

**THE NEW DREAM BOOK  
AND  
PERSONAL JOURNAL**



**MICHAEL CURTIS FORSTER**



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Michael Curtis Forster  
November 20, 1920 – September 26, 2021

Paintings by  
Michellanne Forster

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Michelanne Forster

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[www.hamishbesley.com](http://www.hamishbesley.com)

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Mickey, this was all your idea to start with.

Lots of love, Dad.

June 1990

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*High in the snow bound mountains  
A brook flows clear and cold  
And he who drinks its waters  
Grows young and never old*

*Often have I climbed that mountain  
Drank from its cooling spring  
Each sip of the clear fountain  
It made my spirit sing*

\* My free translation of a German folk poem.

## INTRODUCTION

I HAVE BEEN KEEPING A JOURNAL FOR SOME TIME, mainly to write down my dreams, often followed by reflections, comments and interpretations. Sometimes, I address immediate practical problems. Occasionally, I write little essays on most any topic that comes to mind. My journal is my friend and confidant — perhaps my best friend and only confidante.

Some years ago my daughter, Mickey, asked me to write the story of my early life and upbringing. I hesitated long, for, as the saying goes, “Young people live in the sunlight of hope, old people by the candlelight of memory.” I was not, as yet, anxious to live by too much candlelight.

More recently, however, I realized that I was already spending much time recalling childhood experiences as part of the dream interpretations of my journal. With some hesitation, I decided to expand these efforts so as to satisfy my daughter’s request.

Now that I had agreed to formalize my journal, I needed a good title. Alas, all the really fine titles had already been taken. “Disorder and Early Sorrow” describes my story well, and “Out of my Life and Thought” would have done nicely. I considered *Traum und Wahrheit* and also *Notes from Underground*. I would have loved to use *Diary of a Small Winner* or *Living on Borrowed Time* but, regrettably, none of these titles were available. They’ve all been used by earlier authors. There are no good titles left, and perhaps that is why literature has come to such a sorry pass in our day.

This journal was written during the years 1987 through 1989. Typing and editing were accomplished late that year, within a few weeks of my sixty-ninth birthday. The book was finished in the spring of 1990. The events I described took place forty to sixty years earlier. The dreams are contemporary with the writing. The story describes who

I was; the dreams tell who I am. The two are, of course, intimately connected, and that is the whole point.

There was a historical novel, popular when I was a young man, in which the supposed author, an Egyptian at the time of Akhenaten, who has been banished to the farthest outskirts of the desert, describes how no one will ever find his manuscript, and how he is writing only for himself "Therein," he stated, "I differ from all other authors, past and to come". And so he does. No one ever writes entirely for himself. Every author has some sort of reader in mind. And so I write this for my grandson, Michael Ishi, for his brothers, sisters, cousins and their children yet to be, and for my own children. Just like the legendary Egyptian, I write ultimately, of course, and mostly, for myself. It is easy to write for one's grandchildren. Whether it's written well or badly, almost everyone would like to get a letter mailed across a century.

In the late 1930's, a well-known journalist wrote a book about his globetrotting experiences entitled, *I write as I please*. "Well, who doesn't?" said my mother, grandmother Thilde, of whom, dear reader, you will hear more as the story progresses.

A final word about writing: First, a poem by Hesiod, circa 800 BC, translated into French by the modern classical author, Marguerite Yourcenar:

### *Les Muses Parlent*

*Nous disons beaucoup de mensonges,  
Tout pareil, a la verite  
Mais s'il nous plait, la verite la verite entiere et pure  
Nous l'enoncons d'une voix sure.*

And secondly, a little verse of my own:

*What's to write? It's all been written.*

*What's to say? It's all been said.*

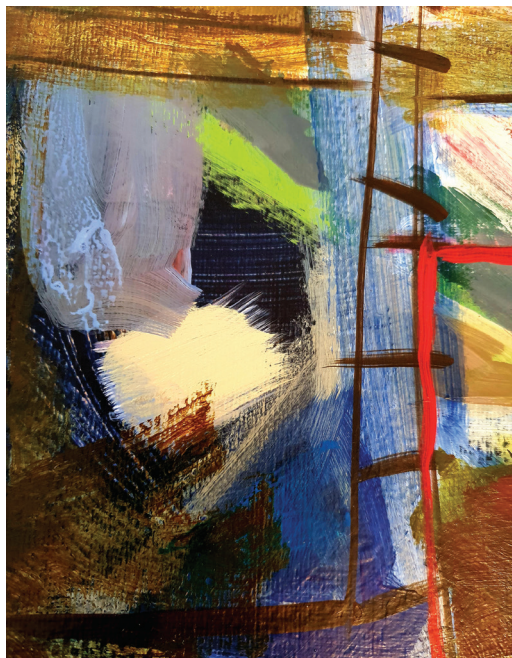
*Of the tumult of the living,  
and the stillness of the dead.*

Twenty-seven centuries separate these two literary efforts.

\* \* \*



## DREAM I



### *Fear of Falling*

I am hiking through the woods with Mike O'Sullivan, a friend and fellow lecturer at the University of Auckland, and some other people. We come to a place where one climbs — a cliff? A tree? I am leading the group. Mike is right behind me. I keep climbing with a fair amount of skill and confidence. I am at the top. There is a very steeply tilted perfectly flat piece of metal — perhaps eight or ten feet long at the far edge of which one has to swing out into space and get onto the top branches of a bare, very tall tree, which one then climbs down on. I am in a controlled semi-panic as I slowly slide down the metal piece on my belly. I briefly think of freezing and having the fire department get me, but

I think a new thought for this dream: what if I fall, you can't live forever. My fear momentarily lessens. I find a little hole that I can put my fingers into, then a wire, and I slowly slide to the edge of the metal. I am now on my belly, with my head hanging into space. I agonizingly, slowly, turn placing my back toward the tree, so that I can push off and reach it. I slip, I am holding the wire. The tree is near, but the wire starts to roll out as if from a pulley and I descend slowly to the ground as the wire unwinds.

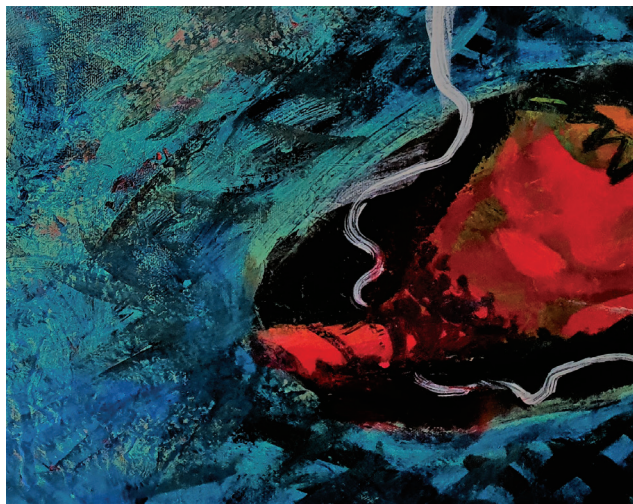
INTERPRETATION:

Mike O'Sullivan is the adult version of the popular boarding school boy that I always wanted to be but never was. The best I could hope for was to be his friend and bask in reflected glory. Even now at sixty-six, I tend to seek out the equivalent of the popular boarding school boys and to avoid the unpopular, the old, the unsuccessful, by whose association I might be tainted.

At the party with a lot of perfect strangers, who I might never see again, I don't want to be alone, for that would typecast me as a social outcast. I do want to be with some glamour queen, so as to prove how popular I am.

Feelings from early life are internalized and permanently imprinted on one's subconscious, nervous system, spirit, and soul.

## DREAM II



### *Climbing Out of a Hole*

I am on a hike with my daughter Susie, who came over last night, and some other friends. I am in a hole by the side of the road. It is a very shallow hole, only four or five feet deep, and the banks are not steep but somehow I can't seem to get out. I try pushing up to climb out with my arms, but I haven't enough strength for a push up. I try using my legs with the same result. This is ridiculous. I feel that in a moment I'll be able to climb out. It's really such an easy hole to get out of. But I try again and again with rests in between and I still can't get out. I can't push up with my arms or with my legs. There's no panic. The hole seems so insignificant, yet I begin to get a little worried. Some young people come by. It is getting nearly dark. I think of calling them to give me a lift up (give me their hand) out of the hole. But I decide against this. I think — in the dream — here I'm supposed to be a leader, a strong person on this hike, who helps others,

but actually I'm getting to be an old man with no strength, who needs help. I finally climb out of the hole and wake up. It was all so real that I'm momentarily surprised it was a dream.

INTERPRETATION:

I'm getting to be an old man who needs help? What kind of help? I interpret the dream as telling me that by taking on my proposed building project I'm digging myself into a hole.\* Here I am, well off financially, without any worries. Why take on something that will put me in a hole? Is this dream just fear or is it prophecy?

But the dream also relates to my pose of strength. Maybe I am an old man who needs help?

\*This journal was written as I was building a large duplex apartment behind the "Granny House" at 1524 Bath Street in Santa Barbara. The building project, during which I made many mistakes, caused me much stress. Often I would wake at two or three in the morning. I would then write for an hour or two which generally calmed me sufficiently to resume my interrupted sleep. Thus, in a sense, the building project created this journal.

## GERMANY, 1931

*Ich träum is Kind mich zurücke  
Und schuttle mien greises Haupt  
Wie sucht ihr mich heim, ihr Bilder  
Die lang ich vergessen geglaubt!*

- Chamisso

IN BOARDING SCHOOL ONE LEARNS ABOUT LIFE.

He who has been to boarding school will find all subsequent experience to be but a pale reflection of the all encompassing in depth education he received in his formative years. Pitiless power, fawning lackyism, betrayal, brutality, duplicity, and just plain, petty meanness — all these less attractive human traits with which most of us only become thoroughly acquainted over the period of a lifetime, are indelibly experienced in a few, brief years' stay at any good boarding school.

The Freie Schul Gemeinde (Free School Community), Wickersdorf, picturesquely lay in the mountains of Thuringia, in a little village called Wickersdorf, which was inhabited by oafish, illiterate, brutal and thoroughly Nazified German peasants. My mother and I took the train to Saalfeld, the provincial capital, and there, the bus to Wickersdorf. I was then ten years old, dressed in fancy new clothes like a little gentleman, for my mother had momentarily struck it rich by selling a story to RKO which landed her a contract to go to America to work on the movie scenario. Up to this point I had had a very lonely childhood, with many ups and downs. But as I said, for the moment, we were rich, and I was to hobnob with the elite and be trained in the ways of the sahib. I was a complete Mama's boy. An only child who had read a lot of books and spent much time with adults. Alternately spoiled and deserted by my adored mother, the perfect victim for the boarding school wolf pack.

I remember the feeling of dread and a true loneliness as we drove through the snow to the school. My mother stayed in the guest quarters for a day or two and thoroughly enjoyed herself. She flirted with the senior boys, charmed the staff and played the great lady. She was then thirty years old, very pretty, and surrounded by the glamour of a successful movie career.

The inevitable day of parting came. I remember only too clearly standing by a sink in the hallway as we said our goodbyes. It was very cold. I committed the unforgivable sin of the boarding school boy. I started to cry. I felt so sorry for myself, and I still do.

I was immediately and literally taken in hand by my classmates — taken to the upstairs dormitory, thrown across the bed and given an "Einweihung's Dresche", an initiation beating. It really didn't hurt all that much, but the shame and humiliation, the feeling of being totally rejected, unloved, alone, hurt, oh so bitterly.

I soon became only too well acquainted with the ways of the school, and it became my life. It was organized along the lines of the German Gymnasium (high school). I was in the lowest of eight forms. There were approximately two-hundred pupils, perhaps twenty-five of whom were girls. A co-educational boarding school was, of course, a very advanced idea at the time. The older girls were much sought after by the older boys, Die Grossen, and much talked about and speculated on by us "little guys", Die Kleinen. The atmosphere introduced me to the idea which is still very much with me today at the age of sixty-six, namely, that one of the most desirable things in life, the ultimate measure of status, is to have a girl.

Since there was a ratio of ten to one, only the most powerful and successful boys had a girl. Oh, to be like them! The older boys and girls paired off and went for walks in the woods and the little guys spied on them in true Indian

fashion. These walks of theirs involved the use of a blanket which was used for knutchen (necking) and supposedly sometimes for ficken (fucking). However, I at least, never had the good fortune of actually observing this endlessly talked about act. We, the little ones, were enlightened about sex talks given to us by the older boys. After lights out, one of the older boys would come into our dormitory and tell us the facts of life. Whether this was a school policy or whether some of the older boys just got a kick out of all this, I don't know. But I still remember lying snugly in a warm bed and listening with anticipatory pleasure in awe as the mysteries of sex were revealed to us.

Apart from sex, there were sports. Each day, summer and winter, began with the run through the woods. Then in the afternoon we again did track and field and played games. Track and field was big at Wickersdorf as one of the masters was Dr. Peltzer, who was on the German Olympic team, and had once beaten the great Finnish runner, Nurmi. Peltzer was an ardent Nazi and an even more ardent homosexual.

In winter there was skiing. In the afternoons we would trudge over to some little practice meadow. After you skied down, you had to climb back up. We made little ski jumps out of a soapbox and had a fine time.

There was also a pond (Teich), which was used for swimming in the summer and ice-skating in the winter. We played tag on skates and improvised ice hockey games. I was a fair athlete, neither the best nor the worst.

The most popular boy and leader of the little guys was René Kries, a slender, blonde, thirteen year-old. Other boys that I remember vividly were Kueiz, Glawgow, Opetz, Arnold Fank, Effner, Max Kahn and Lothar Ostereich.

Kahn and Effner were Jewish. This was something very mysterious and shameful. I didn't understand it at all. I had no idea I was Jewish myself but I knew there was something

wrong. Lothar Ostereich was an avowed Nazi Hitler youth. A number of the masters were also Nazis. The more liberal and possibly Jewish masters were slowly being replaced. I remember one of the new Nazi masters. A recent Heidelberg graduate who had a "Schmiss", a Sabre scar, across his face. From him I learned my very first bit of English, a song which goes: "My heart's in the Highland, my heart is not here. My heart's in the high land a-chasing the deer. A-chasing the wild deer, and a-following the roe. My heart's in the highland, wherever I go." Not bad, considering I learned it 55 years ago when I didn't know a word of English.

The Nazis were closing in on Wickersdorf. To me, that was only a vague and nebulous background to my hopeless struggle of establishing myself as a popular and accepted boy. To be popular, to be liked by everyone, that was my heart's desire. And so to this day I have a very difficult time dealing with any sort of rejection or acting in any way which would cause someone not to like me. Being Jewish in a Nazi world made my quest for popularity hopeless. Though I did not understand this, I felt it. I knew I was some sort of pariah and outcast.

My best friend was Arnold Fank. His father was quite well-known as the director of clean-cut adventure movies which featured mountaineering and skiing, with hokey shots of Mont Blanc enveloped in clouds. His stars were Hannes Schneider, by then famous Arlberg skier, and Lenny Riefenstahl, who subsequently became notorious as the director of Hitler's propaganda films. Arnold's father and my mother were slightly acquainted through the film industry. I spent much of my vacation time at Arnold's house in Berlin. Quite a few of us lived in Berlin. We all took the train together, dressed up in our little gentleman suits and smoking up a veritable storm. We were sahibs.

