy let his mother linger at his bedside one evening. She gently stroked his hand on the blanket, which for once he allowed. He awkwardly listened to her worries about his future and just slightly nodded his head as his mother spoke of her mixed feelings about the new school year. For once, he quietly listened to the hopeful and encouraging words of his

mother, who said in a low voice that she would do anything to support him during this school year and to help him. After getting up, she stroked his hair and whispered with a loving smile that she was full of confidence and believed in him; then she silently left his room, leaving the door slightly open, as she had always done when he was a little boy and was afraid of the dark...

It was more than disappointing that the change of school did not lead to success for Freddy, quite the opposite. The only thing he took away from this year's experience was an injured back, which happened during a ball game in the schoolyard, as he fell backwards into the empty swimming pool. Due to this mishap he could not be accepted in the military training of recruits (*Rekrutenausbildung*) years later, which meant another great disappointment for him and later also led to new problems.

Alfred was also not very successful at that time. After years of his crooked and illegal transactions, he finally got caught. He was arrested and convicted of fraud, forgery, and illegal bankruptcy which landed him for two years in prison.

Astrid was now at an age where the years of patience with her brother were definitely at an end. He stopped listening to her a long time ago and they no longer got along. Astrid simply could not understand Freddy's behaviour and it was very difficult for her to see him often turn abusive and sometimes downright mean to his mother, despite the fact that Adi never treated the children unequally or raised them any differently. Astrid could not escape the fear that Freddy would become like his father and possibly inherited his personality.

Of course, for a child like Freddy it was double and triple as hard to grow up without a father. After the unexpected death of his first mentor, the kind and sympathetic Mr. Wirz, Freddy soon had a second very friendly mentor, Mr. Fälmli. At the time, Adi still worked with his wife at the Wyler Company. Within a very short time, in his open and stable way, Mr. Fälmli was able to build a relationship of trust, and the boy opened up again to the great relief and gratitude of his mother.

Then the unexpected happened, and one really had to ask oneself how to explain it to an already harshly tested young boy, a child who experienced so many hard blows of fate, that Mr. Fälmli, Freddy's valuable substitute father figure, died one day quite unexpectedly, just like his predecessor Mr. Wirz, at a much too young age. One had to feel sorry for Freddy in his great grief at the loss of his "big brother," who had done everything in his power to replace the father for him. That fate had struck again in such harshness, was also inconceivable to Adi. She experienced it as a curse over her boy, and she mourned with her son and did everything to comfort him once again.

Because of this sad event, other difficulties within the family followed. Freddy, who abruptly fell into the old patterns, again showed unpredictable behaviour, which brought a lot of anxiety and worry for all. When he later also began to compulsively call random numbers, which led to such high telephone bills that Adi did not know how to pay for them. She had no other choice but to request a phone connection that would only allow incoming calls and no outgoing ones. In this case, the knowledge that they could

not use the phone in case of an emergency was particularly difficult. For mother and sister this was also a restriction of their personal freedom, especially when it came to the contact with their few important friends and acquaintances.

In later life, when Freddy was long grown but out of convenience still preferred to live at home, he had never bothered to help his mother with the living expenses or to contribute for room and board. When Astrid suggested Adi to kick Freddy out of the house temporarily so that he would learn to become independent and to pay his own living, Adi replied with resignation that she could not go through with it. In addition, she was worried that her son might get on the wrong path and it would be very difficult for him to reintegrate into a normal, public, and social life. This more than justified fear that was always hanging over Adi with its uncertainty, developed into long-term stress, which did not allow her to rest for most of her remaining life.

Even when choosing a career, Freddy picked an apprenticeship as an electrician, like his father, more difficulties surfaced. Although in the beginning his teacher described him as an outstanding apprentice, and he was soon assigned more responsibilities, after a short time his good performance gradually decreased. The apprenticeship would last four years, but since Freddy showed no interest or skill in college, despite all the persuasion, he did not understand how extremely important it was to hang in and complete the training. His behaviour and resistance to all the rules, both in college and at the work place, had the consequence that he was thrown out by his annoyed teacher. Shortly after, he got another opportunity and started a two-year apprenticeship as a salesman. However, this attempt also failed because of his instability and extreme repudiation in college. Very soon Freddy was left with empty hands and with no prospects and spent his free time depending on his mood with occasional part-time work.

In 1963, at the age of twenty-one, Astrid quit her job as a secretary in Lucerne to learn English as an au pair in America for a year. A Swiss intermediary agency recommended a family with three children in a suburb of New York, thinking that Astrid would be welcomed in many ways. The host, a Zurich-born widow who worked all day, hardly had time for Astrid on the day of her arrival, and after a brief tour of the house, gave her an overfilled working schedule.

According to the agreement with the agency, Astrid would be responsible mainly for the children, who already attended school, as well as some light housework in the morning. The afternoons were meant to be spent at a language school, which was also the main reason for her stay in America. But from the beginning, Astrid was completely overloaded with house work that she did not even have enough time for an evening course. Since she was very independent and responsible for her age, it was out of the question for her to get in touch with her aunt Irene in Manhattan to ask for help. She wanted to spare herself an additional, eventually humiliating confrontation. After the second week when she had not gotten a single day off and felt that she was treated like a slave, she decided one morning that she had enough and packed her belongings, booked the next flight back and not even three weeks later, after her arrival in New York, knocked on her mother's apartment door. Although Adi was very happy to have

her daughter back after the initial shock, and after listening to Astrid's bad experiences, she also regretted that Astrid failed to look for another host family in New York. She was also concerned about how long Astrid had to save to be able to afford that flight to America.

Luckily, she was gladly taken back in her former company with open arms and her employer made her a great offer to start as head secretary again.

Barely two years later, in 1965, Astrid's desire for change and education was so great that she made the decision to use her savings for a school in England. As it turned out, this decision was absolutely right! Already after half a year of intensive study, she passed all the exams. Because of her certificates and her basic commercial education, right after completing language school she was offered a job in the travel agency Cosmos in London as secretary of the CEO. She did not want to pass upon this opportunity and worked at that job with much enthusiasm. If it had not been so poorly paid, it would have been a real dream job.

While Astrid was in England, Adi's closest friend Mali died of cancer, after suffering miserably from unimaginable pain. She was only 57 years old, and with her passing, Adi not only lost a wonderful friend, but also a great support and a unique compassionate confidante.

A few years later, Seppi, Mali's widowed husband, asked Adi to marry him. She begged him to understand that a remarriage was out of question for her, and at the same time told him that it would be a shame if their beautiful friendship would end because of it. Seppi assured her that this would never be the case, and so the two remained great friends. Later, Seppi fell in love with a much younger woman named Vilma. However, before he ventured to step into a new marriage, he asked Adi for advice, to hear her honest opinion. When Adi got to know Vilma, she was initially unsure about the big age difference between them. This, however, was not the case, and the happy couple got married and had a very harmonious and loving relationship.

Vilma and Adi soon developed a good and faithful friendship, which Astrid also joined. Years later, whenever Astrid came to Switzerland to visit her mother, she often stayed with Vilma, for reasons that will be explained later.

In 1967, the very independent, alert, and knowledge-hungry Astrid decided to spend a year in Canada, to work and then to travel with the earned money to get to know the country and people. She never imagined before she left that she would like Montreal so much that she would spontaneously decide to stay there.

In 1972 Trudi married Bill, an American she met while passing through South Africa. To Adi's great delight, the wedding was held in Switzerland, on the popular Bürgenstock, high above a lake, where the couple officially tied the knot amidst a highly fashionable crowd under the open sky.

After the wedding, Trudi followed her husband to the United States, to San Francisco, where Bill grew up. Both regularly came back to Switzerland to visit Trudi's mother and Adi. As Bill was working for an airline, it happened that sometimes both came several times a year to Switzerland, which was a great joy for the family and all the friends and acquaintances.

One day, during Adi's summer vacation, she was completely surprised by Trudi and Bill's visit. Both were on the way to Italy and made a short detour to visit Trudi's mother. While all three were still holding each other happily in their arms, Trudi whispered in Adi's ear: "We are going to Capri and you, my dear, are coming with us!" It took Adi a few seconds to really grasp the meaning of this beautiful message and first she had to make sure that she was not dreaming...

During this unique holiday the friendship between Adi and Trudi and her very lovable husband Bill was consolidated and strengthened for the rest of their lives. Adi forever remembered the infinitely beautiful island landscape, which seemed to be painted by a supernatural artist's hand and remained engraved in each visitor's memory for all time. There were also the gigantic images of the glorified red sun that sank in the sea at night, or the view of the tall cliffs where the Capri fisher went out to sea in their boats at dawn. The dream beaches and the hazy horizon that seemed to melt into the blue of the sea and the sky, triggering the feeling of infinite happiness and even brought back the faith in the Almighty to the sceptics in these glorified moments...

Even long after returning home from the southern dream worlds into the normal everyday life, the memory of that wonderful time in Capri remained, just as the friendship between Adi, Trudi and Bill.

To everyone's delight, many years later Bill and Trudi moved back to Switzerland to Villars, in the scenically beautiful canton Waadt for a long time with their son Oliver, who completed the happiness of the young family. The young parents bought a condo there and later Oliver attended the international school. Even years later, when the family returned to the United States again, they kept the apartment in Villars as a holiday home of which they made good use.