But we were also just little boys who rode bicycles and played with toy trains. Everyone had an electric train set, and



I wanted one in the worst way. You never wanted anything quite so badly again as the things you have your heart set on at the age of ten. I poured over the catalogues and made what I thought was a very modest selection of engine, tracks, transformer and the like. It came to something over a hundred marks. During Christmas vacation I modestly presented my request to my mother and uncle, pointing out that, while the sum seemed large it would be a combined birthday and Christmas present. My mother and uncle laughed and made fun of me and I was crushed. Finally I got an electric train set after I came to America. But by that time I was fourteen, and the thrill was gone.

At Wickersdorf, we each belonged to little social and eating clubs, called a Kamaschaft. When my first Kamaschaft broke up, I tried to join a second to which all the popular boys belonged. I was put up for membership; the vote was taken and I was rejected. I later found out that the vote was very close, and that my best friend, Arnold Fank, had voted against me. I cannot describe the pain, loneliness, rejection and sense of betrayal that I felt. Effner, who, as I mentioned, was Jewish, was also rejected. I knew there was a connection.

We tender twelve year-old little ones lived in our own world. The world of adults was taken as a given. It was full of incomprehensible things but ultimately it wasn't important. It was only a backdrop to the real world, our world.

As the snow melted in the spring, skiing and skating were replaced by bicycling and swimming. We spent endless hours writing and messing with our bicycles. We often rode or walked along the path called the Philosophen Weg (philosophers path). "What is the philosopher?" I asked. "One who practices philosophy," I was told. Well, what is philosophy? No one could tell me. Very curious, I thought. There were many things like that.

Reading was popular, especially the reading of trashy

detective novels. They featured incredibly brave and noble heroes with romantic English names like John Kling and Tom Shark (really!). Oh, for the dreams of glory of a ten year-old. One evening a week, stories of literary merit were read to us, and on a second evening there was a “Musik Abend” (music evening). I still remember the story of *Jason and the Golden Fleece*. What was a fleece, I wondered. The music evenings were, it was generally agreed, incredibly boring. To sit still for a whole hour or two doing absolutely nothing. Sheer torture.

The Nazis were taking over. Their propaganda began to permeate the world of the little ones.

“Heute haben wir Schul frei van wegn Nationaler Erhebung,” I wrote to my mother in America.” Die Komunisten haben die Brunnen vergifted,” I continued, full of chatty local news.

The macho brutality which is always a part of boarding school life was caused to flower in its particularly nasty Germanic version by the Nazi ascendancy. One night some five or ten of the senior boys, star athletes and school leaders, got an older boy, John Verhay (Dutch, born in Java) out of bed on a pretext, tied him to a tree and beat him severely with switches cut from the local Germanic woods. John was accused of some sort of sexual misbehaviour which brought dishonour onto the school. Acts of sadism performed in the name of noble causes are a German speciality. No one was punished and the, by now, well Nazified faculty appeared to be in collusion with the vigilantes. As usual, we little ones didn't really understand what was going on, but we could feel the shifting of the wind.

In March, 1933, I received a telephone call from my uncle in Berlin. In those days a boy was only called to the telephone in an extreme emergency. I picked up the telephone, which crackled and sputtered, and my uncle said: “Pack your things, we are leaving. Der Reichstag brennt”.

(The parliament building is burning.) Those were the words which saved my life but at the time they meant nothing to me. What was the Reichstag and what did its burning have to do with me? My mother, in America, having heard the events in Germany, cabled my uncle to get me out of the country without a moment's delay. Unlike so many others who paid for their naïveté with their lives, she did not believe that Hitler's ranting and raving against the Jews was just a lot of talk. She knew what human beings were capable of. She wasn't taking any chances. Honour and glory to her.

The next day, I packed some of my clothes and one or two of my toys, said goodbye to my friends, and left most of my things, my skis, my bicycle, and my existence as a German sahib behind. From now on I was a refugee. Though at the time I didn't know it. We, my Uncle Ludwig and I, were on our way to Czechoslovakia.

I returned to Germany 11 years later as a member of the American army. I always thought I would run into one of my friends from Wickersdorf. But it's never happened.

\* \* \*

## DREAM III



### *The Theater*

I went to the theater with Cuyler and my ex-wife Anne. Everyone had to leave the section we were sitting in, but it was not clear to me why. I was following Cuyler to find new seats, but all of a sudden he was gone. I was alone in the theater hallway. I went to one section, but there were armed plain clothes men blocking the entrance. I started to be afraid and to run. I went to another section, opened a door, and a policeman almost shot me. I felt powder burns but no gun report. His reaction was, "What is this idiot doing here?" I said, "What's all the fuss?" A photographer was sitting on the landing, evidently hoping to take a picture as the

criminal was shot or captured. I said, "Well, I might as well sit down here too", and I did. Anne was there, in the dream, somewhere, giving me a feeling of incompetence, belittling me, which is her big ace in the whole modus operandi, or so, at least, she comes across to me. Is she really always belittling (perhaps subconsciously) or does she just have that effect on me? In the dream, I had the feeling that my leg muscles just wouldn't move. I wanted to run, or scream, or fight, but was unable to move a muscle out of fear.

COMMENT:

I have never been that afraid when awake, but I often feel that way in dreams. Is this a childhood feeling? Is it an instinctive, Jungian, ancestral fear?

Incompetence and fear are the key feelings of this dream. Possibly related to a hassle with Larry Thomson, my architect. Consciously I feel on top of that situation, though I'm anxious to get it resolved.

## DREAM IV



### *Policemen and Jews*

I am in this field, fairground, with Anne. They are taking people and beating them up as the crowd watches (cheers?) This can't be happening in America, I say. It's only a question of time before they go after the Jews.

That's what I was thinking consciously, yesterday, as I read about the various political and financial scandals which seem to involve so many Jews. That's what every Jew thinks all the time.

They are taking these children. Their parents won't stand for this, I think. I hear the children screaming. We go further and are stopped by two American policemen. 'You can't go any further', they say, 'Herr Hauptman'. With that we are now in Nazi Germany. Somehow I am wearing a German Hauptman's (Captain's) uniform, but I'm really a Jew. I am of course scared of being found out. Then, we (Anne

is still with me) are stopped by two German policemen. They quiz us carefully. They think I'm a German Hauptman, but they are suspicious. I am now in a civilian suit which they examine and smell very carefully. They find evidence of the smell of the sea and sand, the evidence of Southern California. However, luckily we were walking on a nearby German beach earlier so this is okay. "Waren sie im Spital?" asks one of the policemen. "Nur ein bissele," I say. I don't want him to ask which hospital and trap me. But he says "Jawohl Herr Hauptman," and lets me go.

COMMENT:

Nazi Germany, America, civilian suit, German army uniform. Fear of persecution! I'm a split personality: laid-back Californian; uptight Nazi refugee. I am half asleep and half awake. Dreams and fantasies of bridge, poker, gambling games. Life's a gamble.

## A JEWISH REFUGEE

*Die einen sie weinen  
Die andern sie wandern  
Die dritten noch mitten  
Im Wechsel der Zeit;  
Auch viele am Ziele,  
Zu den Toten entboten,  
Verdorben, gestorben  
In Lust oder leid.*  
- L. Dreves

MY UNCLE AND I WERE ON OUR WAY. Our destination was Hirschberg-am-See, a village in the Sudetenland of some three thousand inhabitants, which catered to middle-class vacationers. We had spent an earlier summer there and we arrived as tourists. Tourists of modest means, but tourists nevertheless.

I should mention that one of my mother's favourite occupations was to find some place that was really cheap (Europe in the depths of the Depression offered many such places), and spend weeks and sometimes months there "living on very little". Often she used this system to park me somewhere with my uncle when she was on a writing assignment. The assignment being finished, she would join us until the money was gone. Then she was off to write up a storm and sell another story. The accumulation of capital, putting down roots, and middle-class security were not for her. She was a born aristocrat. This is what saved us. When the time came to pack it up and move to America, that was easy. We'd been packing up and moving all our lives. It did, however, cause me to have a rather strange childhood, interminably moving from one backwater tourist town to the next.



To return to our arrival in Hirschberg in March of 1933; this German-speaking part of Czechoslovakia, the Sudetenland, is, of course, the area which a few years later was ceded to Hitler in the famous Munich agreement, thus permanently making the “Munich” a synonym for cowardly surrender. In 1933 the Sudetenland was fanatically German and pro-Nazi. As a consequence I was greeted by my friends from the summer before with much fanfare and a great fuss was made over me, for I was a German. Possibly their parents thought that Uncle Ludwig was one of the many German agents who at that time we sent to the Sudetenland to prepare for Hitler’s takeover. Though, knowing Uncle Ludwig, this seems a bit far-fetched. I still had no idea that I was a Jewish refugee rather than a German tourist. I basked in the admiration of my friends. This lasted for about a week. Then things changed abruptly. All of a sudden the local boys began to treat me coldly, and a number accused me of being Jewish.

“I’m not Jewish,” I said. I was twelve and as I’ve mentioned, knew nothing about Judaism — my mother had always kept our Jewishness a deep dark secret from me. “I know nothing about it.” “Take down your pants and prove it,” they said. In Europe at that time, only Jews were circumcised, so that being circumcised was proof of Jewishness. Then came my finest hour. It so happened that my mother in her anxiety to have me be a non-Jew did not have me circumcised. Thus I could have foiled my tormentors by pulling my pants down and “proving” I was not a Jew. But I refused to do it. Don’t ask me why. I just didn’t like being bullied; and I still don’t. Besides, I knew I wasn’t Jewish. The boys, of course, thought otherwise, and my life became very hard. But I was used to being an outcast; I’d been one all my life.

Our economic life also began to worsen rapidly. We arrived with little money — no doubt supplied by my

mother, for my uncle was always stone broke. We rented a room from a farmer, Herr Kampe, and we ate our main meal in restaurants. While living in a single room was quite a comedown from the standards expected at Wickersdorf, it didn't particularly bother me as that was the way I'd lived most of my life when I was not in a boarding school.

Though we lived with a farmer, we did not live in an isolated farmhouse as we would have in America. In accordance with age-old European custom, the Kampe's house was in the main square of the village. It had a large entrance gate through which the wagons could be driven into the farmyard in the rear of the house. In the farmyard were storage buildings, chickens, pigs and a few fruit trees. The farmlands themselves lay on the outskirts of the village. Every morning the farmer and his helpers would climb in their wagons and drive to a particular portion of the farm to begin the day's work. All the work was done with the help of farm animals. There was no machinery. Similarly, all local transport was on foot or by means of horse-drawn vehicles. Among the three thousand inhabitants of Hirschberg there were perhaps three who owned an automobile. When the tourists came in the summer, a few additional automobiles appeared, but they certainly weren't a part of the life of the ordinary citizen of Hirschberg. He walked or rode in a wagon across the cobblestoned streets just as his ancestors had done for hundreds of years. My mother, incidentally, who in the late twenties was a successful movie writer, never owned a motor car in Europe. She bought her first car, a Chevrolet convertible, when she came to America in 1931. Then, as now, it was impossible to get around Los Angeles without a car.

After a few weeks, our money ran out. My mother was supposed to send additional money from America. But none came. One of the most vivid memories of my childhood is daily trips to the post office, asking for a letter that

never arrived.

My mother was having a very hard time herself. She had lost her job in the movies, as did many others in the Depression, and she was devoting all her efforts to getting my father, the famous movie director Michael Curtiz, to pay child support for me, his illegitimate son. It was an unequal fight. The powerful movie director, supported by all the slimy sycophants of the studio system, on one side — and my mother, without a penny to her name, alone in a strange land, with no permanent immigration status, on the other. But my mother eventually, after many new near misses, got her way. My father's strategy was to force her to return to Europe. Had he succeeded, she, Uncle Ludwig and I would have all ended up in Hitler's ovens.

I, with my uncle in Czechoslovakia, did not know any of this till much later. In fact, my mother never told me that I was illegitimate. I learned this quite by accident when I was nineteen and going to Los Angeles City College. My mother was a great expert at avoiding subjects she did not care to discuss. All I knew was that we had no money and that our trips to the post office continued to be fruitless.

We started running up bills and restaurants, and at the grocery store. Our credit was soon exhausted. Now we lived on potatoes. The Kampe's cellar had enough potatoes stored to withstand siege, so there was no fear of running low. Of course, they were not our potatoes, and since we were no longer paying rent, our claim to the potatoes was doubly weak. But Mrs. Kampe had a kind heart and kept her husband from throwing us out or locking the gate to the potato cellar. Eating potatoes two or three times a day gets to be a bit monotonous, but one can survive on them for a long time.

Occasionally we would take a foray to an outlying village where, hopefully, our reputation as deadbeats had not already spread. We would sit down, order a modest but

nourishing meal — and then my uncle would go through his famous “I forgot my wallet” routine. I would sit there and cringe with embarrassment and shame. But we always got away with it. Most people don’t like to call the police to arrest a twelve year-old boy; so perhaps there’s hope for humanity yet. I really think that my uncle, one of the kindest people who ever lived, did this largely for my sake. He was afraid that I, a growing boy, wasn’t getting a sufficiently balanced diet on potatoes alone, nourishing though they may be.

It was now August, 1933. Our life as deadbeats in Hirschberg could not go on forever. My uncle decided it was time for us to leave. Quietly and unannounced of course. What brought about the final decision, I do not know. That we were Jews (staunchly denied by my uncle) and deadbeats did not make us popular in the Nazified Sudetenland of 1933.

It was possible that there were murmurs of physical threats. My uncle, being a very small man, had a penchant for getting into near violent quarrels. Early one morning, we set out with only the clothes on our backs and without a penny in our pockets. We walked along the country roads, through the picture postcard pretty, neat as a pin, undulating farmlands of Czechoslovakia. Our destination was the provincial capital of Leitmeritz, fifty kilometres to the southeast. We tried to hitch a ride with passing hay wagons, but were unsuccessful. fifty km is thirty miles — a long way to walk for a 12-year-old boy, or anybody else. Several times, near the end of this track I just wanted to sit down by the side of the road and stay there; but my uncle always made me get up and trudge on.

It was during this fateful walk that I was told that we were Jewish. I was not greatly astonished or overwhelmed by this news. The cat was finally out of the bag. My uncle’s more or less instant re-conversion to Judaism was largely

motivated by the fact that as Jewish refugees from Germany we would be able to obtain help from organizations (mostly Jewish) that had been set up to assist the victims of Hitler's persecution. A refugee had greater social status, and initially, a better chance of obtaining charity than a bum. But there was more to it than that. The rise of Hitler forced all Jews to come to terms with their Jewishness in one way or another. It was not a subject one could ignore. The healthiest way to react was that of Uncle Ludwig: "Yes I'm a Jew and I'll take it from there." The day may come, when Jews will again have to make such decisions. Since Hitler's time, it has already come to Jews in Russia and Argentina, and perhaps elsewhere. A Jew is forever like a guest in a hotel. Though the possibility may seem remote, there's always a chance that he's going to be kicked out.

It was night when we arrived in Leitmeritz. We reported to the police station and they put us up overnight in jail, according to local custom. We were the only homeless and the only criminals in Leitmeritz that night. We had the jail to ourselves. It was a large, one-room establishment with a six foot wide board running along one of the sides. This was the community bed and this is where we slept. I was cold, and the bed (board) was hard. There were no blankets and pillows. There were a few lice, and I itched. In the morning we were discharged, and we began our career as refugees in earnest. We went to the Jewish Temple. This was the first one I had ever seen or even been aware of, and we were given enough money to take the bus to Prague. We stayed there for a few days. I'd been there before and I remember it quite well as a beautiful city. We received some further help and moved on by train to Vienna. This was our home town, the place where I was born and where Uncle Ludwig and my mother were raised. We had relatives there. My uncle's uncle, Jacob, and his wife Wanda, and their children, my uncle's cousins, Emil and Walter. What happened to them all when Hitler

took over Austria a few years later and began murdering all the Jews of Europe? I don't know. My mother, if she knew, never said. My uncle, many years later told me that Emil and Walter managed to get out. As for the others, may God have mercy on them.

In Vienna we became part of the Jewish refugee community. We sat in the shabby waiting rooms of refugee agencies, with many other Jews in circumstances no better than our own. We were processed and given meal tickets and a place to stay. We shared furnished rooms and we took our meals at a community kitchen which had been organized by the Jews of Vienna. We lived on the charity of the Jews.

There were meetings and discussions. There were doctors, lawyers, engineers, all down at the heels, all talking endlessly. Much of the talk was about emigrating to Palestine, which required money and papers. All difficult to come by. My uncle had to put his two cents in; and even as a twelve year-old, I could tell that he sometimes said foolish things. But I loved him just the same.

The food at the charity kitchen was pretty grim, but no worse than at the ritzy boarding school, Wickersdorf. And living in shabby furnished rooms was, as I already noted, something I'd done all my life. We were poor and stone broke in a strange town. All of which I'd been many times before. I didn't like it, but I accepted it readily. It didn't make me miserable. What was completely new to me was being Jewish. Being surrounded by Jews. Dealing with nothing but Jews. Seeing the world through Jewish eyes. I had a very positive attitude towards this too. I readily accepted it. A twelve year-old boy is loyal to his family, whatever they are, gladly.

My uncle enrolled me, who but a few weeks earlier had been up your area and, in a Jewish high school (Chaies Gymnasium) of Vienna. This required expertise in Latin, of which I knew nothing, and Hebrew, of which I knew

less. My uncle decided to teach me these arcane subjects, though I suspect that his grasp of them, never too strong, had weakened over the years. I remember sitting in a coffee house, (my uncle loved coffeehouses), and writing in a lined blue book *laudo, laudamus... aleph, beth gimmel...* These lessons were interrupted by frequent interjections by the occupants of adjacent tables who wanted to show that they too had been the recipients of education and culture in their youth. It was like a scene from a Russian novel. I'm afraid I was not a very good student and Uncle Ludwig was not the most patient of teachers. We soon reverted to reading the illustrated papers.

At the Chaies Gymnasium I was the only "hospitant" (a guest) because of my inadequate academic attainments. Classes were coeducational. The boys wore skullcaps, went to the temple, knew Hebrew, and were steeped in the Jewish tradition and culture. I had none of these attainments. I had only been a Jew for a month. Again I was an outsider. On the other hand, I was a refugee, and there I was way ahead of them, poor souls. The students in this school were of the upper-middle-class, the offspring of merchants, doctors, lawyers. I soon made friends. It was just another school. From my twelve year-old perspective, not all that different from Wickersdorf. In the afternoons we played soccer. And I visited the homes of my newfound friends. Having no money for the streetcar, I walked for miles and miles, all around old Yelena. St. Stephen's Church, the Ring Strasse, the Danube, The Prater with its giant Ferris wheel; I covered them all with an empty belly. When I tell people nowadays that I was born in Vienna, they often go into romantic rhapsodies about this beautiful city. I could tell them a thing or two but I don't bother.

One day the streets were barricaded with barbed wire. And the tanks started to roll. It is very scary to have a tank come toward you; what exactly are you supposed to do if

they start shooting? This was during the socialist uprising under Chancellor Dollfuss, whose gang ushered in the Nazis. Depression, social disintegration, revolution and violence locked arms and roamed the streets of Vienna in 1933.

Another item which added to the charm of old, romantic Vienna was that gangs of tough young hoodlums would invade the Jewish quarter where I and my friends lived, and beat up anyone they could find. I remember running from them through the dimly lit, narrow, crooked, cobblestone streets. Luckily, they never caught me.

I went to meetings of the Jewish youth groups. There was singing and hand clapping. The Zionist spirit was in the air. Most people seemed terribly poor.

I also went to quasi-religious socials — their exact nature was unclear to me — where what I perceived to be old men with long beards reeked of sour wine and seemed to have a merry old time. In short, I was well on my way to becoming a real Jew, though I never went to the temple or learned Hebrew, and I never learned anything about the Jewish religion.

I arrived in Vienna perhaps in August of 1933 and I left in February of 1934. I was a Jew for less than six months, but that period made an indelible impression on me. I imagine all of those people — my friends from the High School, Kurzberg, Frostig, Kanner, and all the others, their parents, all the refugees, all the charitable people who helped them, and everyone else I knew or had anything to do with during that period — were indiscriminately murdered in Hitler's gas chambers.

I've always been aware of how a small jiggle of the wheel of fortune could have placed me among their number. I particularly remember one incident. We, my uncle and I, were on our way from Prague to Vienna and we stopped at a railway station to change trains. We looked at a map and consulted the train schedules with the idea of travelling



to Berlin, where my mother had an elegant and empty apartment. She herself, of course, was in America. Sorely tempted, my uncle very nearly decided to return to Berlin. Had he done so, it would almost certainly have been the first leg of our trip to the gas chamber. The gods were watching over us. We continued on our way to Vienna.

Towards the end of our stay in Vienna I was interviewed by the American consul in preparation for immigrating to America. My mother had miraculously succeeded in obtaining her immigration papers, and winning child-support for me. I remember the consul as a burly man in an expensive suit. I was carefully coached not to say anything about communism — an instruction I was only too happy to follow.

We left Vienna and the Jews in February of 1934. We stayed briefly in Paris, where we rented a third rate hotel room. We had a little money. We ate in inexpensive restaurants in the French manner with two bottles of wine on the table, one white and one red. The wine was free but my uncle would only allow me to drink it mixed: three or four parts water to one part wine. It was still very cold and I remember how much I enjoyed the café au lait coffee served the French way, with lots of warm milk. Paris, too, had that feeling of poverty, depression, revolution; though I was only thirteen, I was quite sensitive to politics. I was a precocious little boy, who spent a lot of time listening to the adults talk, and often spent several hours a day sitting in coffeehouses reading the newspaper.

In March 1934 we took the train to Le Havre, and my uncle put me on the passenger – freighter ship “Wyoming” of the French line, which would take me through the Panama Canal to Los Angeles. I stood on the railing and cried as I waved goodbye to my uncle. I felt like a traitor for leaving him behind. He managed to immigrate to Brazil shortly afterwards, well before the start of World War II,

when Jews could no longer get out of Europe. From Brazil, he would occasionally write to us — long, incoherent letters. He lived his usual quixotic existence with many ups and downs — mostly downs. He never married. A few years after the war, he returned to Germany and lived in Berlin the rest of his life.

My feelings of guilt about deserting my beloved Uncle Ludwig remained with me in America. Even though I was only a schoolboy, while my uncle was a man of forty, and though I had no power or means of any sort, it was the depth of the Depression, I felt that we should be helping him. My mother's means were very limited, and she was trying very hard to restructure her own career. On the other hand, my uncle was most often down and out.

I tried to raise the subject with my mother at various times, but she turned me off. I did not insist. I felt, for example, that the money spent to send me to college, hardly more than subsistence, should rightfully be given to my uncle. That he ought to be responsible for making his own living as a forty year-old man was an idea which did not occur to me until much later. I always thought of him as a person who could never earn a living, and perhaps I was right after all.

After the war, I was then twenty-six, and my uncle about forty-eight, he, like other Jewish refugees who survived, was able to obtain a modest pension for life from the German government. His lifelong quest for enough money to go to the coffee house had ended happily. He no longer had any economic worries. Alas, he did not long enjoy his good fortune. He became mentally ill and had to be committed to an institution. It was there I saw him again in 1969. The mental hospital seemed well-run and humane, and my uncle had recovered and was soon to be released. We sat on a bench in the gardens and talked for a long time about my family. It grew dark. It brought back many childhood

memories. I was then a minor executive with the General Electric Company — a successful American returning to his humble origins. That’s how I thought of myself. I was in my forties, and still very foolish. My uncle later wrote to my mother and told her that I talked to him as if I were the uncle and he the nephew. I often think of this little insight (my uncle, though impractical, was far from stupid) when my sons, John and Paul, give me “fatherly advice”.

\* \* \*

## DREAM V



### *Paul*

I dreamed that I was putting my son Paul to bed. There were bunk beds piled tier on tier, three or four high. Paul climbed into one of the very highest. He was perhaps eight – or ten years old. “What time are you coming to bed Daddy,” he said. “About 11:30 or 12:00”. He seemed disappointed that I would be so late. “I’ll look in on you,” I said. Then I climbed up so my head could just reach him and kissed him. “I love you very much,” I said.

When I awoke, I thought of the words of Handel’s Messiah: “His yoke is easy, his burden is light”. That may not be true for some, alas. But it is for me. What are my minute problems compared to the blessing of my four children.

## DREAM VI



### *The Missing Documents*

I am at UCLA. Professor Bucket\* is about to give me my final grade in Electrical Engineering. I am to have various papers ready. I have them all. Somehow we end up in a taxi. I look in all my pockets for the documents. All I can find is trashy, worthless receipts. The documents which I had a moment ago are all gone. I fish in my pockets some more. More useless papers. "I'm going to give you something between a C and an E (a failing grade)", says Bucket. "Well, I'm not going to beg you for a C," I say, keeping my pride. Bucket and I are on friendly terms. I'm sort of using a reverse English approach to beg him for a C. It looks pretty certain that he's going to give me the E. I'm walking down a dark

street in an unfamiliar city. I'm pretty shaken by getting the E. I feel failure, and end to my career dreams. Well, I think, I'm glad I'm not young. I have plenty of money to retire. I don't need to make it as an Engineer or to find another career. I walk into the bar of a hotel. A country bumpkin couple dressed in some sort of native garb is asking for work. "Do you know where these people can get a job?" says the bartender to one of the waiters. The bumpkins stand about expectantly.

COMMENT:

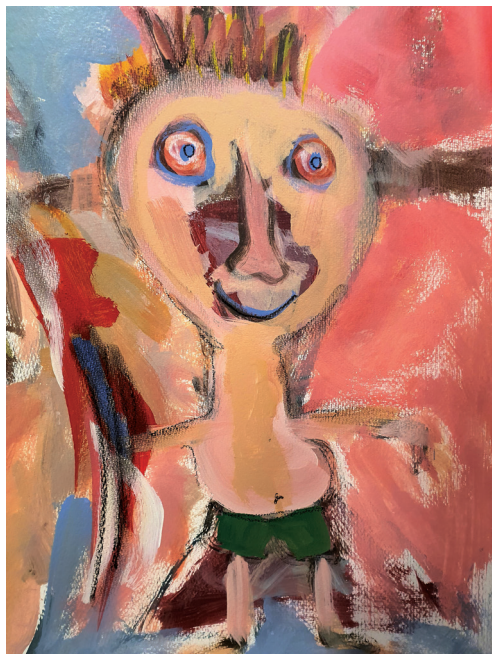
The dream of losing or misplacing something very important which I had only a moment ago is another one of my frequently repeated dreams. Again, being "old" has entered my dreams.

I'm starting to get much more comfortable with saying I'm retired. One can easily retire at fifty. Oddly enough though, I went into the building business partly so that I wouldn't have to say "I'm retired". I now find saying "I'm retired" much more comfortable and simple.

Has fear of failure replaced social rejection as the dominant theme of my dreams?

\* What a marvelous name! I could never invent such a wonderful name when awake. One is so creative in dreams.

## DREAM VII



### *John's Room*

I dreamt we were in one of our bedrooms on Woodland Drive. Anne and Mickey were talking about giving away John's room. John, as a little eight-year-old boy, listened wistfully. "You won't give me away Daddy," he says. I hugged him to my heart. "I'd rather die a thousand deaths," I say. I feel such infinite love for him.

#### COMMENT:

The wonderful thing about love for one's children is that it is truly infinite. If you love one of them more, it doesn't mean you love another one less. The more you love one, the more you love all.

## I BECOME AN AMERICAN

*Friendship, love and wisdom's fountain,  
these are three, go on and count them.  
And I seek some underestimate,  
but my gas bill isn't paid.\**

ON THE SHIP "WYOMING" of the *Companie Generale Transatlantique*, my life took another drastic one hundred and eighty degree turn. From one day to the next, I again became a member of the upper classes. There were three delicious meals per day. I was particularly impressed by the balls of fruit and trays of cheese, all delicious, all plentiful, which were passed around after dinner. These little titbits so carelessly thrown in, were far more dinner than I was used to having.

The passengers seem to me to be very rich. Particularly a Spanish family on their way to Central America. Travelling up the coast, we stopped in Nicaragua and Costa Rica after going through the Panama Canal. During one of those visits, the head of the Spanish family purchased something and pulled out a wad of money which he carried loose in his coat pocket. I had never seen so much money, and I couldn't imagine anyone just carrying it in his pocket. I was used to people treating money with religious awe; most carefully filing it away, one bill at a time, in their wallets or purses.

Two sisters, about ten or eleven years old, were the younger offspring of the Spanish family. We whiled away the hours playing dirty doctor. The parents did not approve, and my relationship with the family became strained. There was the ship's lottery. A number of passengers, who had given generously, won substantial prizes. I, having little to spend, contributed only a few francs. I won a photo album with a

\* My own very free translation of a poem by Heine



red ribbon which I still have. I saw that the lottery was rigged.

I stood at the railing one evening and watched the giant red sun sink into the sea. The sea was calm and the boat moved gently along, all alone on the vast ocean. It was so beautiful and so sad. I cried with heartfelt sobs, feeling infinitely alone on the immense sea. Innumerable immigrants of all ages and climes must have felt the same way on their way to America.

Sometime in April of 1934, about thirty days after leaving Le Havre and the Europe about to be swallowed by Hitler, we arrived in another world, San Pedro, Southern California. My mother came and got me. I worried that she would be there, but she was and we were off in our own car, a 1931 Chevy convertible. It was the first time I ever rode in a car that belonged to us. I couldn't believe such luxury.

We rode through the open fields and little suburban towns that then constituted greater Los Angeles, to Santa Monica, our destination. It was a beautiful sunny Southern California day.