Quite different from Capri, was Adi's vacation with her daughter in 1977 in Cran Canaria. After a long, grey and wet winter, both women needed to fill up on some sun and warmth together. They looked forward to their travel arrangements, which included additional interesting excursions. They also planned to visit the neighbouring island of Tenerife.

These excursions, which were largely conducted in comfortable buses, were very popular among the guests. It was not just the fascination of the island and its very special appeal, but also the many interesting sights, which one would not have expected on this sunny island. Only a small shadow was cast over these trips, because it increasingly irritated Adi when the driver stopped at some souvenir shops several times a day, so that passengers could buy some souvenirs. Neither Adi nor Astrid were interested and would have preferred to see a museum or another attraction in that time. But for timing

and traffic reasons it was not possible during these short transit stops. Thus they had no choice but to briefly stretch their legs or to wait inside the bus for the journey to continue.

So at the end of this relaxing, sunny holiday came the memorable Sunday, March 27, 1977, the day of departure. Their luggage had been picked up from the hotel one hour prior to the departure of the passengers and brought to the airport. Later, when the bus driver stopped at a flower shop even on this last trip, Adi could not believe that even this drive was interrupted. She was very annoyed because she would have preferred to be at the airport a little earlier instead of wasting time for shopping. On the other hand, the other fellow passengers appreciated that they could bring back one of the popular exotic banana plants, a bird of paradise flower, called Strelizie. This particular flower was named in honour of Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Streliz, wife of the English King George the Third.

When the bus continued towards the airport, Adi did not know yet that perhaps this very stop had saved her and Astrid's life. When shortly after the bus was about to turn onto the ramp in the direction of the departure station, the entire road was suddenly blocked by hysterical people in tears screaming wildly. The driver ran to the entrance, where he learned that a bomb went off inside the airport, near a kiosk, and that people were hurt and some possibly killed.

For this reason, the entire airport was immediately evacuated and closed. After a few hours of waiting, the still shocked passengers were told to walk from the bus directly onto the air field, where a plane was waiting for them. They boarded without a boarding pass, only with their passport and return flight coupon in their hands. The travelers were informed that there was no guaranty that their luggage could be loaded on the aircraft and in good condition. This news did not comfort or reassure the passengers. When a few hours later the plane landed without incidents in Zurich-Kloten, the people could exhale, not least because no one expected to find that all the suitcases and luggage also arrived intact.

During the taxi ride back to their apartment, Adi and Astrid heard in horror on the radio, that the same afternoon, on the island of Tenerife that a plane catastrophe occurred on the runway of the Los Rodeos airport. Two Boeing 747 collided and 583 people were killed and 61 seriously injured. Both machines and other aircrafts had Gran Canaria as their initial landing destination. Just minutes before landing, they all received the command from the tower to switch the destination to Tenerife because the Cran Canaria airport had to be closed due to the bomb explosion at 12:30 pm.

Both women looked at each other. They were chalk pale and without saying a word held each other's hands until the end of the taxi ride and were aware that in all likelihood they were spared by just a few minutes. For a long time afterwards, when memories of the horrific news prevented Adi from sleeping, she thought back with humility and gratitude to the bus driver from Gran Canaria, who had accomplished an unconsciously heroic act with his stopover at the flower shop...

Astrid's training as a flight attendant with Air Canada brought her only advantages in her beloved job. She could satisfy her passion for flying, use her strong foreign language skills, and discover many big

cities around the world. This used to be possible, because sometimes between the arrival and the return flight there were several days on the ground. For Astrid this occupation was not only something really special, but also brought the really priceless advantage that during her Swiss flights she could regularly visit her beloved mother. It often happened that Astrid was assigned the Zurich flight a few months in a row with a weekly layover. Thus, to the great delight of both women, both mother and daughter could spend some cheerful and carefree times during Astrid's "layovers" in the beautiful hotels where the Air Canada crew was always accommodated.

One day, when Adi was staying with Astrid at the Sheraton Atlantis Hotel, Olly came to visit, since she lived very close to Zurich. After the initial greetings, she critically looked around the chic hotel, and asked Astrid where she would eat dinner? Astrid explained that in good weather she and her mother mostly ate on the terrace of the coffee shop or somewhere in town, or in the summer after a long walk on the Üetliberg. To which Olly replied that Astrid should rather invest more money and eat at the dining room of the Sheraton Atlantis, because there she would have the chance, as a young, pretty woman, to meet rich men, because you never know ... Adi and Astrid laughed heartily over this statement. Yes, the nickname "funny Olly" lived up to itself, and Astrid explained to her then, still laughing, that she was already happily married to a very good man. To that Olly replied in all seriousness: "Oh! But what will you do if your husband dies suddenly, or if he comes home one day with the news that he fell in love with someone else? That way you could be prepared for all eventualities, ever provide a suitable replacement ahead of time...!"

From that time on, whenever Astrid had an over-night stay in Zurich or for that matter in another city, she was always reminded by her husband Gabi before leaving home: "Darling, don't forget to dine in the Dining Room!"

As a busy business man and a sought-after engineer, Gabi had a lot of work, which Astrid had become used to over the years and was able to handle it well. So she spent her holidays both in March and November with her mother in their beloved central Switzerland. In return, it became established since Astrid's move to Canada, that each year Adi spent at least one long vacation with her daughter in Montreal, and of course it was great that Adi could benefit from one annual free flight thanks to her daughter's work. Even after Astrid's wedding this custom was maintained, and it quickly became apparent that Adi and Gabi had their own special connection and got along very well. Adi was very proud of her dashing son-in-law, and it was a wonderful feeling to know that her beloved daughter was happy. That was also the reason why in the meantime Adi was twice as excited about her next visit to Canada, or better yet thrice, because in her enthusiasm she could also not get enough of flying...

Often, during her long visits to Canada, she would make a detour and fly on to San Francisco where she visited Trudi and her family and was always welcomed with open arms. When Adi returned back, she always left behind vivid images with family and friends that were marked by harmonious memories for her and for everyone who came into contact with her.

When one day, on her flight back to Canada, she had to change the terminal building in Los Angeles, Bill made sure to give Adi all the necessary instructions. Astrid even offered to pick her up in Los Angeles. But Adi did not want to hear anything about it, even though she had to deplane in Toronto, pick up her suitcase to go through customs. Outgoing as Adi was, she started a conversation on her flight to LAX with a much younger African-American couple. When they heard that Adi had to change terminals, they offered to drive her to her Air Canada terminal, since their car was parked at the airport. Adi thankfully accepted. Luckily they turned out to be the most charming couple. It could have ended differently. Astrid picked her mother up at Dorval airport and when they arrived at home, Astrid realized with horror, that even though Adi had arrived with the same looking suitcase she left with, it was not hers but a captain's. Unfortunately, Astrid had lent her uniform suitcase to her mother, a mistake she would never again repeat. It was in Toronto that Adi had picked up the wrong suitcase, never bothering reading the nametag.

Every time on the return flight, high above the clouds, when Adi slowly took leave from her careless vacation time, instinctively dark shadows appeared in anxious anticipation in her soul. These signalled that restlessness and unpredictability would return into her life again. Thus, each time before landing in Zurich, she sent a silent prayer to heaven with closed eyes: "Please God, let me not have any bad news, let it be good news for a change, and give me the necessary strength and patience that I need so desperately for living with Freddy!"

Going back to 1967, just when Astrid first traveled to Canada, Mr. and Mrs. Weingarten sold their business due to old age and Adi still had three more years until retirement. Women retired at age of 62 then. She was lucky and did not have to look for work, for the brothers Jäger took over the business from the Weingartens with all their employees. The fashion house continued to run under the new leadership with the name *La Contessa*. Of course, the work environment under the new management was not quite as comfortable as before, which was understandable given the exceptionally friendly relationship between Adi and her former employers. However, it was not a big deal for her, and she adjusted for her final three years of work, relieved that she could continue to work because for the subsequent modest pension, each year of employment was still of great existential importance.

Even after the business was sold, Adi still sometimes met with Mrs. Weingarten. Only a few years after selling the business Mr. Weingarten died and his wife followed him 25 years later. Almost unbelievable and so touching was the fact that every Christmas Adi received a box of chocolates and a gift of a hundred francs from the loyal Mrs. Weingarten, this, until her death. Could there be a finer appreciation of a former employee? Every year it was an extraordinarily delightful surprise for Adi and a real joy for her soul.

In those precious moments, Adi was deeply grateful to fate, despite the many hardships. She had to admit that she made the best of her life. With her almost limitless hope, with sacrifice and persistence, with dedication and hard work she had achieved a lot and despite being a single mother. Now it was only up to Freddy to find his right path and her greatest wish would come true. Her goal was to spend

her retirement in peace with herself and life, healthy in body and soul, with inner harmony and closeness with all those dear people whom she cherished. These positive thoughts always let Adi flourish anew, and since she belonged to the rare breed of women who were quite satisfied with their mirror image, she could hardly believe that her 60th birthday was approaching.