My mother had rented a bungalow for twenty-eight dollars a month, which was a typical rent for a small house or apartment in the 1930's, and we set up housekeeping. We went to Desmond's, and The Broadway, and other shops in downtown Los Angeles, and she completely re-outfitted me. I spent my time exploring the streets of Santa Monica, reading all the German books in the Santa Monica Library, and going to the movies. I was soon excruciatingly bored. I read, or rather re-read, Felix Dahn's *Ein Kampf um Rom*, a heavy historical novel, which told how the incredibly noble and brave Germanic Goths were betrayed by the degenerate citizens of Italy, and the deceitful Oriental Byzantines. What business these Germanic tribes had in Italy in the first place was conveniently not explained. The book made a tremendous impression on me. Throughout my childhood, I loved to read. I was very lonely and very romantic.

I also saw innumerable Hollywood movies. All the theatres played double features, usually one A and one B-movie. The theatres were clean and elegant. Each theatre employed several ushers. The price was typically thirty-five cents but children twelve and under could get in for a dime. I always claimed to be twelve years old even though I had turned thirteen the previous November. The movies also helped me learn English. By mid-summer I spoke it well enough to make myself understood. My mother and I still spoke German with each other, but we began to intersperse it with English phrases. By late summer I began reading English books. The first book I ever read completely in English was Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper*. There was a big to-do in this story about the royal seal. "What is a seal?" I asked my mother. "A seal is a cute furry animal that swims about in the ocean," my mother said. This was one of the many things I found confusing about the English language.

I grew a bit chubby from all the rich and plentiful food, and my fancy new clothes were too tight for me. I was of course also growing in height. I was very bored and very lonely. I needed occupation. Challenge. A settled routine. Companions of my own age.

My mother now got a new idea. We were going to emigrate to Brazil, and she was going to make it big in that country's infant film industry. She didn't speak a word of Portuguese, or Spanish, nor did she have any particular contacts, but that didn't slow her down. She was now really quite well-off. My father paid us one hundred and fifty dollars a month child support which at that time was a very nice middle-class salary. Though, to put this in perspective, my father, as one of the top directors in Hollywood, earned perhaps five thousand dollars per week. My mother could have made any number of practical, middle-class plans. But that was not her way. She had to be a top dog, and it had to

be in the movies. She never, to my recollection, entertained any wild ideas about getting rich in real estate or the stock market. In fact she was quite suspicious and even overly cautious in these areas. Some years later she did open up a restaurant. But of that in due time.

So, here I was, as yet totally unsettled in America, and we were off to Brazil. We moved into a furnished room a block away, sold our car, and pursued my mother's favourite occupation — "living on very little". We moved again to another furnished room in downtown Los Angeles. The purpose of this move is not clear to me, but the overall idea was to save as much as possible for our trip to Brazil. I spent a lot of time in the main library; I wandered the streets of downtown Los Angeles; I went to innumerable movies, sometimes in the sleaziest theatres in the worst parts of town.

One day, in Thrifty's drugstore, my mother saw some movie people that she had known in former days. She ducked out, hoping they had not seen her. She was shabbily dressed. She began to cry, because they were all successful and elegant, and she looked so poor and down at the heels. They were "Schone, elegante Frauen," she said and that's what she wanted to be. She rarely showed emotion, so I remember this incident vividly. I, too, felt shabby and impoverished, but I accepted it as my more or less normal state.

I spent many hours with my electric train (I had finally gotten one). I built various switches and gadgets to go with it. But I had turned fourteen, and a train at fourteen is not like a train at ten. Besides, I had no one to play with. That is not quite true. I adopted an abandoned dog who, like me was wandering the streets of downtown Los Angeles on his own, and lavished much love and attention on him. So, at least I had one friend, albeit a four-legged one — a real 'Heinz 57 Varieties' mutt.

Late in 1934, we set sail for Rio de Janeiro. My mother had become a bleached blonde for the occasion. She reasoned that Latins were very fond of fair skin, fair-haired women. Her motive was neither sexual nor matrimonial — only to charm her way into the movies. For the second time that year, I travelled along the coast of Central America and through the Panama Canal, then turning southward toward Brazil, where we landed early in 1935. The boat was a freighter, which also carried about twenty passengers. The voyage was slow and boring. There were no young people near my age, but I managed to make friends with some of the crew to the great annoyance of the Captain, who thought that they, the crew, were using me as a spy to find out what was going on among the ruling classes. Perhaps they were. I played a little chess, which I picked up in the coffeehouses of Europe, and learned the rudiments of bridge. Occasionally, the more serious bridge ladies would get desperate and ask my mother, and occasionally me, to fill in to make a foursome. They were openly amazed by my mother's bridge game, which could best be described as truly "off-the-wall". Of course, that expression had not been invented as yet.

The passengers were a bit on the weird side. There were a number of know-it-all, crabby old ladies whom my mother called "The Elders of Zion". Another wrinkled old female, who spent a lot of time sunning herself in a deck chair, was promptly named "the sitting cadaver". My mother was not the PTA type. There were also several alcoholics, not the least of whom was the ship's doctor. Mr. Webster, one of the alcoholic passengers, went on a binge in some port of call near the equator. The combination of heat and alcohol put him in the hospital for a few days. Meanwhile, we and the ship lay becalmed in tropical waters.

We landed in Rio and moved into a second-rate hotel. I was reunited with Uncle Ludwig. He hated Brazil. He felt himself far above what he considered to be a lot of native

riff-raff. He too was a snob.

It was February, the time of the famous Rio Carnival, but this had little to offer to an alone fourteen year old. It was beastly hot. We ate enormous amounts of meat, which, like many other things, was very cheap. As usual, I was bored and lonely. I played with my BB gun, and my electric train, but toys no longer interested me, for I had reached puberty, and my thoughts were of nothing but sex. I learned to masturbate, which left me exhausted in the tropical heat. My mother caught me, and I received the first of many lectures on the evils of masturbation. I felt guilty and unmanly. I continued to feel guilty, and to masturbate, until I had a full-time sexual partner many years later. I daresay my behaviour was typical of my generation, and perhaps of all generations.

We only stayed in Rio for a few weeks. My mother soon saw that, in spite of her bleached hair, her prospects in the Brazilian film industry were not too rosy. She now got a new idea. She decided to go to New York and write a Broadway play. Her plans were never small. We booked a third class passage on an ocean liner for New York. Once more I said goodbye to my uncle. I was not to see him again for thirty years, but he always was, and will be, in my thoughts.

Once in New York, I was put into boarding school and my real integration into American life began. Kingsley school for boys in Essex Falls, New Jersey, was an Eastern prep school. The American equivalent of Wickersdorf. It was the only boarding school I ever went to which served tasty and well-balanced meals. Every other boarding school of my experience featured prison fare. Certainly far worse than any I had in the Army.

Again, I remember vividly the bus ride to the school. I was too nervous to eat. This was the first time I had been enrolled in school in two years, apart from my brief stint in the Chaies Gymnasium, and of course my first school conducted in the English language.

I was assigned to the eighth grade, in accordance with my age and took classes in English, French, pre-algebra, and general science. I did poorly in all of them except for English. Even though my spoken English was heavily accented and awkward, I had done an uncommon amount of reading and I had a natural flair for language, so that I soon learned to write well. Then as now, I love stories and poetry. In math and science I performed miserably. Since I had only rarely gone to school on a regular basis, I had never been taught the rudiments of these subjects. But I was used to all this as it was only a repetition of my earlier experiences. My whole education consisted of being briefly enrolled in the school, being kept as the new boy unfamiliar with what is going on, and in a few weeks or months, moving on to a new town. In the process my schooling was often interrupted for long periods of time. As the opportunity offered, I was once more entered into a new school in a strange town, and the process was repeated. I attended school at most a third of the time the first to the tenth grade.

The all pervasive activity at Kingsley in the spring semester was baseball. Every boy was placed on an organized team that represented the school. Whenever there was a little free time, the boys would peel off in twos and threes and engage in endless games of catch. Every boy had a baseball glove so old, worn, and devoid of padding that it could easily have been used and discarded by Christie Matheson. We played "one-o cat" with a broom handle and a tennis ball in the schoolyard. Some of those boys could hit that ball a mile and a half through the crisp, cool, spring air.

I was placed on the lowest level team, and in right field, where I could do a minimum of damage. My teammates were several years younger and smaller than me. Many were excellent players for their age group. I, of course, never played baseball in my life, and the pressure I felt being the new boy in school, and a foreigner with a funny accent at that, did not

help me in my efforts to excel at this new game — which, of course, I desperately wanted to do. I never did learn to play a halfway decent game of baseball. The coach, who typically, also drove the team bus, was very tolerant of my efforts, and so, on the whole, were my teammates. I was commended during assembly once or twice for my efforts, if not for my skills, and that made me feel very proud.

As so often in the past, I wanted so much to be liked, to fit in; but of course I was once more the ultimate outsider. The boys make fun of my accent, and my foreign ways. They called me “Hitler”, a rather ironic name for a Jewish refugee. In New Jersey, just as in Wickersdorf, the great political crises which were shaking the world in the spring of 1935 barely penetrated the domain of the fourteen year-old boarding school boys. I was from a strange, half-mythical place called Germany. Hence I was “Hitler”.

I started to make a few friends. On weekends we would walk, perhaps two or three miles, to the village of Essex Falls, just as the boys at Wickersdorf went to Saalfelt. We ate ice cream and hung around the drugstore. We went to the movies: musicals with Dick Powell and Ruby Keeler, and Warner Brothers B grade detective pictures, which featured an eternal, mysterious and foreboding fog, a “stiff” in the first reel, and men with double-breasted suits and wide brimmed hats who talked out of the corners of their mouths

On school days, every morning began with a combination chapel and assembly. Announcements were made and beautiful and stirring hymns were sung — all of them new to me. The most stirring up of all was “America the Beautiful”. It still moves me to tears.

Alas, the relatively normal existence soon ended, for the school term came to a close and summer vacation began. I moved back to New York and rejoined my mother. We shared a room in a rundown Manhattan hotel. Again I was alone. I wandered the streets of New York. Times Square,

42nd street, and the rest of midtown Manhattan became more than familiar to me. I resumed my habits of going to sleazy movies and spending endless hours in reading and fantasy. I discovered the magazines, *Boys Life* and *American Boy*, whose stories of sport and adventure featured bravery, courage, self-denial, and nobility of soul in totally unrealistic amounts. I was very naïve. The New York summer became oppressively hot and humid. We sweltered in mid-Manhattan in a room whose only window connected with an air shaft. I masturbated in the summer heat.

My mother had written a play, which she subsequently revived and revised many times. Her energy and efforts were directed toward having this play produced. She would walk about the room and endlessly mull over her next series of moves, like a champion chess player. This was her way of working. Occasionally, she would try out her plans on me. I began to think that they were sometimes not too realistic or logical. She did not like having that pointed out to her.

The play, copies of which I still have it in German and English (in the course of time she had written a version in each language) dealt with the Van de Lubbe case, the Dutch communist who was framed for burning the Reichstag in a famous Nazi trial. It was this very conflagration which led to my hasty departure from Wickersdorf, and perhaps, more important historically — though not to me — it was this trial which gave Hitler an excuse for abolishing the Democratic constitutional guarantees in Germany.

The play wasn't bad at all. Perhaps every bit as good as Lillian Hellman's *Watch on the Rhine*, an anti-Nazi play which enjoyed a great success at the time. But Grandma never managed to sell it. Many years later she almost had it produced at the Mark Taper forum in Los Angeles, but at the last minute, the deal fell through. How my heart goes out to her, and how I wish she had succeeded. She was always pursuing the impossible dream, the Holy Grail. She could



not settle for an ordinary life. What experiences of her early life were driving her? Where did she get these ideas? She, who was in every other way, so wise and insightful regarding the ways of the world.

In August, my mother temporarily gave up her struggle to conquer Broadway and decided to once more attempt to storm Hollywood. As usual, she chose the cheapest mode of transport, this time the Greyhound bus. The midsummer non-stop trip across the USA was educational and exhausting. Endlessly sweating, fat and sleepless people travelling westward across the vast continent.

We arrived in Los Angeles and spent the rest of the summer in Santa Monica, my mother's favourite stomping ground. In the fall it was time to go to boarding school again and this time my mother selected Raenford Military Academy. My going to a military school was totally incongruous. Grandma Thilde's political leanings were toward socialism and pacifism, and much of that, reinforced by my own reading and thinking, had rubbed off on me. The rightist, gung ho, super patriotic attitude one associates with the military school upbringing was quite foreign to us. My mother explained that the only boarding schools in California were military schools. Surely there must have been some non-military ones. It was another one of her off-the-wall moves.

We went down to Desmond's clothing store and bought my school uniforms, tunic, boots, puttees, Sam Brown belt — all very gung ho and very uncomfortable. Thus arrayed we took the drive to Raenford which was located in the San Fernando Valley, between Tarzana and Encino. At that time, in 1935, the intersection of Sunset and Sepulveda boulevards was surrounded by fields and meadows, and the San Fernando Valley was largely open country. Raenford (I hadn't any idea where they got that Nordic militaristic sounding name) was a typical boarding school layout. There

was a large three-story main building which housed the class classrooms, mess hall and the sleeping quarters for the older boys, of whom I was now one. The younger students occupied a second smaller building. There was a dilapidated but serviceable swimming pool, a drill field, and football practice field. The whole thing was surrounded by open country. The native California back country. The Bush. The nearest outpost of civilization was a little grocery store more than a mile away on Ventura Boulevard. We often walked to the store in the evenings and on weekends to buy candy and such other snacks as we could afford, for as is customary in boarding schools all over the world, we were all starving. The food at Raenford was indescribably bad, and the portions were small.

Most of the boys came from career military families. There were, however, a number of borderline delinquents who had gotten into trouble in Junior High School and had been sent to Raenford in the hope that military discipline would straighten them out. This hope proved to be in vain.

Much of the life at Raenford was a copy of what I experienced a few years later in the Army. Cleaning your room spotlessly so that it passed the inspection of white gloved officers was a big deal. So was close order drill, saluting and standing formations. There was also the usual emphasis on athletics. After school we played eternal games of touch football — it was fall, and football season — just as I had played baseball at Kingsley and soccer at Wickersdorf. In addition, there was sex. The juvenile delinquents had kept up their contacts with their former Junior High School girlfriends, and they spent their weekends in torrid necking sessions, which they described in endless and agonizing detail. Unfortunately, I was never invited to these parties, so I was unable to verify their stories. I was very envious. How I wished that I too had a girl, so that I could go to these glamorous parties. It was not only the thought of having a

companionship, and — oh heaven, the idea of being able to touch and fondle her real-life girl; it was the admiration and envy of my friends which I so desperately craved.

Raenford was run by Major Lewis and his assistant Lieut. Bonner. Major Lewis was a little fellow who played the soldier to the hilt. I later discovered that his was a reserve commission, and that he was in fact a shoe salesman, but you would've never guessed it from the way he played his part at Raenford. He was surrounded by an aura of sabre rattling, cannon fire, and heroics, and by an air of meanness and sadism quite appropriate to a Foreign Legion commander at Fort Zinderneuf. Naturally, I was scared of him.

On Sunday, we had chapel which featured Major Lewis as minister and speaker. His favourite topics, one of which he never tired was the evils of masturbation. He managed to scare the hell out of us, but of course, everyone kept right on masturbating just the same. Major Lewis claimed to know judo and often described in graphic detail how he would make mincemeat out of some of the larger boys if they dared to cross him. Fortunately for him, I suspect, this matter was never put to the test.

At Raenford, quite unexpectedly, I became a student, and most amazingly, a student of mathematics and science. This turn of events had an incalculable influence on my later life. It provided me with a career path which made it fairly easy for me to always earn a good living. How easily I could have been an English major and subsequently a movie director like my father and my daughter, a writer like my mother or my son Paul, a third assistant librarian in some hick town or a failed intellectual with nothing to sell in the job market, like my Uncle Ludwig.

How and why it was that Raenford turned me into a successful student is far from clear. The teachers were competent but not inspiring. I did not love them or greatly admire them. The textbooks were dog-eared, ragged and out

of date. The classrooms were uncomfortable, the frills such as movie projectors or any sort of gadgetry, or gimmicks to make learning a pleasure, nonexistent. My juvenile delinquent friends never took to studying, and left Raenford just as ignorant as they entered it. But I had the potential for learning, and Raenford gave me the opportunity and structure for doing it.

I took plane geometry, algebra, chemistry, English and French. I was fascinated by geometry. The wonderful logic of it. How each step inexorably followed from the previous one. The cold clear beauty of it. It was wonderful. And all this tied in with an earlier passion. From childhood on I was entranced by astronomy. My Uncle Ludwig used to tell me about the stars under the title: "Es drecht sich" (things turn about) when I was a little boy. As I grew up, I read a number of popular books on astronomy which made a great impression on me. How wonderful, I thought, to spend your life studying the stars and the mysteries of the universe. But, I was told, to be an astronomer you have to know mathematics, and we were terrible at mathematics, and hated it, my mother said. (Just as she said we were terrible at singing. But more of that later).

My earlier brief acquaintance with mathematics gave me no reason to doubt my mother, but plane geometry changed my mind. I was good at it, and I loved it. Inspired by my success in geometry, I turned to algebra and chemistry. I decided I was going to excel in mathematics and science and become an astronomer. That was settled. In English we did American literature and that sort of thing had always been right down my alley. The only subject I did poorly and was French. To get ahead of my story – a little more than ten years later I was a teaching assistant at the University of Grenoble and loved France and all things French. I spoke the language nearly fluently. I swing from both sides of the plate. I could do mathematics, and I was good with words. I

was creative and imaginative. I had a flair for putting ideas together and for taking them apart. I am a natural organiser; I am a quick study. Also, when motivated, I can work very hard. I am responsible; I want to do a good job. I hate it when things are left dangling and no one is in control. On the negative side, I am mercurial; I quickly lose interest and start to slack off. I am overly eager to gain approval and I am too sensitive to criticism. I can't stand it when someone doesn't like me, or is indifferent to me. I crumble in the face of hostility, real or imagined. The scars of my boarding school childhood were and always will be with me.

But to return to Raenford. As I reflect on it, its great advantage was that the classes were small so that the student could feel the teachers' approval and disapproval on an immediate personal level. There was also a two-hour study hall, in which strict silence was enforced, every evening from seven to nine. While it is possible to spend one's time reading detective magazines hidden in one's book, or just to stare into space and daydream, it was really more interesting to do one's homework and study. Yet another advantage of Raenford as a school, for me at least, was that there was no competition; there were very few good students. None in fact that I can recall offhand. Thus it was easy to stand out, to excel, to shine, to be approved of, and that's what I wanted so desperately.

A year at Raenford was followed by another long and boring summer. My mother had rented a house in Hollywood on Lexington Avenue just north of Santa Monica Boulevard. The nearest cross street was Gardner Street, about a mile west of La Brea Avenue. She decided to become domestic. This was not too successful as she was the world's worst cook and housekeeper. She bought a few sticks of furniture and made grand plans to entertain her friends. I believe she had one party and then she gave up the whole idea. She was very lazy when it came to any kind of physical work.

She considered herself above it.

I joined the Hollywood YMCA and learned how to play basketball. It was rough going. I didn't know anyone and I'd never played basketball in my life, so I was terrible at it. Slowly I made a few friends, and even more slowly, my game improved. But as usual I was the outsider. The other boys were schoolmates, and may belong to church clubs that had basketball teams and were all buddy- buddy. I had a funny accent, and I was Jewish and I didn't belong to anything at all. I just played basketball, and that very badly.

Being Jewish was then, and for a long time to come, the central fact of my life. Oh, how I wished I wasn't Jewish. And yet, there was an underlying stubbornness. To become a Christian from mere convenience seemed to me cowardly and hypocritical. I was betwixt and between.

As a refugee, I accepted my Jewishness, but when I came to America my mother made me see the error of my ways. I would say something and she would correct me with: "Don't say that, that's the Jewish expression". She made me feel that being Jewish was a shameful secret best hidden from the world.

In the fall of 1936, I entered Hollywood High. Starting in a large public high school for the first time as a Junior is never easy, but for me as a foreigner barely acquainted with American ways, it was doubly difficult. I was only a B student as I did not study very hard, having somehow lost my motivation. I was in the high achiever classes with lots of bright and ambitious students. I was the sort of kid who joins the chess club as opposed to going to school dances and parties. I really wanted to go to the dances and be around glamorous girls (I thought of them as glamorous) in the worst way. But I didn't know how to dance, and I was shy and awkward with girls. So I played chess; it was better than nothing.

In my senior year I joined the swim team. I was a fair breast stroker and taught myself the butterfly. I made

the Hollywood High varsity. I won a few races and my name began to appear in a paragraph or two in the school newspaper. It was the first stepping stone on the path to social success which, more than any debutante, I was so desperate to achieve. At the end of the year, I won my varsity letter. This meant infinitely more to me than winning a scholarship to Caltech, which in my circle was considered the peak of academic achievement. My best friend, Steve Kegl, won such a scholarship, but could not accept it because he was too poor. He had to work to help support his mother. The depression was still very much with us. Instead he went on to Los Angeles City College with me. There he was able to work in the Bank of America at night and still carry a full programme of study in the daytime. He was a very bright and very disciplined and motivated student, which I was not. He planned to save his money — he lived very frugally — and transfer to Caltech as a senior. His plan, like so many, many others with which I became acquainted in my lifetime, never materialized. He died early in the war, of pneumonia I think, in the Aleutians, or someplace like that. He was one of the first of that vast army of friends and acquaintances who have since crossed the river to that undiscovered country from whose borne for no traveller returns. In some ways, I am very much aware that soon I must join him; but most of the time I feel and act as if I'm going to live forever. Just like the soldier in war, who knows that many of his comrades will be killed or wounded, but never he.

\* \* \*

## DREAM VIII



### *Fear of Torture*

In the end I was screaming, screaming in uncontrolled terror, willing to sign anything for I knew I could never resist under torture of any kind. Blind fear had taken possession of me. Blind fear and panic. It was so real — never had a dream felt so real. I awoke; I was immensely relieved it was only a dream, but only for a moment. Because I realized that the fear in the dream was only a reflection of my fear of getting into a deadly hassle with my architect.

I was on an airplane on some sort of a tourist tour. I was with a lady called Elizabeth — tightlipped, no make up, English nanny type, but pleasant enough. She was some kind of business agent. She had helped me arrange an apparently



not very successful business trip — all this was very vague. She presented her bill; I thought she was doing it for nothing. I thought, ‘oh well, a few hundred dollars.’ Her bill came to more than eleven thousand dollars. I couldn’t believe it. ‘I want an itemized bill’, I said. Once I get off the tour and am back in Santa Barbara I won’t pay it, I thought.

An Algerian foreign type caught up with me on an embankment; he served me with a tattered envelope. Some unpleasant legal papers relating to the money. Next, I was surrounded by Elizabeth and a set of her gangster friends. I felt I was going to be knifed, tortured, I don’t know what. The man next to me encouraged by the mob, “Fast Freddie”, wearing a suit which could only have come from the Germany of the 1930’s, put his hand in my pants and started touching or scratching my buttocks. Then a woman, not Elizabeth, did the same. This is where I started screaming in blind fear and panic. I thought I was going to be castrated. I’ll sign anything I thought, anything — .

## DREAM IX



### *Lost on a Motorcycle – Out of Control*

I am on a motorbike giving two ladies a ride on the back seat. “Westwood used to be peaceful, way out in the country,” I explain. Now the traffic is terrible. We cut off the main road; somehow we’re lost on a steep side road going uphill. We barely manage to turn around. Now we are in my Mustang. We go back downhill. We’re back on the motorbike off the road on grass several inches deep in water. It is raining; I can’t see. I fear that momentarily I will hit something. I try to work the brakes. I get confused between bicycle and car brakes. (I frequently dream that I’m in a car, driving, can’t see, and the brakes don’t work. Momentarily, I’m going to hit something; I never do). Finally we get back on the pavement. I’m still confused. I can’t see where I am. It is night and people are in the way. With the ladies’ help, I’m pointed in the right direction.

We are now walking uphill. Mr and Mrs Moore, “The Owners”, very cultivated, well-spoken, obviously in control of their lives and their business, with the authority of success, money, position, belonging to the right class, are walking behind us. I feel inferior to these people. This is a strong feeling left over from childhood. They are well-to-do. I am poor. I am Jewish, ugly. That is how I felt as a child and while growing up, and this is how I still feel, particularly when things don’t go so well. My own feelings of being attractive and successful are always temporary and only skin-deep. There’s nothing I can do about these childhood feelings except recognize them and accept them. Then they become manageable.

Someone petitions Mr and Mrs Moore to become their pilot. They say “We already have a pilot. He’s very satisfactory and also he’s good in the store.” Apparently he works in the store when not flying. This only emphasizes that they are Sahibs. I associate owning a store with all those middle class values I mentioned above. In childhood I felt that store owners were important and rich.

Mr and Mrs Moore said they would double check, but it looked like they had no need for an additional pilot. We come to a door at the head of a stairwell leading to the street; we are no longer lost, and I wake up.

INTERPRETATION:

I fear that I am lost, flying blind, out of control, in over my head on my building project. Not safe and in control like Mr and Mrs Moore.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

*Was unterscheidet  
Götter von Menschen?  
Dass Viele Wellen  
Vor Jenen wandeln,  
Ein Ewiger Strom:  
Uns hebt die Welle  
Verschlingt die Welle  
Und wir versinken*  
- Goethe

WHEN I WAS ABOUT SEVEN, I got pneumonia and was very sick. I nearly died. I remember my first walk after recovering. I was too weak to walk by myself and had to be supported by my mother and my uncle. We walked outdoors in a park connected with the hospital. It felt wonderful to be alive and in the sun. Today I still get that feeling on a warm spring day with the sun shining through the trees.

I judge that I was seven, or somewhat younger, if my memory does not deceive me that I attended first grade. I was one of the best students and learned to read rapidly. I can still see the letters of the alphabet, perhaps on a wall chart, in my mind's eye. I had a lady teacher and she approved of me because I was a good student. The idea of being worthwhile and loved for my intellectual achievements came to me early. That otherwise for myself alone, I was unlovable, was also impressed on me in many ways.

In order to hasten my recovery after my long illness, my mother packed me off with my uncle, her built-in babysitter, to a small village called Seefeldt, high in the Bavarian Alps, between Munich and Innsbruck. At that time, the pigs literally ran about in the village streets, which were not even cobblestoned. It is here that so many of the stories originated which I later told my children, and which you, Michael Ishi,

will in good time tell to yours. Uncle Ludwig never had any children, but your children will be Uncle Ludwig's great-great grand nephews.

In order to get me to eat, Uncle Ludwig would take up the story, and at the most exciting part he would say, "Open your mouth," and shovel in a spoonful of food and get me to chew and swallow it before he continued. The most famous and fascinating story was that of the butcher and bear. The basic plot, which had an infinity of variations, was simplicity itself. The butcher tried to convert the bear into bear ham, which was considered a great delicacy in some parts of Europe, and the bear always escaped by a whisker at the last moment.

Another fine story, or game, was "Hotel Post". In the European villages, the hotel where, in former times, the postal carriage and horses stopped overnight was usually the oldest, and often the only hotel in town. Uncle Ludwig would tell me endlessly the wonderful things that transpired at the Hotel Post while I was asleep. I often played "Hotel Post" with Susie while she was a little girl.

A variation of "Hotel Post" was "Ich hab gesehen und du hast heheidet" Which means, roughly, "I saw great things while you were asleep". In this game my uncle would again tease me with all the fine places he'd been to while I was asleep. Since the only place one could go at night in Seefeldt was the Hotel Post, this game and "Hotel Post" were essentially identical.

One day my uncle and I went for a hike in the mountains. It was spring time or early summer, and I remember the wonderful smell and feel of the melting snow mixed with pine needles and the little rivulets flowing among the trees. We had packed a lunch, which included an orange, then a great luxury in that part of the world, or so at least I thought. As we sat down to picnic, the orange slipped out of my hand and rolled down the mountain at an ever

increasing speed. I can still see that orange rolling.

I played in the village streets. I remember a building site featuring an open lime pit (“kalk” in German). Some village boys, peasant louts, started to shove and tease me, and call me a dirty Jew. I cried. My uncle came and rescued me, and gave those village boys an earful. The German word my family — who were city bred, intellectual snobs — used for “peasant” was “Hirsel”, which connotes an ignorant, crude, illiterate, stupid peasant, unversed in city ways.

The pigs continue to run in the streets of Seefeldt. Occasionally we would visit the nearby town of Innsbruck; and this too, I still remember. More than fifty years later, in 1981, I was in Innsbruck on a ski trip, and I took the train on the sentimental journey to Seefeldt. Seefeldt had undergone an astonishing change. It was now a luxury ski resort. The pigs had vanished, or been changed into humans. Fat and filthy rich Germans, men and women, paraded about in million dollars worth of fur coats. Just like the bear, but fatter. Could the butcher be far behind? Mercedes cars were a dime a dozen. We sat in a snobbish restaurant in our ski clothes. At each of the neighbouring tables sat a German couple — most likely owners of breweries by their appearance — and under each table sat the family dog. There were no children present. The Germans, it is said, love their dogs better than their children. The dog, typically a dachshund or a similar breed, was also grossly fat, and like his masters, he too wore a fur coat, in addition to the one which nature had given him. Every few minutes a family — man, woman and dog — would leave their table, walk out the door, and moments later re-enter the restaurant, march back to their table and resume their places. No sooner were they seated, but another trio would arise and go through the same drill. This went on all evening long. The only purpose for this ritual, that I could think of, was to show off the fur coats. They were indeed impressive. They reached right down to the floor. Never have

I seen the words, plutocrat, capitalist pig, war profiteer, so well illustrated.