But Adi was unaware that the biggest blow of fate was still ahead of her, and would put her whole life upside down and shake her sense of dignity out of shame, helplessness, and despair. Only half a year before her retirement, one night Freddy along with two accomplices broke into *La Contessa*. The trio robbed the safe that had about 10,000 Swiss francs, which the thieves divided among themselves that same night. On the third day after the burglary, the police managed to find and arrest them.

Much later, at court the judge asked Freddy the following question: "How come that at your arrest you still had all the money, while your two friends had already spent their share?" Freddy replied indifferently: "Well, I only did it for fun and for the thrill. The money never really interested me!" Because of that reply, and because his part of the money was fully returned, Freddy got away with a black eye and only two years of probation, while his friends, both with criminal records, ended up in prison.

It goes without saying that following Freddy's arrest, the shocked Adi was asked to resign her work immediately, without any further questions. Even though her employer was aware that Adi had nothing to do with the incident, she was still dismissed with noticeable contempt, and shame that Adi felt, brought her to the limit of her mental strength. The loss of her good reputation and the very nice job was just as hard for her as the awareness that in the eyes of her esteemed employer she was now the mother of the criminal who had caused the company owners major damage. The certainty that in the future she would have a lot of time to think about what happened and her personal situation brought her to the edge of a nervous breakdown.

As if this tragedy was not hard enough, at the same time Adi's father passed away. He was 89 years old and although physically and mentally he was of perfect health, it was the loneliness that was hard for him, as all his former good friends and acquaintances had long been dead. Thus, he often mentioned to his family without much emotion that he would like a peaceful and quick death soon, preferably by a heart attack and in his sleep, and of course preferably at home in his own bed. His last wish was fulfilled in a miraculous way with all the details and father William said quietly and peacefully goodbye one night to his rich and fulfilled life. This fact was the only thing that could comfort Adi a little in her grief. But at the same time, the terrible memories of the early death of her beloved half-brother Willy came back, who was torn from his young life and had to die in appalling pain. This heavy load and the constant devastating worries about Freddy's machinations led Adi again to a dangerous mental edge.

In this state, Adi dragged herself to the train station and set out on the long trip to Germany for her father's funeral. She could not eat or drink and therefore arrived weakened and in poor health in Düsseldorf. Because of the occasion Adi did not count on a joyful reunion, and painfully felt how much

she missed her father, the good strong man, who through all those years had held that family and the business together. She also noticed right away that her brother Erwin behaved differently than usual towards her. He was rather strange and not very talkative, which she attributed to the loss of their great father. It hurt her that she did not have a single second to talk privately with her brother because he was constantly besieged by his wife. Even during the funeral he and his wife held their distance from his sister, which Adi did not mind as she was absorbed in a mental conversation with her father and wanted to take away comfort and confidence from the peaceful and solemn ceremony.

Immediately after the funeral, when Adi was still dazed from the experience, Erwin came up to her and said that he would wait for her in order to make some important announcement. Tired and affected, with her head and heart still full of the events from the past 48 hours, Adi entered the large living room. With choppy words and a stony countenance Erwin informed his sister that even while their father was still alive, he was appointed the executor of his will. With shivers down her back Adi thought, "Erwin, what happened to you, where is your warmth, your kindness?" And suddenly she sensed the worst was coming and had to sit down immediately because her legs were seized with a weakness. Now Adi understood that Erwin's behaviour since her arrival had a deeper meaning, and sure enough, he informed her that of the entire paternal fortune, only the equivalent of 20,000 francs would be her inheritance. Adi was speechless and could not understand Erwin's words. She had neither the desire nor the power to fight with her brother over the inheritance, when her father was barely buried. She was shocked by Erwin's coldness and she was immediately aware that he just had told her a huge lie.

The fact was that she had heard father personally say that he would make provisions, and would of course divide his considerable fortune equally among his children. Adi looked sadly at Erwin, but he did not return her look, and turned away. As he was leaving the living room, he heard the words of his sister: "If you do that, Erwin, you are no longer my brother!" And so it was, although deep in her heart Adi knew that her brother was an honest man, she could not claim the same about his wife. Even earlier she often did nasty, mean things to her in order to always get a personal advantage. It was generally known that Erwin suffered greatly in his marriage at times, being under his wife's "hammer" but unfortunately he did not have enough backbone to stand up to her.

Finally back in her four walls after the stressful days in Düsseldorf and an exhausting return trip, the bitter time of processing began for Adi. She reorganized her daily routine again and started a new life again. But how could one plan something productively if one was still under the shock of a sudden eviction from her professional life, caused by a criminal act of her own son, and how does one deal with the humiliating fact of the injustice and shame? How does one live from one day to the next, unprepared, without daily tasks and goals, alone with all the time and a silent, unpredictable son, who did not seem to have any morals and perspectives?

In her poor health, brought on by a debilitating weight loss and fear of life, as well as massive guilt about her employers, she was only barely aware that Freddy in his odd way was worried about her, and gave her some attention and for the first time showed a trace of compassion.

Supported and cared for by her dear friends and the occasional written and telephone contact with Astrid, after endless weeks, Adi slowly began to resume a normal life. After a long period of unemployment, with the approach of her forthcoming 62nd birthday, the regular payments of her pension were in sight, and Adi was aware that even with the modest influx she would fare a lot better.

Living with Freddy was an ever-changing roller-coaster ride. For a while it went well, so Adi had hope again and then small things happened again that wore her down and tested her patience. So every day she cooked a nice lunch meal for Freddy and it happened over and over again that he simply stayed away and sometimes even for days without telling her. Since Adi had to carry all the household costs without the support of her son, and because a lot of food was wasted by his no-shows, one day Adi was fed up and told her son that she would no longer cook for him.

She kept strictly to it, and even allowed herself a hot meal in a small restaurant near her apartment on week days. The owners of this cozy restaurant were lovely people, and with time they noticed that Adi could never finish the daily portion, and suggested to serve her half the portion at a much cheaper price, which was not customary at the time. By eating out, Adi now had a daily destination that gave her great pleasure and simultaneously gave her regular and very useful contact with people, which gradually and very carefully brought back her earlier *joie de vivre*.

12. The Full Life

Since moving from Kriens to Lucerne in 1967, Adi still lived with Freddy in the low-cost, small city apartment, where she should stay until the end of her life. Even after her move, the apartment had adequate space for two people, since by that time Astrid was already living in Canada and her room did not have to be used exclusively as a bedroom. Adi was still working downtown and enjoyed the freedom that the location provided, since she could now walk easily to work and conduct her entire daily routine. It was a much appreciated time saver.

The couple Olga and Fritz, who moved into that building the same year as Adi and worked as superintendants, became her close friends from the start. They visited each other every now and then in their apartments or met in the city for an occasional dinner or a coffee. During this whole time and into her old age, Adi was very happy and grateful for how accommodating and helpful this friendly couple always was to her. For Astrid it was also reassuring to know that her mother had such dear neighbours, and the three have maintained a good relationship to this day, even after Adi's death, especially when Astrid is visiting her brother, who after his mother's death took over the lease.

Even when Freddy's behaviour showed no major abnormalities, it was better for Adi not to investigate, because if she had known how many crooked things happened behind her back, it would have been the end of her hard-won inner peace and one shouldn't even think about the consequences.

But some of these incidents leaked occasionally all the way to Astrid in distant Canada, because she fervently kept up her good friendly relations with her loved ones in Switzerland. So she knew, for example, that her brother only occasionally worked temporary jobs, and that he stood out for his anti-social remarks. He preferred to let others do the work, mocked the working society and, as he put it, saw no sense in working very hard for money in order to later receive, in his view, a ridiculous low pension, which would never be enough for a good life anyway... That it was precisely this small pension income that financially kept him afloat for decades, until mother's death, he never cared to mention.

Astrid also knew that after a long period of inactivity, her brother realized that maybe after all, it would not be too bad an idea, and began to work again – for an insurance company for some time, then in a night club, and for a while even in the red-light district. But he did not last anywhere for more than two years. In between, he also took odd jobs where he sometimes got paid "under the table." Years later, Freddy actually found some regular work for a lawyer with a small salary. He liked this interesting position very much and got along with his employer just fine.

In time, Freddy gathered enough experience and expertise for his purposes in this job that he only occasionally showed his face in the office. In the meantime, he found exactly the right field, where he could work independently and with little effort, getting on almost risk-free and earning quite good

money. He associated with a social group that relied on his help, the foreigners. They were foreign workers, unemployed, refugees, illiterate, mostly people not well versed or fluent in German or not competent in official matters. They turned to Freddy, when they needed help or could not express, defend, or justify themselves. In these circles it was known that with a bit of cash they could turn to Freddy for all legal questions, especially if someone unknowingly or for reasons of mental or linguistic deficiency was in danger of coming in conflict with the law.

He became an expert in legal issues for foreigners. It soon spread among the foreign circles that a Swiss specialist offered his services of non-bureaucratic advice and assistance, as well as proficiency in filling out all existing official applications and forms of any kind. This also included, of course always with advanced payment, the written processing of residence permits, authorizations, or citizenship forms. It goes without saying that with this type of work, in such an environment, the money did not flow in regularly and it is safe to presume that the services were often provided without supporting documents and receipts. Freddy's life was like an unpredictable balancing act that would have caused some degree of anxiety to any reasonable person.