We moved from Seefeldt to Garmisch which later became the site of the Winter Olympics. I remember Garmisch — I had been there several times since as an adult, once with the whole family — covered with snow and coffeehouses. But every place Uncle Ludwig went featured coffeehouses, for they were his hangout. I spent endless hours in them as a child, reading the illustrated papers. I still enjoy reading a newspaper over a cup of coffee. I know that the papers are superficial, that secret, and full of half-truths and lies. Still I like reading them.

We then moved to Starnberg on the Starnberger See (lake), which was famous as the hangout of the Mad King Ludwig of Bavaria. Both Starnberg and Garmisch are near Munich, and Seefeldt is a few miles up the road towards Innsbruck.

I have been to this area and to many other parts of Europe on three widely different occasions. As a child when I was growing up in pre-Hitler Europe, as a young, conquering American soldier when Europe lay in bombed out ruins; and much later in the sixty's and seventies as an American executive and university professor. Perhaps there will be time for yet another visit.

The Mad King Ludwig, according to my mother, was something of a poet. He wrote:

*Rechts sind Baume, Links sind Baume  
Und dazwischen, Zwischenräume*

And also:

*Stamm verwwanter Hohen Zoller  
Sei dem Wittelsbach kein Groller  
Zürne nicht der Lola Montes  
Denn Ick seiher nice Konnt es*

These verses are untranslatable. Lola Montes was King Ludwig's mistress. She was just as crazy as he was. To think that I remember all this trash which I first heard sixty years ago.

In Starnberg I learned to ride a bicycle. We lived in a little villa which was surrounded by a wooden fence. I see the villa as white, the fence is green. I would climb my bicycle, hanging onto the fence, and then take off, ride a few feet until I was about to lose my balance, and then crash into the fence, trying to hang on for dear life. There were many falls and bruises.

I also went to school. I would get a clean, new two-for-a-penny blue exercise book, and in no time after I had attempted a few writing assignments, the once pristine exercise book became a huge, inky mass. A bewildering Rorschach test. Once my mother, examining my work, came up with the nonexistent German word "Egebein". It was supposed to be "Engelein", little angel. From then on any smudged up indecipherable piece of writing was called an "Egebein" in our family. I did not do well in that school.

We returned to Berlin and I was put in a boarding school in the suburb of Zelendorf. It was run by Herr and Frau Brose, "Tante Brose".

There was also a Tante Martha. A capable, strong, no nonsense sort of woman dressed all in white in the nurse's uniform. To this day, I consider nurses' uniforms a sexual turn on. Is this a relic of Tante Martha? I was perhaps eight or nine years old, and among the younger of the boarders. There was also Eve Brose, the daughter of the house who was thirteen, rather busty and wore pigtails; in addition there were two very grown-up high school boys, one in the Realschule (technical high school), the other in the Gymnasium. We all took our meals together, family-style. It was the custom to be able to request one favourite dish on one's birthday. I requested Bullethen, a sort of meat patty.



We did not have Bulletin on my birthday, for it was Sunday and Herr Brose chose to have something else. I felt this as a devastating put down. Children are very sensitive and easily hurt by careless adults

There was a cellar in which bicycles were kept. I can still smell the musty odour of that cellar mixed with the smell of rubber bicycle tires.

I went to school. I had a leather school satchel, carried on one's back like a day pack in the European fashion. In the winter, it was very cold. We wore shorts and long black stockings which went above the knees in which I hated. I was often nearly frozen playing in the snow, coming home from school. My best friend was Hans Wickerhauser, who lived with his family across the street. They were well off. We spent a lot of time on Hans' stamp collection. Hans' sister, Marianne, was my first very vague love, the object of not yet defined or understood sexual fantasies. We bought a few pennies worth of material, made glue out of flour and constructed kites. We flew these in the neighbouring fields. It was plenty of space. There is a well-known German poem which begins:

*“Gemacht sing die Felder der Stoppelwinndt weht Hoch oben  
in Lüften mein Drache nun Schwebt”.*

It always brings me back to my childhood memories of kite flying.

Once I opened Hans' garden gate and their German shepherd “Lux” who had been left unchained, rushed towards me. “Lux,” I shouted, commanding him to stop, and to my great belief, he did. The incident made a lasting impression on me.

Once I found a pocket watch under a pine tree in Hans' yard. Rather than taking it in the house, I hid it in the tree; it was a mean and spiteful thing to do.

On the way home from school one day, my schoolmates ganged up on me, called me a dirty Jew and threw rocks

at me. It was the feeling of being betrayed by boys who I thought were my friends that was so hard to take on these occasions.

As an adult I had a pattern of being rather more than commonly distrustful of strangers (particularly in a business relationship). But once someone is nice to me, and shows competence, my initial mistrust is replaced by a, perhaps, exaggerated faith in his abilities and friendship. Finally, I become too quickly disillusioned when my high expectations are not met.

These mood swings, this inability to have realistic expectations of people, derive from feelings based on my childhood experiences, when desperate cravings for love and friendship were often met with rejection and betrayal. I want to love, but have no trust in love.

During this Tante Brose period, I spent a summer at Hidden See, the resort island in the Baltic Sea. My mother was in the chips. She had written a movie for Gitta Alpar, a singer turned movie star. I remember the billboards advertising it when it was played at the UFA Palast in Berlin. This must have been around 1929. A lot of movie people went to this resort. My mother often did things to be in with the movie crowd. That's why she sent me to Wickersdorf and possibly also to Raenford. I played soccer with the local boys. A woman bather drowned. The first dead person I ever saw. There was a big inquiry, held by the hotel guests, into whether the lifeguards, burly local fishermen in waterproof clothing and big fisherman's hats, who jumped into an open boat to rescue people, had been negligent. I listen to the loud-mouthed city people, who never did any real or dangerous work in their lives, berate the non-verbal fisherman. I was all for the fisherman. I thought the city people were just trying to show off and impress each other. A child of eight understands much more than adults think.

One of my mother's woman friends changed her bathing suit and I saw her pubic hair. Another vivid memory.

My mother and I were taking a walk. I was singing. My mother squelched me. "We don't sing," she said, meaning our family had not inherited any musical ability. Actually, Uncle Ludwig was very musical, and my father's mother was supposedly an opera singer.

I returned to school in Berlin-Zeihendorf. I was very tanned. The teacher made a big speech, aimed at me, about how the brave Germans were fighting in the trenches (in World War I which had ended eleven years earlier), while the Jews grew fat as war profiteers. This was the Nazi's favourite song and dance. He somehow connected this to my getting tanned and fat during the summer vacation while somewhere, certainly not in his classroom, skinny, pale-skinned German boys were starving.

It was from this, and I'm sure many similar, now mainly subconscious experiences, that I got the feeling of inferiority for being dark-skinned and different. Feeling inferior to those Nordic or Celtic or Aryan types; wishing myself like them; choosing them for my friends, trying to be like them; not sticking up for myself when they behave badly towards me for fear they'll disapprove of me. These unfortunate feelings, learned in childhood have been with me all my life.

I have an image of this teacher playing the violin while tapping his foot in time with the music. I associate this with being strongly criticized for my singing, being told not to sing, though I do not remember the exact incident. Again, this and many similar childhood experiences, including of course my mother's attitude, have made me a singing cripple all my life. After three or four years resuming lessons, beginning in my early sixties, I conclude that I am probably below average musical ability, but that kindly and understanding teachers could have done much to correct this.

Somehow the name, Reidel, comes to mind. Was this nemesis of the teacher called Herr Reidel?

Earlier, I am living in Berlin in a furnished room with Uncle Ludwig. I am perhaps seven or eight years old. I am looking out the window. In the distance, I see a gang of boys playing in a park. How I wish I could join them. I felt so lonely. Uncle Ludwig was away for long hours, mostly at the coffeehouse. Several hours alone, with nothing to do, can seem like an eternity to a child of eight. Why didn't I just walk to the park and watch the game from there? I was probably given orders not to go out. I was a very obedient child. I had a firm belief in the great goodness of my uncle and my mother. My uncle often hit my mother up for money. They would get in a fight. I hated that.

I whiled away the time in reading and in fantasies. I read a lot of German poetry — *Weiland der Schmeidt*, which is a romantic, heroic, patriotic German mythology. The Germans love to indoctrinate their children with this sort of trash. I read, nay swallowed, the *Nibelungen Lid*. Siegfried, Hagen, Krimheid — that whole gang which others only know as Wagner's operas. I met them all at the age of eight. I also read Maupassant's *Bel Ami*. I didn't know what to make of this, but it made me feel romantic, strange and grown-up.

I spent considerable periods of my childhood alone in furnished rooms, wandering about, going to the park, with no one to play with. I learned early how to be alone. I had plenty of opportunity to practice.

Yet earlier, I'm in a barbershop getting my first haircut. In those days it was customary to let the boy's hair grow for several years before he caught his first haircut. I am perhaps four years old. The floor of the shop is strewn with my black locks. "What a pity, what pretty hair," someone says.

We are living in Naples, in a section called the Posiliopo. This was when I was four or five years old. I see Vesuvius, the famous volcano, across the bay. I wait for the streetcar. I am

able to identify the streetcar long before anyone can read the sign on its front, giving its destination. How did I do it? No one can figure it out.

We are in a restaurant, the Italian equivalent of the coffeeshop. My uncle is showing a revolver to some people. I am very impressed.

We are living on the Isle of Capri. There is a set of steps and somehow my mother managed to fall down them. She is black and blue and walks about with the cane. There seems to be one or more men hanging about. This is one of the few times I can recall where my mother had “boyfriends”, as would be normal for a young pretty woman.

I opened the door. My mother is standing naked in front of a washbasin with flowers on it. She quickly shoos me out of the room. I am seeing something I’m not supposed to see. Seeing a naked woman, even your own mother, is a forbidden thing.

We are on the train returning from Italy. Someone brings in a lunch basket. It has oranges and apples in it and a bottle of Chianti. A sailor is trying to be friendly to my mother. He butters me up and lets me wear his hat. I take it and throw it out the window. Wasn’t I cute?

A few days ago I saw the movie *Wannsee Conference*. It depicts with great realism the meeting in which the extermination of all the Jews of Europe was given bureaucratic approval.

It reminded me of the summer I spent in Wannsee with my Uncle Ludwig. I think I was then already in Wickersdorf, i.e. about ten years old. My uncle and I had a room in a sort of villa — a suburban house with a fair amount of ground around it. The Wannsee is a lake on the outskirts of Berlin much used for recreation. It has a sandy shore which, in my memory, is much like the beach at the seashore. I remember walking along feeling very tired, hot and thirsty. There were huge and delicious dill pickles for sale, which I loved.

My uncle became friendly with several men who were weightlifters and very muscular and athletic. He was in his athletic phase. I have the definite impression that these men were Nazis, pure Aryan super-patriots and that my uncle kept his being Jewish very much to himself.

When not talking about fitness and athletics, these men talked endlessly about girls, or should I say, women. My uncle was about thirty-five years old. I was fascinated by all this talk. As adults often do, they just ignored my presence, thinking I was too young to understand. Indeed, I failed to understand what was so great about women, but I felt the glamour and excitement of the whole subject. Here too I learned that “conquering” women, having a woman, being able to show off, with due modesty, one success with women – that was the way to be a big shot and gain everyone’s approval and envy.

My uncle and his friends always remind me of a phrase in a Hemingway story that in the depths of the Depression, some men took out their poverty in drink, others in sports. (Possibly this was Henry Miller’s description of Paris at about the same time period, rather than Hemingway’s — I can’t remember). My uncle and his companions took out their poverty in sports. This all ended a few months later when my uncle got in an argument with his buddies and they threatened to beat him up. My uncle called the police. A rather unheroic response, considering that they were all very macho and talked a lot about boxing and manly self-defence in general. All this took place shortly after Max Schmeling defeated Jack Sharkey for the world heavyweight championship. Schmeling won when Sharkey fouled him by hitting him “ten centimetres below the navel”. I still remember the phrase. I think this fight took place in 1931.

\* \* \*

## DREAM X



### *Lost Once Again*

I am going on a ski trip. I take my beautiful new wooden skis out of the closet. They are very big and very shiny. I am having breakfast but all of a sudden it's time to leave. I don't have any of my clothes, poles, gloves — anything. I race downstairs in the elevator. I am on the top floor of some sort of hotel. The elevator gathers speed. Down, down twenty or more floors. I begin to wonder if the elevator will crash. I almost wish it will. (I often dream I'm on a falling elevator and fear that I may crash. This is the first time that I almost wished it would). I arrive at the bottom. I race out, but somehow I get lost. I take a wrong turn. I end up behind the building in a backyard court. I run, I dodge obstacles;

I'm lost. I see my mother. She waves at me cherrily. "It's time to go," she says. "You'll have to come without your clothes". (Awake, I interpret this as her beckoning me from the world beyond to join her in death. But I did not think or feel that in the dream). "Okay" I say, "we'll buy some." I'm naked from the waist up. I'm not too worried, I'll buy some clothes; one can always use another ski outfit, I figure, but I reflect I have no gloves, no poles, nothing.

Somehow my mother and I end up in a cafeteria line. "The cook gives us a long, complicated bill, written in ink, very small. "Here," he says, "you add it up and check it." "Never mind", I say, "we're in a hurry." I'm convinced the bill is correct. The cook is wearing many rings and a big white cook's uniform. "Vous etes un honnete homme," I say in French. While waking up, possibly still in the dream, I say; "J'aime ma fille, mais je deteste les Russes." Waking further, I think of a phrase from a French translation of Galsworthy's play *Loyalties*. "On dit qu'il vendait vraiment les tapis dans la cite.

#### INTERPRETATION:

The dream of being lost in unfamiliar, and yet not totally unfamiliar, surroundings and racing desperately to catch a train or plane is a very common one with me. I'm lost in my building project and don't know what I'm doing. I'm lost in my personal life. I'm lost. I ought to be settled down with a nice lady, smelling the daisies — I'll smell them soon enough.



## DREAM XI



### *Dueling With a Midget*

Anne, and my friends, George Hodgins and Jim Brunk, are lying in a tent, their heads just barely sticking out. I know there's nothing sexual going on. Still I'm curious, suspicious. I feel isolated, alienated, left out as usual. June Hodgins comes over. She starts to hug me. It's not sexual, nor do I feel sexual. She has something wrong with her eye. I'm afraid it might be contagious. I say something like, we will make love with our eyes closed. Anne is now with the Brunks. Again I feel left out. I say, "I have to go," though I don't really, and start rooting around in my suitcase.

Later I am in a huge, garish, pink stucco beach resort building. I'm not really lost, just wandering about. There

seem to be some holes in the floor. Dangerous if you're not careful. Later still, I am sitting at the beach. There is no surf. An old lady, possibly on crutches or in a wheelchair, walks into the water and is gone as little bubbles rise. Don't try to rescue her, her companion says. She's old and wants to die. I'm relieved to hear this as I didn't really want to get into the cold water and wrestle with the old bag. After what seems a long time, the tip of her umbrella appears and we pull her out. She's alive and okay.

Later again, I'm dueling with a midget. The midget is very fierce and proud, but I know he can't hurt me. I turn his weapon aside and tap or poke him lightly, showing, magnanimously, that I could have killed him had I wished. I wake up.