The absolute highlight was the fact that within a few years Freddy was married three times and each time they were just marriages of convenience with foreign women. The agreement was always in advance to get divorced again as soon as the respective new wife received a Swiss passport and became a citizen. This was Freddy's largest source of income, and it is surprising that such misconduct was possible in the seventies and eighties, and that it took the law so many years to change.

Although Adi was always affected by her son's behaviour and missteps and suffered terribly from it, she finally came to realize that she was not responsible for the actions of her long grown son. When, in their plight, she could at last acknowledge this fact, and with Astrid's support, she began to slowly feel better in her daily life.

But only many years later, after she had been able to process her humiliating dismissal, was she finally able to re-establish an organized and enriching new life that held many wonderful events for her in store.

Even in the years after Adi's retirement, Freddy continued to live his own encapsulated life in which there was no place for his mother. She had long given up asking him where he was staying when he disappeared for weeks without warning. She also let it pass without a word that he never made any contributions to household expenses. Thus, it was impossible for Adi to put money aside from the meagre pension income, which always made her uneasy. Despite everything, deep inside she believed that her son's lack of contribution was not malicious; she simply could not have imagined otherwise. Rather, she thought that he could not contribute anything because he had nothing to give, or maybe subconsciously he simply wanted to remain the little boy, who had a right to a free home, including a mother's unconditional care. How could Adi ever know what was really brewing in the mind and soul of her sometimes pitiful son?

To her own astonishment, Adi succeeded in keeping a cool head and to inwardly distance herself from Freddy's lifestyle. Because of her hard-earned, new attitude, it was finally possible for her to enjoy the modest pleasures of everyday life, the new freedoms, and the wonderful friendships with nice people, with all her heart. The regular meetings with Astrid on her layovers in Zurich, where each time she was spoiled by her daughter in the best hotels, enriched her life, and especially the annual, regular, mutual holidays in Switzerland and Canada. Already the preparations for her long vacation in Montreal and its great anticipation, bestowed a wonderful lightness and positive time on her many weeks in advance.

On the long-awaited day of departure, when Adi finally sat in the plane, where she was already known by several crew members as the mother of an esteemed colleague, she was always warmly received and taken care of. She really enjoyed the travel atmosphere by leaning back in the soft padding of her window seat. One or the other flight attendant could also remember from years before, that Adi used to order her favourite drink, a *Screwdriver*, as an aperitif. So it was not unusual that upon entering the aircraft, she was greeted with this delicious drink. She was also always impressed by the fine food on board, and when it was accompanied with some nice red wine, Adi felt like a queen. Often, it happened that a seat in first class was free and to her utmost joy, she was transferred from her economy seat into the incredibly elegant first-class area where she could enjoy the many wonderful amenities with all her senses. Thus, Astrid never had to worry because she knew that her nice colleagues would provide the best care for her mother when she happened to be assigned to another destination.

With age, the discounted standby travel for family members of the flight personnel became too nerve-racking for Adi. Since there was always a small risk that due to full occupancy there would not be a seat available, the anxiety before departure increased and the uncertainty about making the flight started to bother her more and more.

Bernadette, Astrid's good childhood friend from school in Lucerne, was also a member of the Air Canada crew. So it happened that one day on the flight to Montreal Adi was pleasantly surprised to see the familiar, lovely Bernadette as a flight attendant on the long journey. But that was no coincidence, for Astrid had organized it that way because at that time there were only flights with stop-overs in Paris, which would have been technically difficult and challenging for Adi. Bernadette was prepared to help Adi in case she would have had to give up her seat from Paris to a full paying passenger. This meant that a connecting flight to Montreal on the same day could not be guaranteed, and in rare cases she would have to look for over- night accommodation. Astrid informed her mother about this possibility prior to her departure and how she would have to proceed in case should it ever occur. At the same time, she reassured her mother that such a scenario was extremely rare.

But when it actually happened in Paris and Adi's seat was given away, all the good advice only went so far. Bernadette even accompanied Adi to the gate while she was being deplaned. But when Bernadette noticed in what bad shape Adi had become, she pleaded with the ground crew to make every possible effort for "her elderly aunt," as Bernadette in her distress, made the agent believe, to find a seat,

because she could not leave the poor woman alone in a strange city. Her desperate plea was heard and together they sought the best possible opportunity to let the terrified woman fly after all. It cost both women a lot of energy, and later when Adi sat in the jump seat, a bit uncomfortable but nonetheless relieved, she gave Bernadette a grateful smile.

Once they arrived in Montreal, Bernadette immediately contacted Astrid, informed her about the incident at Charles de Gaulle Airport and asked her to never again let her mother travel without a reservation. From that day on, Astrid always bought regular Swissair tickets for Adi. Of course, in the early years there was no more "upgrading" for Adi, which she missed because understandably she could not expect to be spoiled the way she had been on Air Canada. After all, she had gotten used to travel first class. But luck was on her side, and as chance would have it, the airport manager of Swissair moved into the same apartment building as Astrid. Since both became good friends, one can imagine what pleasant consequences this had for Adi's future flights to Switzerland...

Once, during her annual visit to Montreal, Adi expressed the wish to one day visit British Columbia with her daughter, a province of Canada on the Pacific Ocean. She had read a lot about it and mentioned it to Astrid. Astrid was also interested in this trip because she knew Vancouver only from her layovers, and so both flight enthusiasts went on a trip during Adi's holidays. Upon their arrival they immediately rented a car to be free and unattached, and be able to drive far into the interior of British Columbia. Thus, in glorious weather, mother and daughter were able to enjoy fantastic and unforgettable holidays. Aside from all the surrounding towns outside of Montreal, which Adi had already seen, each year both women also went to the Laurentiens for a few days. Adi was so impressed by the immense size of this beautiful place with all its green forests – a wonderful world in itself, unique landscape and pure nature, simply heavenly!

Adi loved and admired her son-in-law Gabor, whom she called Gabi, like all his friends did. She was very proud to have a well-known and successful engineer as her son-in-law. Even when Astrid was en route for a few days during her mother's visit, Adi and Gabi spent a very good time together. They got along very well and mainly spoke English, although Gabi still understood some German. Since he went to school in Budapest before the Second World War, he also had to learn German because Hungary and Austria were still part of the imperial monarchy at that time. For both, it was always striking to find out that Adi had learned many of the same songs and poems in her German school in Düsseldorf. They were always surprised anew when they found more German texts or verses they had learned as young students, and could even recite them after sorting through their memories for a few minutes. So it happened that sometimes they could both recite full texts together, which always ended in laughter. Both even had some of the same subjects, particularly German literature and history, and knew many of the same songs. And when Astrid happened to witness one of those exciting hours of reminiscing, she was quite amazed at the two. She took great pleasure in watching her mother and husband get excited in vivid, sometimes amusing, sometimes serious verbal confrontations, and talking about past events, politics, school, church and state. Since both held a similar opinion, the occasionally heated debates always ended on good terms, and the conversation was exciting and interesting until the end.

When Astrid was away for work and Gabi had the time, he often played backgammon with Adi in the evenings, always betting a few dollars, which Adi usually won to Gabi's astonishment. When Gabi invited her to dinner afterwards and asked her what she would like to eat, she always had the same sly answer ready: "If you still have money left, my poor Gabi, I would like to go eat a lobster!" Lobster and sweet and sour Chinese food were Adi's favourite dishes.

Both of them also had a great time, following all possible sport matches on TV. Since Astrid and Gabi played tennis, Adi also watched every match in Switzerland, even though she had never held a tennis racket in her hands. She not only knew every player but also knew all the scores. When Astrid and Gabi had a discussion about tennis once, but could not remember the specifics anymore to continue their conversation, Gabi asked Astrid to call her mother in Switzerland. Of course, Adi could give the right answer even before Astrid finished her question.

Adi's favourite players at that time were Agassi and McEnroy. Agassi for his tennis clothes, which she found quite crazy, and whenever she referred to him in admiration as "her bird of paradise," everyone knew that she meant Agassi. Whenever McEnroy played, she was not only excited about the game itself, but also about the unpredictability of the star's temper. It was common knowledge that McEnroy had no qualms about shouting out his anger without restraint into the world, or to throw the tennis racket angry on the floor, like a little spoiled brat who once again did not get his way. In any case it was an outstanding game, and mixed with his incalculable moods, it was a double pleasure for Adi, and at times even pure adrenaline.

When Adi was once again staying in Montreal and came along with her daughter and son-in-law to the tennis club to watch the games of the members, she said afterwards in all earnest and a bit disappointed: "You know, actually no one plays really good tennis in your club!" Astrid and Gabi laughed and had to admit that she was right. Since Adi only knew the top players of the World Cup level from television, her comparison was not entirely wrong...

In addition to tennis, Adi was also interested in boxing. As she knew from the stories of her son-in-law, he used to box as a young man at the university of Budapest. This of course was cause for more exciting conversations between Adi and Gabi. Astrid still remembers the sleep deprivation one day caused by her mother's passion for boxing, for which Adi felt guilty afterwards. It was during Astrid's layover in Zurich, where the two women met once again in a beautiful hotel, and after a lovely dinner and lively conversation, retired to their room. Astrid was tired from the long flight and both were looking forward to the comfy bed. At 3am Astrid was woken up by the TV sounds. Drowsy, and in disbelief, she asked her mother why she turned on the TV at that time? Adi replied: "The comeback of Muhammed Ali is starting. The boxing match is broadcasted live, but go back to sleep, child!" As Astrid caught the mischievous smile in her mother's eyes, she did not have the heart to talk her out of it. The same day, on her way back to Montreal, Astrid had to pay for the restless night because it took a lot of energy to stay awake, and for once it was hard to keep smiling for the passengers...

As usual, Astrid came to Switzerland again in March 1980, but this time not to take her mother on a sky vacation as every year, which both of them enjoyed very much. While Astrid used to speed down the slopes on her waxed skies, Adi enjoyed the majestic, white mountain scenery on her walks, rhythmically crunching through the snow in her warm winter boots and working up an appetite.

But in the spring of 1980 everything was different. This time instead of taking her into the mountains, Astrid fulfilled a long awaited dream for her mother: "Once in a lifetime to go to Africa – once in a lifetime to go on a safari in Kenya!" How many times had she heard her say that? Astrid remembered to this day that she heard these words as a young adult, and each time in a yearning and sentimental tone. Astrid fulfilled that big wish as an additional, very belated birthday surprise for her mother's already passed 70th birthday. Indeed, she would soon celebrate her 72nd year. The fact that Astrid's budget was strained did not bother her because the pride and joy of making her mother's wish possible, made her very happy. Besides, Astrid thought that she could not any longer postpone it due to her mother's age. Did she have a premonition of some disaster to happen?

When Adi finally realized how much that trip was worth, she felt guilty. She continuously protested that it was merely a dreamy, utopian wish expression that her daughter should never have taken seriously. But Astrid could see in Adi's shining eyes how happy and deeply touched she was.

For this destination, in joyful anticipation, Adi wanted to buy a few suitable clothes. That was the moment when she decided to buy the first pair of jeans of her life. Astrid had encouraged her for years, but until then Adi was always convinced that she was not a jeans type. Now it worked, and Adi was very satisfied with her choice because she did not simply choose a natural blue one as "every commoner" was wearing no, it had to be an olive green pair, naturally with the matching shirt.

It was a unique, wonderful, and unforgettable trip, despite the many efforts and the extreme heat that hardly let them both sleep. On the day of the safari, Astrid thought it necessary to charter a small plane because Adi could not stomach the long bumpy ride by car. However, once arrived at the original departure point for the Safari, there was no choice but to transfer into a jeep, to marvel over all the animals and sights, and in order not to miss anything. Adi needed a stomach-calming pill to manage the long ride in the jeep through the endless expanses. Astrid often watched her mother discreetly from the side. She was a little concerned about her health; her pale face with thick beads of sweat revealed her fatigue. Sometimes Astrid had to shake her head a little amused when she saw how impressionable her mother was and how much she was affected, and how she recorded every detail.

Barely recovered from this exhausting and very exciting safari, more trips were planned, and when Astrid asked her mother if it was not too much for her, Adi replied with nonchalance: "Not at all and since we are here, child, we have to enjoy every minute and explore all the possibilities – I will have enough time to rest at home!" As it turned out, Adi could have easily extended her holiday, while Astrid was happy to return home, since she had more difficulties with the extreme heat.

Another incredible experience was the visit to *Hell's Kitchen*, this incredibly impressive volcanic mountain on the Kenyan coast, also known as the Grand Canyon of Kenya. With its vast canyons and the huge vertical rock formations, it offered the small tour group a magical colour spectrum that ranged from creamy white to pink, beige and brown to the darkest red, mixing in perfect harmony.

What remained unforgettable on that day for the two women and probably for all the other tourists as well, was the memory of the lunch break, nothing special in itself, and yet a notably funny story: This excursion was one of the hottest ever, and far and wide in these endless rocky mountains there was not a shady spot in sight. But suddenly, after a short march through the rocks and abyss, the narrow path opened to a tiny valley, where a piece of hanging rock formed a narrow shade over the red earth. All went happily towards it, but had to admit that not everyone could fit underneath it, unless they lay down beside each other on the floor and everyone would try to at least keep their head in the narrow shadow strip. No sooner said than done! The travellers took their lunches from their bags, lay down on their stomachs, and resting their heads on their elbows they could still their hunger and above all quench their thirst! In retrospect, that was the only shade they saw that memorable day in the open wilderness ... nonetheless, in spite of every possible sun block, one could not complain about a nice skin colour, and sore muscles made themselves know ... And as one can imagine, the memories of this shade experience brought much amusement, which, depending on the temperament of the traveller, expressed itself in a pleasurable smile, a loud laugh, or just pleasant thoughts of a fascinating excursion.

On the return flight to Switzerland, Adi said enthusiastically, "What a dream vacation that was, Astrid! How nice that with my 72 years I could still experience it in good health! I'm so very grateful that you made this possible and I will never forget it as long as I live!" Astrid replied: "Yes mommy, it was really worth it, and it was exactly the right time. I am so proud of you, of how you mastered and enjoyed this trip. It is hard to believe, sometimes you were like a little child in your excitement, and sometimes tough and strong when it came to getting through! To travel with you is always such a pleasure!"

Astrid often remembered those conversations in the fall of that year. The great worries and many setbacks that Adi had to suffer over the many decades were not that easily repressed after all in terms of her health. So it happened that only six months later, in November 1980, she suffered a major stroke, which resulted in partial paralysis and loss of speech, and almost cost her life. Astrid immediately arrived from Montreal and before going into her mother's hospital room, was able to meet the specialist in charge and the doctor on duty, and learned from the two doctors that there was not too much hope and that she should be prepared for the worst. An unprecedented terrible fear clutched Astrid's heart and she thought: "My God, what will become of her and Freddy when mom dies, and what will happen to her if she doesn't die? It would be unimaginable if she had to vegetate in this condition without regaining physical and mental powers again. Wouldn't that be undignified and cruel? Would it really be what she would have wanted and deserved?" Countless thoughts and feelings came over her and almost drove her mad.

When Astrid summoned up her courage and stepped into the hospital room, where the deeply depressed Freddy was waiting for her, she found her mother in a miserable state. Was this small pile of person really her mommy, whom Astrid only knew as strong and vital all her life? Adi lay like dead in her pillows; she could neither speak nor move, nor communicate how much she could grasp from her environment. Astrid and Freddy were never sure whether their beloved mom would survive the next seconds.

After two days and nights, when the siblings were still sitting overtired and very concerned by her bedside, Astrid saw a barely visible emotion in her mother's pale face: finally, finally, the long-awaited sign of life! To their infinite relief, Adi could soon make it understood that she could comprehend her children's questions by closing her eyes for a "yes" and closing them a little longer for a "no." Astrid understood this language immediately, and she carefully explained to her mother in a gentle and soft voice that she had suffered a stroke and was very ill, and that even the doctors were not sure, whether she would survive. In return Adi unmistakably communicated to her children with a small gesture that she will not die. So it came ever so slowly to a turn, and with every day she progressed towards her release with minimal but steady progress, and did well in the difficult therapies, and one could sense her strong will power to want to come back to life. It is not surprising that one of her first sentence she could clearly pronounce was "I don't want to die yet!" Amusing rather than tragic was the fact that in her first attempts to speak, Adi was conversing in three languages, in German, French, and English, much to the amazement of the doctors and nurses.

Finally home again Adi was initially taken care of by Freddy and Astrid together. It was very touching and almost miraculous for both women to witness how well Freddy took care of his mother, without many words and with unsuspected attention. Who would have ever thought and who would have guessed at the time that Adi would be taken care of by her son for many years, and that he spared her a life in a nursing home almost until the end. Who would have ever believed that Adi had to admit at the end of her life that there wasn't a more helpful and more patient son than her Freddy...

In the beginning it was very helpful for the siblings to see with what strong will their mother worked on herself. Without a word, but with many gestures she hinted that she refused to remain a cripple. How often she sat in the living room, took a newspaper or a book and tried to read or to formulate something in vain. The realization that initially even with the greatest effort there was no progress was devastating and very, very sad for all. But Adi did not give up and literally fought to copy a few consecutive lines from a magazine. But the result was just some incoherent scribbles, like that of a small child, but Adi's persistence was the best incentive to continue.

Adi refused linguistic and mental therapy and was downright offended when her therapist spoke and treated her like a child. That he was a compassionate, patient professional with many years of experience of working with stroke patients, Adi did not care, and she let it be known to her children. For the therapist, Adi was a phenomenon. He took her defence with humour and soon realized that with a

friendly, objective, and mature language he could get much further with her, and Adi's sudden progress confirmed the right approach of his new learning therapy.

Although in the beginning of the treatment Adi could only barely stack a few wooden blocks in a straight line even with the greatest effort, it took a lot of patience and time, not only from Freddy who after Astrid's departure was taking care of his mother by himself, but also from Adi herself. In retrospect, Astrid could not tell how long it really took for her mother to be able to know her name, how old she was, where she lived, how many children she had, and when she could feed herself again without spilling something.

Until the next visit, Astrid could witness her mother's first small but then ever-increasing progress in her daily phone calls. So after many months, it gradually came to a dialogue between mother and daughter, which no one would have thought it possible in this relatively short time.