## AN AMERICAN COLLEGE BOY

*Bet 'em high and sleep in the streets  
Dime and a dime, that's twenty to you  
Pair of aces, That's got me beat  
You're looking at 'em, they're all blue \**

I PASSED THE ENGLISH COMPOSITION EXAM AT UCLA and was accepted there but I chose to go to LA City College for the first two years of college. I didn't really give the matter much thought. I guess I felt less intimidated by City College. I lived with my friend Victor Cottan and his Jewish family. I still had tremendous conflicts about the Jewish. Both Victor and I were in love with Vernie Paul, a thin shy girl who lived with her maiden aunts. Vernie's friends all went to UCLA and joined a sorority but Vernie too was a victim of the depression and ended up at City College. She thought of this as a shameful come-down; it didn't bother me at all. Vernie and I only held hands, but that was more thrilling than some of the wild nights I spent many years later.

At City College I went for the swim team and again earned my letter. I joined the Letterman's Club and started to hang around the star athletes and school big shots. I basked in reflected glory. I never ran for an office or joined any sort of club or quasi-fraternity. I was always afraid of being rejected. My Wickersdorf Kameradschaft Heibling experiences permanently damaged me — I just hung around with the big shots. I learned how to be a real Joe College dresser, and I learned how to dance. I was a naturally good dancer. I knew all the popular girls. They usually were going with one of my friends. I always tried to date the most popular girl I could get, whether I liked her or not, but of

\* A portion of some verses I wrote at UCLA's Robinson Hall where we spent most of our study time playing poker

course I liked all the girls. I was sort of the male equivalent of the fat, plain girl who is the prom Queen's best friend, always hanging around, but never really "in" or popular herself. I felt inadequate and insecure. I was trying to work out and reacting to my childhood experiences; but I didn't understand that then. Occasionally, I studied and did well in the class. But most of the time I just hung out. Often I felt like a hypocrite. I was acting a part. I tried to be the all American Joe College but I really wasn't that at all. I had to park my brains in a corner.

I didn't really care in the slightest whether City College beat one of their arch rivals at football or anything else. I was intellectual, dark skinned, Jewish, and had a distinct foreign accent — a poor candidate indeed for a WASP. Instead of being me — the interesting, romantic, different, attractive person I was, or could aspire to be — I tried to copy the manners and appearance of a baker's helper.

I realize now that playing the part was something I learned in boarding school to survive, and that I continued to do it throughout my life. In the Army, I played the soldier, and in the business world, I played executive. The part was always the same, namely, that of the popular, mainstream, gung-ho White Anglo-Saxon Protestant all-round Joe.

Of course, to get on in this world, one often has to hide one's true feelings and opinions. But I overdid it. Much of the time I had no faith in what I was doing, nor did I believe what I was saying. I said what I thought people wanted to hear. Sometimes it sounded so stupid it made me cringe. I should have been more honest; tactful but honest. The truth shall set you free.

After two years it was time to transfer to UCLA. But I was in no hurry. I hung around City College for an extra semester.

My two years at the University of California at Los Angeles were uneventful. I felt tremendously inferior to the

fraternity boys, and looked hopelessly and longingly at the sorority girls, whom I considered quite unattainable. Instead of recognizing the negative aspects of snobbery, of racial and social prejudice, I accepted their view, and the Nazi view that I was inferior, lucky to be tolerated by this new master race.

I haltingly developed some further social skills. I played cards and formed friendships at the Robinson Hall dormitory, where I now lived. The war was now going full bore (it was 1942) and even nonentities at the bottom of the barrel became someone by joining the various reserve officer groups on campus. This gave them a commission upon graduation, and a fancy cadet's officer uniform to swagger around in while still in school. I was again barred from this new class of sahibs, pilots, naval officers, all sorts of immensely glamorous people, for I was not a US citizen. My mother had not taken the necessary steps. She wanted to keep me out of the war. This was very hard for me, for it put a new and immense obstacle in my path to becoming the all-around popular all-American boy. Seeing the matter now in perspective, I see that if my mother didn't have her off-the-wall ideas, I would have ended up in Hitler's ovens, which in a sense, are only an extension, though a very extreme one, of the fraternity system. I'm sure Hitler managed to convince a lot of Jews that they deserved to be exterminated. Well, I am a sixty year-old Jew and I'm still coming out swinging.

At school I wasted my time; I barely kept up with my studies; I was totally obsessed by sex. I wanted to be popular, so that I could get girls and sex, and I wanted to get girls so that I could be popular. The idea of getting what I wanted through achievement, or money, or some sort of aggressive behaviour did not occur to me. Popularity, being accepted by my peers, but in reality, by the boys long ago, from grammar school and Wickersdorf — that's what I wanted.

I had a golden opportunity to study mathematics, physics, astronomy but most of the time cared nothing

about this. I only cared about being popular and getting sex. I failed in both. I was on my way to becoming a neurotic personality which took me a lifetime to overcome. I was intelligent, warm hearted, sensitive, healthy, educated and amusing. I did not know how to value any of these qualities. I wanted to be dull, laconic, Aryan and popular, with a lovely fraternity pin and a sorority girl sweetheart. This, or rather any number of adult variations of this, is what I've wanted all my life. More often than not, when I actually got it, I found it boring, frustrating and pointless.

I graduated from UCLA, getting A's from the courses when I really needed them and studied, but just loafed most of the time. I could've been a straight A student through college. But as it was, my grades were barely adequate.

I also earned my letter in swimming, but I was never a star, nor did I really work at it. I earned letters in High School, Junior College and in college but I never had a single hour of real coaching. Minor sports like swimming were very loosely organized in those days. Still it felt good to be an athlete; sports was one of the doors to popularity.

The summer between City College and UCLA (1941) I worked at Yosemite National Park. This was quite an accomplishment; only the cream of the crop of college boys and girls landed these jobs. I was paid fifty cents per hour which was far more than I ever made before. I did not do well on this summer job. I tried to reorganize the whole janitor operation (I was the lowest of the janitors) and proudly presented my ideas to the top management. My boss, the head janitor, was naturally furious. (I knew there was no use talking to him and he knew that I knew). I was saddled with the dirtiest jobs for the rest of the summer. This desire to shine, to win approval from the big boss, has been a lifelong tendency of mine. It's just another form of a child wanting the approval of parents, teachers and other authority figures.

Yosemite was a very valuable experience for me. It convinced me that pushing a pencil was a lot easier and more pleasant than pushing a broom; that being a member of the labouring class, which seems so romantic and democratic in books, could put one in a servile and fawning position under the direction of morons and sadists. I also saved quite a bit of money. I was very frugal. The idea of living on very little and saving money came so naturally to me that I never questioned it. Even when I was living on my mother's money — really my child support money from my father — I was terribly frugal. This again is what I learned as a child and as a refugee. I was not your ordinary middle-class youth like my friends and classmates. I was a refugee from depression pre-Hitler Europe. I was the Wandering Jew. Money meant security. I knew first-hand what it was like to have no money.

I graduated from UCLA in February of 1943 with a BA in mathematics. I was waiting to go into the service. I volunteered to be drafted. That was the only way I could get into the war, not being a US citizen. I was just hanging around. I audited a few courses, but as usual did not study. I felt inferior, shabby, unwanted, compared to my glamorous classmates, some of whom by now had reached the ranks of major or even Lieutenant Colonel.

Others of my classmates were already dead — killed in the war. And my classmates from long ago, the Aryan supermen from Wickersdorf and the Jewish victims from the Chaies Gymnasium — many, many of them are also dead by the summer of 1943. But I did not think of that. I only wanted to be a part of the war. My American patriotism, my faith in the justice of our cause, the belief — sincerely shared by everyone — that we were “the good guys” was fused with my hatred of the Nazis. As a refugee and a Jew, never, never could I stand aside and let others do my fighting for me. I had to get into the war.

While I was waiting for my draft notice to arrive, in the spring and summer of 1943, I became an extra in the movies. The Hollywood studios were grinding out war movies by the dozen, but with so many young men in service, there was a shortage of extras who could be used to play soldiers. The studios called on the college boys to fill this need. We responded with alacrity for the pay was ten dollars a day and the work was minimal. I worked at all the major studios – MGM, Warner Bros., Paramount, Columbia — and played soldiers of every nationality — Belgian, French, English, Polish, you name it. At the time I had no interest whatever in the movies or theatre as a possible career. It was forty years later that I became an amateur actor. It was just fun and easy money. It was also a little ironic, for I was the son of the famous director Michael Curtiz. But no one knew that except me, and I wasn't about to tell anyone. Often there were beautiful and completely unattainable chorus girls and starlets. I would have gladly sold my soul to possess one of these ravishing creatures. I still remember one particular movie, a musical called *Up in Arms* with Danny Kaye and Dinah Shore. It featured a chorus of lovelies, dressed up as WACS (Women's Army Corps). Every morning when they came to work they had their legs made up. This procedure consisted of standing on a stool and lifting their skirts nearly waist high as the makeup was applied. I was mad with desire, yearning, lust.

When I was not working at the studios, I went to the beach. We would arrive early in the morning at Will Rogers State Beach in Santa Monica. The beach would be nearly deserted. The weather was sunny but still cool. A wonderful nostalgic feeling that has stayed with me all my life. The near empty beach, the day beginning to warm up, and the smell of the ocean breeze.

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## DREAM XII



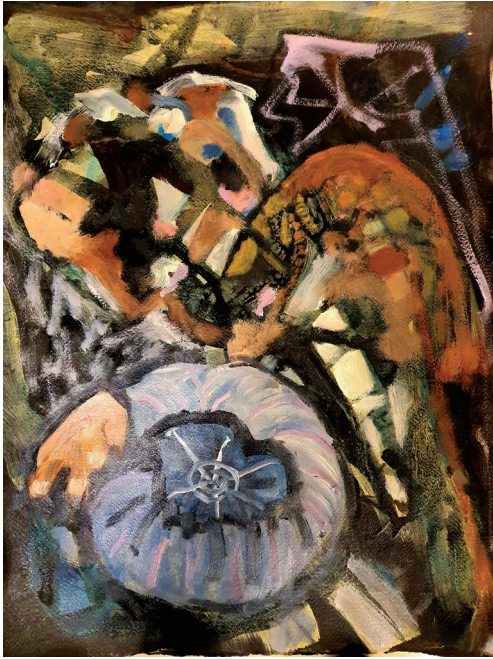
### *The Singing Lesson*

Last night I dreamt about a music teacher, Gail Embreé. We were going to form a singing group and she gave me a look which said: “You’ll ruin my singing group, you’re hopeless”. And I thought, “Well, I’m going to try. You can always kick me out if I’m no good.” Later, Gail and I bumped into her friend. She said: “This is Michael, an older friend of mine”, making it clear that ours was not a romance, I was too old for her. And I said, “Older man, my foot, I’m younger than she is.”

#### INTERPRETATION:

I’m sticking up for myself, believing in myself in areas where I’m particularly sensitive to my shortcomings.

## DREAM XIII



### *A Dream and a Digression*

It is three AM on 31 December, 1988. The string has played itself out — it's time to wax philosophical.

We are somewhere in Europe. We are staying in two hotels at once — a package deal. One features a complete and ornate bath; the other, general sleeping and living quarters. Is this really a good idea? I wonder in my dream.

#### COMMENT:

In general I'm not happy in my dreams. I'm quarrelling, I'm lost. I'm down and out in a strange town in a strange country. I'm always so relieved when I wake up. Reality is so much better than my dreams. Is that true for everyone?

## AN AMERICAN SOLDIER

*It was fun to ski at Grenoble,  
And fun to kiss in the snow.  
And the light in your eyes  
Caused me numerous sighs  
As little as two months ago. \**

IN AUGUST OF 1943 I WAS FINALLY DRAFTED INTO THE ARMY. I took a little travelling bag and went by the red streetcar to Fort MacArthur in San Pedro. The Army immediately embraced me and overnight I became a soldier. I was issued a uniform, boots, underwear, hat and a raincoat. I learned how to salute, make my bed, and do close order drill — skills which I had already acquired at Raenford. A week later my name was called and I was shipped to camp Barkeley, Texas for basic training in the Medical Corps. Having been born in Vienna, I was considered unreliable and best attached in the Medical Corps where I couldn't shoot anybody.

Basic training was hard, but not terribly so for a young athletic person. The thing I minded most was having to wear itchy wool clothes in the dust and summer heat. The non-coms and officers who trained us were on the whole fair and responsible people. There were no sadists or psychopaths, like the ones one so often encounters in the war movies. I keenly felt my lack of rank and status. I remember marching down the dusty Texas roads and seeing the glamorous fly boys high up in the blue sky. These are my classmates I thought. As usual I felt unworthy, inferior.

At first I was a bit of a rebel, which resulted in my spending several weekends in a row on Kitchen Patrol. "You get you a bucket of hot soapy water and G.I. the shit out of this floor," said the mess sergeant, and I did. I soon saw the

\* Part of some verses I wrote for Marie Helene

error of my ways. I realized that the Army was a gigantic pitiless machine, and I saw the danger of getting in its way. I decided to become a “good soldier” I shined my shoes, stood ramrod straight, saluted smartly, and became an expert at the little skills prized by the Army, such as rolling a tight full field pack.

The members of my company were Texas farm boys, New York taxi drivers, Mexicans of uncertain occupation, and other typical members of the so-called lower classes. There was also a sprinkling of college boys like myself. I readily made friends with my fellow soldiers. I was one of them. They helped me and I helped them. There were occasional anti-Semitic remarks, but no organized hostility, beatings or anything of that kind, as described in many novels written after the war. Somewhere during basic training I became a US citizen at the court ceremony in San Antonio, Texas. At this time I could have applied for officer training but that didn't occur to me. I was a bit of a fatalist.

At the end of basic training my platoon was shipped to the Pacific. I however, had been selected to be trained as an X-ray technician at fort Sam Houston, in San Antonio, Texas. This came as a complete surprise to me. It certainly wasn't anything I applied for. I remember standing outside my barracks — it was cold, the ground was frozen as the wind cut like a knife across the Texas plain — and waving goodbye to the men in my company as they marched off on their last bivouac prior to embarking for points unknown. What would've happened to me had I remained a private soldier in the medical corps in the Pacific theatre, I do not know, but as so often in my life, at a critical juncture, the hand of fate intervened.

On New Year's Eve, I got into a poker game and lost all my money. I arrived in San Antonio on New Year's Day 1944. I sat on my new bed without a penny in my pocket. Everyone was going into town to check it out. Someone

asked me to go and I told them I was broke. He very generously offered to lend me money. Sight unseen.

In San Antonio we led the easy life. The food was excellent and the regular army barracks seemed luxurious after the Camp Berkeley tar paper shacks. We had nice, clean uniforms, and divided our time between classes and practical work at the hospital. I acquired a girl. This was my first steady sexual partner as opposed to my previous hit and miss (mostly miss) earlier experiences. But I felt itchy. I wanted to get into the war.