Exactly one year after Adi's release from the hospital, she managed to recover completely. Her memory gradually came back to full capacity, and the two women could again revel in the memories of their Kenya trip together. Astrid was aware that at that time it was the last and also the best time to have undertaken the trip to Africa with her mother. That Adi could remember it so well was touching, and retrospectively made Astrid just as happy as her slowly recovering back to life, strong mother.

13. The Last Years

Adi's realization of having received a new gift of life filled her with humility, and when after her long recovery she was about to come back to Montreal for vacation, she felt she was finally over the mountain.

But unfortunately, the next incident followed soon after, and only a few years later, just when she thought she had regained her health, she was taken by surprise again. As it happened, Adi was with Astrid in Zurich, where both women had once again spent a carefree evening and a restful night at a hotel.

In the morning when she awoke, Astrid heard her mother call out from the bathroom: "Oh God, I can't comb my hair!" Astrid came immediately and saw that Adi held the comb upside down and continuously tried to comb over and beside her head, but without touching her hair with the comb. That terrified Astrid, and at first she feared that her mother might be losing her eyesight. She gently led Adi back into the bedroom where she helped her sit down on the bed. She did not want to worry her mother with her fears, and to distract her, Astrid asked her in a calm voice to check how much money she had with her. With great difficulty Adi managed to get her wallet out of her purse, but she was unable to count the money.

It became clear to Astrid that her mother had suffered a relapse again, if not another slight stroke. The hotel doctor who was immediately sent for confirmed Astrid's assumption and it was he who called the airline and explained the situation and informed them that Astrid would not be able to work the return flight. Since the incident happened only two hours before her pick-up, it was clear that in such a short time no replacement could be organized for Astrid. To her great relief, she was informed later that she should not worry because there were only a few passengers on the flight to Montreal. So she could devote herself to her mother, and luckily a friend from Zurich was ready to drive the two women to Lucerne. There, Adi's general physician, who was already informed, made the necessary preparations for a possible emergency.

As it turned out, it was in fact a light stroke, from which Adi could slowly recover after a week of absolute bed rest and care, to the great relief of all. Initially, Freddy was not available and Astrid only knew that he was staying somewhere in Holland where he could not be reached and would return only in about one week. Fortunately, she was granted leave from work and after Freddy's return, knowing her mother to be in good hands, she could resume work with a peace of mind.

From then on, Adi was not disturbed by any more relapses for the next years. Freddy was very caring and took over most of her household chores so that she was left only with minor house work to do. She accepted his help gratefully, and when he had to confess to her that he had to go away for a short time to serve a prison sentence for evading the military tax, she could only shake her head and say sadly,

"Boy, what kind of trouble do you get yourself in?" The whole thing happened because of Freddy's stubbornness, in his mind he found it unfair having to pay despite that fact that he could not serve in the military on account of his back condition. It was about the principle and he refused to pay in full knowledge that he would go to jail for it.

In those days, for the first time Adi felt as if Freddy had become a little more reasonable. With surprise, she found that in certain things her son indeed acted more responsibly and even showed a trace of conscience. As a wise woman, she kept her observations to herself and never uttered a word about it, in order not to destroy these new, good aspirations before they properly settled.

Whenever Astrid stayed with her mother in Lucerne, Adi liked to go shopping with her daughter, even though otherwise she showed no great interest in it. On few occasions, when Astrid went on a shopping spree by herself, Adi always had great fun upon her return examining the contents of the shopping bags. So she spotted among the purchased goods a CD with Lambada music, which Astrid really liked for its supposedly new style of music, and Adi's cheerful comment was: "Oh child, this music has been around for a long time!" That was just a small example of Adi's incredibly varied interests and generally very broad knowledge. Often she was way ahead of her time, sometimes even more than her own daughter.

On December 23, 1987, when Adi had not heard from Olly for some time, she tried to call her at home to inquire how she was, and to wish her a merry Christmas. Finally in the evening, after several attempts, the phone was picked up by Olly's husband. In his weeping state, he revealed to her that Olly died two days ago from breast cancer. He also told her sadly that Olly had known that she was suffering from breast cancer for seventeen years, but refused all treatments. Adi had no idea Olly was sick, for she never mentioned a word about it to anyone. The funeral was the very next day, and afterwards Adi came back home completely exhausted. That was probably the saddest Christmas she ever had, and for a long time she could not recover from her pain.

In 1991, Astrid and Gabi moved into their new big condo. When Adi heard the good news, she announced that she would like to fly to Canada one last time, to admire the new home and its proud owners with her own eyes. She explained that it was of great importance to her, so that later, on the phone with Astrid, she could imagine from which of the many rooms her daughter was calling her. For Adi, it was a sensation: Astrid and Gabi had five rooms, each equipped with a phone. In hindsight she must have had a premonition that it would be her last visit.

So, that summer, with her 83 years, Adi was on the way to her loved ones in Canada, indeed, as it would turn out for the last time. The reunion was incredible for all, and who would have thought even for a second then that only five days after her arrival Adi would suffer another stroke? This time her legs were affected most. It was her third stroke and the ambulance immediately took her to the nearest hospital. Luckily, it was only a minor one, and Adi could leave the clinic after four days. Only with the active and loving support of Astrid and Gabi could she walk a few steps at first. With the excellent care of her

young physiotherapist, who came from Lebanon, she made good progress, and it was almost a miracle that Adi was back on her feet in record time, as if nothing had happened.

The rest of the vacation was as always filled with various activities. Apart from tennis and boxing, she was also passionately interested in soccer, as was Gabi, who in his youth was a keen soccer player. It was a wonderful coincidence that during this vacation the international soccer matches took place and were broadcasted from Europe. Although the live broadcasts were at midnight local time, Adi and Gabi did not miss a single game, while Astrid preferred to go to bed.

Adi was even enthusiastic about sports cars, although she never learned to drive a car. Once, when visiting her daughter's friend Diane, she met one of Diane's male friends, who happened to own a Corvette. When she saw the car, Adi was stunned, which the young man noticed immediately and politely asked whether she would like to go for a spin. Adi did not have to be asked twice and accepted this unique, fantastic opportunity with great enthusiasm. A short time later, when she sank into the deep, leather seat beside the driver and the sports car drove off as if shot from a cannon, in her sheer amazement she forgot to wave to the astonished spectators.

After they still hadn't returned half an hour later from their joyride, Astrid started to worry and was about to call the police in desperation. As she was reaching for the phone, the two came back in good health and high spirits. Astrid was relieved, and when she saw her mother struggle to get out of the front seat, her worries were soon forgotten and she could not hold back an amused smile. Getting in was reasonably easy, but as Adi was no longer the youngest with her 83 years and was also suffering from arthritis, she was too stiff to get out of the deep rocket without help. She did it with composure, and the experienced adventure just surpassed all previous records, and made the minor obstacles be quickly forgotten.

As scheduled, Adi flew back to Switzerland after six weeks, where Freddy was already waiting for her well prepared. Astrid wanted to accompany her mother, but the petite, feisty woman wouldn't have it and said archly, "Child, that is out of the question; don't even think about it! One could think your mother was an old woman!" And that was it, and all three hugged each other when saying goodbye, and the fact that Adi was getting on a plane for the last time and thus another era came to an end, lingered nostalgically in their minds for quite a while.

When Astrid retired three years later, she spent a few weeks with her mother in Lucerne four times a year. Since her last stroke in Montreal, Adi was doing surprisingly well and both women went on many memorable trips together as before. Apart from her sometimes very painful arthritis, which made itself apparent on Adi's crooked fingers and hands, she felt relatively well. Unfortunately no one could persuade her to regularly take the painkillers prescribed by her doctor to make her life much easier. But she was always strictly opposed to any medication, which unfortunately also meant that she had to give up her beloved needlework, knitting and crocheting.

Nonetheless, Adi was still full of gratitude for her good health and still remained a cheerful person. In accord with herself and her world, she remained an amiable, well-maintained, older lady with smiling eyes and admirably positive attitude. Adi loved people and they loved her, and in chance encounters on the streets they always exchanged a few friendly words and good wishes. When she went shopping or took a walk, she often sang or hummed softly to herself and was pleased with everything beautiful she encountered. Freddy must have inherited it from his mother because he always whistles when he is walking.

After Astrid immigrated to Canada in 1967, for the next twenty-five years, Adi regularly met with Astrid's best school friend Marie-Louise for a good meal in town or in summer time for a boat ride on Lake Lucerne. Sometimes they also took the bus to one of the countless, wonderful attractions outside the city. The two lively women always had much to tell each other and discussed everything under the sun. For Adi, it was always a pleasure to spend her time with young, interesting people. Never in their lives could Adi and Astrid imagine that the vivacious Marie-Louise would die so early and under such sad circumstances.

It happened when Marie-Louise was only fifty years old. For years she had been suffering from multiple sclerosis, which was misdiagnosed for years and thus also mistreated. The doctors were of the opinion that it was the consequences of a minor brain stroke, and were always surprised that Marie-Louise showed no progress during the regular examinations. As a result, for health reasons, she could only work half a day. As the secretary of an insurance company, she was responsible for processing incoming medical bills. One day, her own health insurance bill with a corresponding medical report landed on her desk, which stated that after many examinations they suspected multiple sclerosis, which to her dismay turned out to be true.

This finding was devastating for Marie-Louise. For a whole year she went to regular psychological treatment, which unfortunately did not help matters either. When on top of that she also learned that her partner, whom she loved dearly and with whom she had been living together for a long time, was cheating on her, it became too much for her to handle. In her desperation, she resorted to an overdose of pills, which she took with alcohol, and thus she was found one evening lying lifeless on the floor of her living room. Marie-Louise died from an overdose of medication, for fear of the serious consequences of her illness, and of a broken heart...

It was late November 1993 when Adi was carefully informed of her death, which set off a tremendous sense of shock and immense pain. In view of the upcoming holiday season and in the anticipation that this sad news would trigger unbearable suffering and a long period of mourning for Astrid, Adi found it best to wait until after New Year to announce this sad news to her daughter.

Time went by quickly and with Adi's 89 years, there were days when walking became more difficult for her, and she could move only very slowly. Sometimes she was forced to stay home. That was not easy for her because she was used to going for a walk in the city every day and in any weather. Even her

beloved gym exercises, without which Adi never felt really comfortable in her skin, she had to slowly give up because she no longer could control her movement. One can hardly believe it: up to that time and still occasionally afterwards, Adi still used to take the stairs up to her apartment on the fourth floor instead of taking the elevator, as she did in her prime after her daily walks. Even if she had to pull herself up with her hands and arms half way up the banisters, nobody was allowed to help her. Sometimes she was surprised about how long she could keep it up, and simultaneously she had to learn that her body was no longer capable of such high performance and that it no longer made sense to duel with her willpower.

But before she had become totally incapacitated, it happened that the film about the life story of Tina Turner was playing in Lucerne. Adi was generally not a movie-goer, but since she knew some details from the great singer's fate and recognized many parallels with her own life, she did not want to miss this film for anything in the world. But since it played in an older building on the second floor, without an elevator, the question was whether Adi could make it up the many steps? In fact, Adi managed despite having to mobilize all her strength to reach her goal. After the impressive film, Adi wanted to go down the stairs again, which despite her strong will was impossible. What could be done? Astrid had to fetch the manager, and so it came that together with an employee, they had to practically carry the delicate little woman down the stairs.

Freddy acknowledged his mother's loss of strength with concern, and for safety reasons did not want her to continue preparing things in the kitchen. In recent years, Freddy had already taken over most of the house work, and it was really surprising with what matter-of-factness and calmness he took care of the household.

Later that year, Adi slipped in the apartment and broke her thigh bone. The operation was a success and Adi healed incredibly fast. The day after the surgery she could already take a few steps with someone's help. It could have been the success story of her life, but nobody expected that Adi subsequently would refuse to learn to walk because she was simply afraid of falling again. Thus, a few weeks went by before she was entirely dependent on a wheelchair. Back home, she could initially roll herself to the table and with little outside help go to the toilet. She still loved reading and with pleasure often sank for hours in the exciting contents of her beloved books, or liked solving tricky crosswords. Of course she also liked to watch TV every evening. It was incredible, but in any situation Adi kept her positive attitude, which in turn was helpful for Freddy and made the increasingly challenging care easier.

As far as they could, Freddy and Astrid wanted to make the remaining years as nice as possible for their mother. So Astrid thought that it would be a great joy for her mother if she took her to Weggis on vacation for a week, the place where in 1931, Adi as a young woman had her first vacation abroad with Olly. Although Adi had sometimes made an afternoon trip to Weggis from Lucerne, this multi-day vacation turned out to be a real hit now. To the great joy of both two women, the weather was continuously at its best, which in central Switzerland is not a matter of fact.

Also, in September 1997, Adi's 90th year, Freddy decided that his mother should once more enjoy a dream vacation on the Riviera, and that both children would accompany her. Astrid was first against it, mainly because at that time Adi could not sleep well at night, and often woke up screaming. When she was calmly asked what she was afraid of, each time she replied: "I really don't know, child." But Freddy still booked the vacation and while Adi enjoyed the trip, it was still very tiring for all three, and it was agreed afterwards that this was the last vacation abroad.

Adi's anxiety became more frequent over time; no matter how many times Freddy and Astrid tried to explain and promised never to leave her alone. The siblings agreed that her anxiety was due to her formal existential fears and going back to the time when her beloved Hans was held captive in a concentration camp, and were processed only now. Both feared with great concern that Adi's subconscious could probably never really come to rest.

Since Adi was in a wheelchair, Freddy was even more caring towards her and his commitment and his willingness to help were exemplary. Astrid watched in amazement with how much patience her brother dealt with their mother. The awareness that she was in good hands with Freddy, calmed Astrid even when she was back in Canada. Since beside her wheelchair Adi was later also dependent on a big hospital bed, it was hard for Astrid to find room in the already small apartment during her visits. Her now widowed friend Vilma lived in the neighbouring, beautifully situated village Meggen and had an idyllic "paradise garden," as Adi always used to call it. So it was convenient for all when Astrid stayed with Vilma during her visits. From there it was only a short bus ride for Astrid to visit her mother in Lucerne.

Over the years there were more and more tasks for Freddy, for mother's strength continued to decrease, and the day came when she needed full-time care. Although the home care worker came for an hour Monday to Friday, Freddy was sometimes working around the clock, depending on his mother's condition. He not only took care of her, but took care of the daily errands, the preparation of meals; and he was responsible for his mother's mobility and her personal hygiene.

In the first years before Adi's full-time care, Freddy went on vacation only once a year, which he badly needed and more than deserved. As Astrid lacked the strength to lift her mother out of bed and the wheelchair, Adi had to stay in a nursing home while Freddy was on vacation. Astrid accompanied her and stayed with her the whole time. Although it was a friendly nursing home with very amiable nursing staff, and Adi always got a beautiful two-room unit with a great view, she protested going there each time. In response to Astrid's question why she had such a great dislike of this place she replied that there were too many old people. It seemed that Adi did not really realize that she had reached a considerable age herself. On her 92nd birthday, when she was asked by Astrid and Freddy how old she would like to get, she replied with a mischievous look: "Oh children, better not too old!" This response was typical for her, for even in her old age, she retained her sense of humour and a wonderfully clear way of thinking.

Not to disturb her inner peace and joy of life, the siblings agreed to keep their mother away from all the possible daily problems and anxieties. That was also the case when Astrid was diagnosed with breast cancer during an annual routine examination. This was a shocking revelation and a great disturbance in Astrid's life. Throughout the whole terrible time, Astrid managed not to let anything on during her phone conversations with her mother and continuously tried to have cheerful conversations with Adi, although she often felt like crying at the time. For the initial uncertainty and fear that she might go before her beloved mother and would leave her behind was probably the greatest burden at this unpredictable time. After a long and hard time, when she finally was assured that she had beaten the cancer, it was an infinite relief and Astrid's gratitude was boundless.

Although Adi felt fine and consistently found delight in many beautiful things, the traces of her long life began to show. Over longer and shorter periods of time her earlier painful experiences became especially apparent. What had seemed long processed came with increasing frequency back again to the fore and disturbed Adi's sleep with panic attacks. For the most part, it were long presumably forgotten memories, surfacing from the unfathomable depths of her soul, so crisp and clear as if there were no long decades in between. There they were again, the horrific images and the feelings of the early years, and with them the suffocating fear of violence, loss, loneliness, hunger and poverty. And the tears, sorrow and the pain over a much too short-lived great love and the associated indescribable mourning, were suddenly omnipresent again for minutes or hours, until they left again for weeks and months only to suddenly return again.

Already at the beginning of her need for full-time care and with the increasing loss of speech due to the different brain strokes, her expression abilities were abruptly limited. Adi's reactions created some very touching moments for Astrid and Freddy. When the siblings concentrated to assist their mother with food, without eating at the same time with her, she refused to eat and gave them a questioning look and a slight slide of the plate in their direction, implying that they had to eat first. Astrid and Freddy knew immediately that their mother was worried again that her children would suffer hunger. And once more all powers of persuasions were applied to explain that they both had enough to eat, no matter what would happen in this world.

At the same time, Adi's concentration abilities decreased rapidly. First she had to give up her beloved crossword puzzles, then she had to give up reading after many unsuccessful attempts to read different books, she shut them in resignation and forever put them aside. Finally, she only rarely watched a show on TV or simply stared indifferently at the screen, without really knowing what was going on. Age-related physical complaints came as well, but could have easily been curbed with the appropriate medications. But that was the well known problem: Adi was totally against medication for health reasons. Although she was prescribed only the most necessary pills by her doctor, the kind that all older people have to take, for thinning the blood or for high blood pressure, she always refused until Freddy was able to persuade her when her discomfort increased. But his arguments only rarely helped and her stubbornness almost brought Freddy to despair. So much so, that he even called his sister in Canada and

asked her to talk to their mother and to bring her to reason. But Adi always waved with both hands and replied: "No, I don't need that," and refused to take the phone to listen to Astrid's urging.

No matter how Adi felt, she was always up for a meal at a restaurant any time. That was her passion and she livened up each time when they went out. Astrid and Freddy could take their mother out until the end. She clearly enjoyed it, could eat and drink everything and never once had problems with her stomach. All her birthdays were always celebrated with mutual friends in a nice restaurant. They were always a group of about fifteen people and Adi always had great fun sitting among friends and sometimes be driven around by other people, or to accept the fine food. Sometimes she was also a bit confused, but it did not bother anyone and as long as she enjoyed herself, no one thought of going home.

In her last years, the siblings were able to fulfill another exclusive wish for their mother: Freddy made sure that she could daily enjoy a glass of premium French Champagne, as before in her brief, carefree time with her Hans, when the two lovers could have a very good bottle from time to time. Thus, Freddy served his happy mother the "golden pearls" always in a slim elegant crystal goblet, which Adi looked forward to every day. Almost transfixed, she celebrated this ritual every evening and enjoyed her favourite drink in many small sips, lost in her thoughts, deeply satisfied, and happily smiling to herself.

Freddy and Astrid always noticed in the morning if Adi had not slept well. On such days she could spend hours staring before her and when she was asked, "Mommy, are you confused?" she murmured softly: "Yes, a little." Sometimes she repeated the same words to herself, for example, "Freddy, Freddy, Freddy!" And when he repeatedly asked her, "Yes, what would you like?" she always answered: "Nothing!" and claimed never to have called him. Sometimes it seemed that Adi could no longer hear herself, even though her hearing was still quite good. When Freddy decided to make a test by repeating the words: "Mommy, Mommy, Mommy" in a low voice, Adi at first did not react at all, but suddenly she became very alert and called quite clearly irritated back: "Freddy, stop this nonsense, what is this constant calling?" In her last years, Adi experienced more, minor strokes, which unfortunately led to a complete loss of speech, so that no more conversations could take place. Yet all three tried to make themselves understood with gestures, hand movements, and signs, which worked quite well and sometimes even caused great amusement.

On Adi's second last birthday, she was surprised by her daughter with an unexpected guest. During the long, intensive research for the family tree, Astrid found the son of Dagmar, Adi's beloved niece, and immediately got in touch with him by phone. Astrid was first excited and then very relieved when Dietmar answered the phone in a friendly voice. After she introduced herself and explained the reason of her call, they had a very lively, long telephone conversation and Astrid noted with great surprise that Dietmar and her mother were unmistakably similar in character. Two wonderful, good-hearted people, and both marked by the fate in their own different ways. When Dietmar had recovered from the many news and began to comprehend that he had a great-aunt and two other relatives the heart of

Switzerland, he cheerfully agreed to come and travelled from Fürth near Nürnberg to Lucerne for Adi's birthday celebration.

Astrid was overjoyed and could not wait to present the birthday surprise to her mother. Thus, Dietmar stood in front of Adi, a vivid, radiantly dashing young man in a smart suit and with a huge bouquet of flowers in his arms. Adi looked up at him expectantly and prettily made-up from her wheelchair. Both listened intently to Astrid's lively explanations and the surprised Adi could not believe it. Unfortunately, at that time she could no longer speak, but her eyes shone with happiness and her smile and the lively movements of her hands spoke volumes. To make sure that her mother really understood who this friendly young man was Astrid repeated several times that he was the son of Dagmar - Dagmar's son - son of Dagmar! It is not known whether Adi had understood right away and it remains her secret whether she perhaps doubted Astrid's mind after her many well-intended repetitions...

Freddy's selfless assistance over the past seven years before mother's death was particularly difficult. In the circle of friends, he was admired for it, which was rather embarrassing for him. When asked why he was taking it all on and not placing mother in a nursing home, his reply was always short and to the point: "Because she deserves it!" His sister was confident that he wanted to show his mother that he was a good son at heart. Adi surely felt that there was no more honest and valuable proof of compensation than this almost limitless, long-lasting and devoted care by her presumably lost and now returned dear son Freddy.

In mother's last years, Freddy gave up his annual, much-needed vacation completely. He based his decision on the fact that mother would not like to go to the nursing home, and that it would be impossible for the caretakers to spare so much time and give her all the attention she now needed.

In this situation, it was also a major concern for Astrid to help her brother as often as possible and to relieve him. The relationship between the two women in this difficult time was still very cordial. Astrid knew even in the years before, how much she had to thank her brother. She was convinced that Adi's life was extended by Freddy's care and that therefore they both could keep their mother longer. Adi would have liked to live on and she was no longer bothered by nightmares at the end of her life. Waking up, one could see in her face how much she appreciated being able to get up every morning, to go out with Freddy, or even just sit by the window, peacefully dozing.

And so came the bright March 4, 2005, when Astrid, after a few dedicated days of care, took a short break at the nearby Krienseregg. A wonderful fresh early spring smell was in the air, which announced the longer days and sadly reminded Astrid that she would never come up here, so close to heaven, with her beloved mother again as in the many decades before.

Before returning back to replace Freddy, she thought about her mother's approaching 97th birthday, which was supposed to take place in six days. A smile crossed her face as she imagined how overjoyed her mother would be surrounded by her loved ones that day. Although she became increasingly frail in

the past two years, could no longer express herself, and could only eat pureed food, she was, especially when eating out, always in a good mood and could still see with vivid, bright eyes very clearly what happened around her.

The owners of the restaurant *Lions in Ebikon* were very nice people, who for years hosted wonderful birthday celebrations for Adi. In their very approachable way, they always tried to prepare a glamorous birthday table and to present the exquisite festive meal for the birthday girl and her guests. That Adi had to have her own, pureed food at the next birthday, did not bother anybody, and least of all the "birthday girl" herself.

Immersed in happy anticipation, at that moment Astrid saw very clearly her mother's dear face in her mind's eye, and whispered softly: "Yes Mommy, I'm turning back home now and will be right with you!" In this peaceful moment, she would have never expected that only seconds later she would be torn from her harmonious world of ideas by the ringing of her cell phone. While she silently listened to Freddy's pain-filled words, her smile faded and with it the lightness and joy in the face of the oncoming grief, cowardly disappearing for a long time...

Epilogue

Montreal, spring 2010

Hello Mommy,

Don't even think I wouldn't have noticed! You have been watching regularly over my shoulders as I wrote! I know it; I felt you, while it was supposed to be a surprise – and now, don't look at me so innocently! I have really tried to re-tell the stories from your life very closely and sometimes even word for word, and that was only possible because the memories of your stories remained unforgettable and unique for me. They have influenced, moved, and fascinated me ever since I was a child, and you could not repeat them often enough to me back then on my insistence. When I got older, and could understand and experience life better by your side, we became tied together by our shared experience even more. How many times have we drawn consolation and hope from our deep mother-daughter bond, and the great friendship hat was given to us also made us strong and confident together in difficult times.

So, over long periods of time, and first in keywords, I began to collect your many stories. When you quietly left us on March 4, 2005 and because I missed you so much, I worked through my pain by recording sentence by sentence, all that you have experienced and all that I experienced with you. The result after the last four years of research and investigations was also a big family tree, which I recorded and hung on a large piece resembling wallpaper on the wall of my study. This not only enabled me to write easily and continuously, but also made visible for me the number of your ancestors, distant and close relatives, and close family members, including their personal data.

And now it's in front of you, Mommy, the very first copy of your biography about a fate of many faces; a book about a touching love and life story, and at the same time a textbook on the art of living: "Do not bend, do not break, always pick yourself up, keep hope alive, never lose sight of the goals, believe, hope, love, keep on going on the road of life, and ultimately find inner peace, happiness and peace!" In this discipline you were a world champion mommy, a great champion!

If you should come to ponder, because perhaps you find in your life story some long-forgotten incidents which are now brought back to life, then I am happy that I was able to surprise you. As you can see, I've been paying attention, I always listened carefully, but you know that! And one more thing, Mommy, so it is finally clear: my petite figure is really not the outcome of starvation, no, no and no again! I eat balanced meals, and enjoy food just like you, and am simply very fortunate to have inherited the great genes of my mother in the best of health.

With fondness I also do daily sports: in summer swimming and tennis, in winter skiing, swimming and hiking. Have you already forgotten, you were always in motion – and so I am, too, how could it be any different? Since Gabi peacefully passed away after a short illness in August 2008, I travel again throughout the world, which is made possible for me and all the former employees of Air Canada

through generous discounts. So I can maintain and continue not only my own, but also our common, yet very few old friendships, and in return, you give me the assurance that Gabi is in good hands with you. You see, Mommy, we are still a great team!

I see your beloved problem child Freddy regularly when I visit my friends in Switzerland. He is doing well and as far as I know, no longer causes trouble, lives alone and orderly in your former apartment in Lucerne, where he still feels at home and well. With my now 67 years, and since Gabi's death, I also become more aware how fast time flies and how short a human life is. Therefore I try to follow your example: I enjoy with gratitude the great moments in life and everything good and beautiful that lands in my lap, and that, when I look at it all carefully, is a very enjoyable lot! Now I hold you deeply and linger in my thoughts with all of you, with you and Hans, the great love of your life. I miss you both, but it no longer hurts. Please let Father know that I have been longing all my life to get to know him. I think we have much to tell each other – sooner or later...

Farewell Mommy! I love you!

Your Astrid