At the end of three or four months our training was complete. We were ready to x-ray anyone and anything. But it turned out, in typical Army fashion, that the Army didn't need any more X-rays after all — at least not right then and there. I never took another X-ray in my life. I was sent back to Camp Berkeley, and I became an acting Corporal, a junior member of the cadre, whose job it was to train the new recruits. This was a difficult, lonely and pleasant assignment. I could not really be friendly with the troops for I was an authority figure, but I didn't belong with the permanent non-coms either. I was a straw boss. I had trouble maintaining my authority; for example, in assigning men to work details. I did not have the inner security and self-confidence which this difficult position required. I tried to be easy on the men, to be popular with them, get them to carry out my orders because they liked me. This never works, and it didn't work then. To be a leader, one must first gain the respect of one's subordinates which often involves an element of fear, or even hate. Only when this is firmly established they come to love you. I have been in a similar position countless times since. In many respects I am a good leader. I am fair and considerate; I am an excellent planner and organizer, I am very conscientious, and I am, or become, expert in the technical detail of the job on hand. But I am always too concerned about whether my subordinates like me. Thus I

lack force and authority. These feelings, of course, date way back to my boarding school days, and further back to my early childhood.

I was on bivouac with my new company in the late spring of 1944. It rained a lot. We got wet and stayed wet. We slept on the ground, two to a pup tent. We stood in line for “chow” which was ladled into a single mess kit — one gooey mess upon the next. One sat on a rock or a log and ate it as the cold rain drizzled down on the wet ground.

It was announced that Rome had fallen. I received this news sitting on a tree stump in the middle of Texas. Earlier the Germans suffered defeats in Africa and at Stalingrad. I was certain we were going to win the war, but also the end seemed years and years away.

“The first Sgt. wants to see you,” someone said. He does? Now what have I done? I hadn’t done anything. There were secret orders for me to be shipped to an unknown destination. Once in the train I realised that most of the men in our little detachment had foreign accents. It soon became clear that we were headed for the military intelligence school at Camp Ritchie, Maryland, to be trained as interrogators of prisoners of war.

Camp Richie was a country club among army camps. Again, there were permanent barracks and excellent food. The nearest town was Hagerstown, Maryland, a pleasant little community whose patriotic citizens couldn’t do enough for the soldier boys. My fellow trainees were a strange amalgam of second or third generation American college boys, many of German background, and refugees, who but for the fact that they were Jewish would have been in the German army. Lots of them were a bit older, say around thirty or thirty-five, and had arrived in America very recently. Some exhibited the less pleasant traits of the German-Jewish intellectual. I, of course, was very anxious not to be classed with this group. For I had grown up and gone to school in

America; I was an American college boy, and that's the group I wanted to belong to and identify with. But of course, I also was, much as I did not want to admit it, even to myself, one of the refugees.

The Army, which a year earlier had taught me the names of all of the bones in the body (which I had already completely forgotten) now taught me the order of battle of the German Army, the intricacies of the Nazi party, the ss, the Gestapo. We practiced interrogating our fellow soldiers, who had been trained to act as prisoners. "Where were you captured? By a tree. Where was the tree? Near a house." And so on.

We marched about singing German army songs: "Die vogelein im Walde, die singen, singen, Ja so wunder, wunderfbar." The German songs alternated with "It's a long way to Tipperary" or "The caissons go rolling along". It was all rather ironic. If Hitler hadn't gone off on the Jewish kick, three quarters of us would have been on the other side in the German army.

But for the grace of God, by the time I was in my early twenties, I could have been killed as a German soldier at Stalingrad; no doubt that was the fate of many of my schoolmates at Wickersdorf. Or in a Jew in a concentration camp, which must be what happened to most of my friends in the Chaies Gymnasium in Vienna. Or as a private in the medical corps of the U.S. Army on some godforsaken island in the Pacific. But here I am alive and kicking at sixty-seven. Hang in there, believe in yourself. These young punks. What do they know?

It was very beautiful in the hills of Maryland in the fall of 1944. The Allied invasion of Europe on the beaches of Normandy had taken place that June. But I was not yet in the war. We went on endless exercises and bivouacs. We were put in a truck in the middle of the night, blindfolded and driven to some place in the countryside ten miles or so away.



We were given maps of the area with all familiar landmarks re-named in French or German. The trick was to reach some destination on this map and rendezvous with the other troops. We practiced other arts related to being dropped behind enemy lines. I learned to shoot and assemble a rifle, a carbine, and a submachine gun. I was a good soldier and took pride in being one.

We were shipped to England late that year. We crossed on the troop ship carrying some five-thousand soldiers. We slept head to toe in narrow bunks, stacked in like sardines. Some became seasick the instant they got aboard and remained that way for the whole of the two weeks of the crossing. There was a lot of crowding and a lot of vomiting. Once stood in endless lines which serpentine through the bowels and across the decks of the ship. We next spend a month or two in Birmingham England. It was foggy, wet, very cold. They heated our rooms with enormous fires created from the local English coal. I learned to drink the tapped English beer in the neighbourhood pubs in sufficient quantity to get a good buzz on. By now I was a technician third grade, the equivalent of the staff Sgt. There were lots of girls. I was an American soldier overseas; I felt good about myself.

We crossed the channel early in 1945, stayed briefly on the outskirts of Paris and moved on to the Aachen — Cologne area. The fighting troops were ahead of us. We were well protected.

I belonged to a prisoner of war interrogation team consisting of five or so enlisted men and commanded by Lieut. PG Gragert. We called him *Partie Genosse Gragert* (after the PG) which means party member in Nazi German. Not to his face, of course. In both his attitudes and his Aryan ancestry he could have easily been a Nazi storm trooper. He, like so many others, was an expert black market operator. He was continually crating up and sending home carloads of



stuff which he had somehow liberated. He must have crated a whole house full of furniture.

A ranking enlisted man was Master Sgt. Klinger, who became a very good friend. He was one of the few people I have ever met who had actually learned the language in school well enough to speak it. His German and French had been acquired at the University and he was nearly fluent in both.

Our team had two or three jeeps and we travelled about them, attached to various units of the American 1st and 3rd armies. We were always several miles behind the front. There was no danger. But we got to see the war firsthand. Every town we came to was totally destroyed. It was a terrible and bitter war for the frontline troops.

I caught pneumonia and I was briefly sent to a rear echelon hospital in Luxembourg. I still remember the wonderful feeling of slowly recovering my strength, going for walks through the stone walled village in the pale sunlight of the late European spring.

I rejoined my unit in Wuppertal, in the Rhineland. We lived in a villa with servants. We ate well, drank cognac, and excellent wines, which seemed on hand for the asking. There were plenty of girls. We were the Lords of the town, the conquerors. An American soldier was a god.

Our work changed from interrogating prisoners of war to ferreting out Nazis from the civilian population. We interrogated an endless stream of good German citizens, high-ranking, cultured bureaucrats, and illiterate snarly, oafish peasants, young and old. They all claimed to have been fervent anti-Nazis. "If you were such a fervent anti-Nazi, how did you happen to be a major in the SS?" "Oh, I was forced into that; it was a mere formality: I would have lost my job had I refused; I was only a little man, an insignificant follower" in German "Mitgänger". My favourite reply to this little speech, and which often caused its recipients to

blanche, and sometimes to faint, was to quote the German proverb, "Mitegangen, mitehangen". It seemed there was not a single Nazi in all of Germany.

Soon the atmosphere changed. The operators, the kowtowing opportunists, the sly and slimy bureaucrats, soon found themselves little cushiony jobs with the conquering armies. Yesterday's Nazi war criminal suspect became today's assistant to the supply sergeant. The black market flourished. The war in Europe was over.

We drove through the beautiful countryside up the Rhine into Bavaria, to our new assignment in Pilsen, Czechoslovakia. The country which, ten years earlier, I traversed with my uncle as a twelve year-old, impoverished Jewish refugee now lay at my feet as a conquering American soldier. We lined up on one side of Pilsen's ancient town square. The Russians lined up on the other. Ceremonies of friendship were held with much fanfare. Together we would conquer Japan and the world.

I travelled all by myself with my Jeep and my typewriter along the lovely cherry tree lined country roads of Czechoslovakia. There were an enormous number of refugees in the displaced persons camps strewn about the countryside. Someone had to decide what to do with these people. Put them on the road and let them find their way home? Some had already walked across European Russia and Poland. A bit of a hike through Germany to get to their native village was hardly worth mentioning. Or throw them in jail as if they were war criminals or upper crust Nazi functionaries? To sort them out one needed skilled interrogators familiar with German ways and the German language. That was me.

Lieut. Gragert's black market activities somehow caught up with him. He was confined to quarters. I used to bring him beer and dropped in frequently to chat and cheer him up. With his help, I wrangled an assignment to study at the University of Grenoble. Now that the war in Europe was

over, we all expected to go to Japan to participate in what we thought would be a long and bloody struggle. An interlude at the University of Grenoble seemed like a splendid idea. On the train ride from Munich to Grenoble, my fellow students to be showed off their knowledge of the French language and French literature. They were far more advanced than I, and I felt like a real clod. I was very flattered when Joe Rabinowitz, one of the more shining Francophiles, asked me to be his roommate.

Grenoble, at the foot of the Alps, was then a small provincial French town's cobblestoned streets. There were about a hundred American soldiers there as students and also a smaller number with housekeeping duties we snobbishly referred to as "truck drivers". We were in a French town, among the French. The populace had been totally impoverished by the occupation and the war. The women wore wooden shoes, a small cake of soap was a luxury, American cigarettes were the universal currency, a pair of silk stockings was worth the king's ransom.

The studies at the University were not demanding, although we did read some good literature and poetry. My French improved rapidly as we spent mornings at the university lectures, our afternoons going to French movies, and our evenings in the local cafés chatting up the girls.

I saw hundreds of American movies dubbed in French, among them *Camille - la Dame aux Camellias*, by Alexander Dumas, French language with Robert Taylor, an American, and Greta Garbo, a Swede. How strange it was to hear Taylor and Garbo speaking fluent, lip-synch French. I also saw the marvellous French classic, *Les Enfants du Paradis* made in France during the war. One of the greatest movies of all time. It moved me tremendously. We thought nothing of walking miles and miles, clear across town along the cobblestoned, tree-lined streets, to go to an as yet unvisited café. We had lots of time.

Every day we brought the Paris Herald Tribune and a loaf of oven-fresh French bread. We took them back to our room at the hotel and Joe would do the crossword puzzle while we would down the delicious still warm bread. Joe was a crossword puzzle wizz. He could do the puzzle just about as fast as he could write

Once on a hike in the foothills of the Alps, I spent a night in a cabin occupied by a few French soldiers and some German prisoners assigned to them for work detail. I acted as an interpreter between the French and the Germans, so that, for the first time, they could have a real conversation about their hometowns, their civilian occupations, their families. It was one of my great moments as a linguist.

I met Marie Helene, a university student, blonde, beautiful, a little chubby, and a champion skier. We took many trips to the Alpe D'Huez, a ski resort a few miles from Grenoble, high in the Alps. We would stop skiing in the early afternoon and spend the rest of the afternoon necking. We never made love. Marie was a strictly brought up Catholic girl of good family. We slept in separate rooms. Christmas Eve we walked through the snow to midnight mass. The snow was falling and the bells were tolling. It was so romantic.

A new term began at the University. I was promoted to "moniteur" or teaching assistant. The American soldiers in the beginning class which I helped teach, would repeat in unison after Mme. Huilier, the professor, the opening lines of his famous poem: "*Le Ceil est au dessus le toit.*" Only they pronounce the last two words "le twat" with infinite relish — being a slang term popular among soldiers, for vagina. I can still hear them recite, putting their heart and soul into it, "*Le Ceil est au dessus le toit*". No one loved this poem more than they. Mme. Huilier had no idea what was going on; she was very impressed by the hunger for culture demonstrated by "les Americains".

My assignment in Grenoble ended in early spring 1946. I was ordered to report to the third Army headquarters, now at the Bad Tolz outside of Munich. This was very close to the Starnberg-Seefeld-Garmish area where I spent time as a child after recovering from pneumonia. It was just nearby that the butcher first went after the bear and that the orange rolled down the mountain. But now I was no longer a little boy, at least not on the outside. I was a conquering American soldier. Marie Helene saw me off at the Grenoble train station. That too was a great moment. Nothing is more romantic than a European train station, especially at night. What does the song say — “the sigh of midnight trains and empty stations/silk stockings thrown aside, dance invitations/ oh have the ghost of you clings —”

I think now from this great distance, that Marie wanted to marry me. I sometimes wonder what my life would have been like had I done so. What if I have gone into the family business and become a French petit bourgeois in Grenoble? Why not? I started out as an Austrian Jew and spent some time as a New Zealand university professor. However, I had no intention of getting married. I wanted to return to the United States, make my way, get rich, lead a romantic and glamorous life, be a sahib. I had the confidence, but it was only paper thin. I was, and am, a slightly manic depressive personality. One minute I have great confidence in my abilities; I think I can do anything. The next, I'm not so sure.

At Bad Tolz the rot set in. The noble feelings of the war had vanished. The great volunteer army dissolved into an angle-working, fraternizing, gigantic black market. The newly arrived, just drafted, eighteen year-old quickly learned the ropes. His weekly PX ration of 40 packs of cigarettes gave him a stake with which to operate. In no time he had a German girlfriend and any number of German business connections. The Germans who have prospered under the Nazis were again rising to the top of the heap. They were

now prospering with the Americans. What was the war all about anyway?

On a trip with the 3rd Army swim team, which I had casually joined, we were quartered in the villa next to a clinic which housed badly wounded German veterans. Pale, emaciated, creatures in drab, worn and shabby hospital uniforms, half starved, some without arms, some without legs. How they looked at us — well fed, swaggering in health, as we partied with the only too willing German girls — not with hatred, but with sadness and infinite resignation. There was no bridge that led from their world to ours.

On another excursion I spent the night at a village inn. A former concentration camp inmate, one of the millions of homeless wanderers on the European roads, offered me a cigarette, the remainder of a well crumpled pack, which must have been his only possession. He smiled at me as if to say, “You are my brother,” and so I was, and so I am. I was an American college boy turned soldier, but I carried an awful lot of baggage around with me from my European childhood.

In May of 1946, it was my turn to be shipped home and be demobilized. My superior, a Lieutenant whose name I have long forgotten, offered to promote me to master sergeant if I stayed on. I did not even consider this proposition. Like the vast majority of my fellow soldiers, I couldn't wait to get out of the Army; but it made me feel good that I had been a good soldier. And it still does.

The trip home, the liberty ship, was very pleasant. I lay face down on a canvas hatch and dozed in the sun, listening to the creaking of guy wires, ropes, and pulleys, to the gently crashing waves, and the circling seagulls. There was a poker game which began before the engine started in Bremerhaven and continued twenty-four hours a day until after they stopped in New York. The entry into New York Harbour and the site of the Statue of Liberty were appropriately thrilling; but

there were no bands playing or cheering crowds. The war had ended six months earlier. Returning soldiers were old news.

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## DREAM XIV



### *The Priest*

I am a small boy in Italy, sitting between my mother — or is it my wife — and a young, slightly pudgy priest with a shaven head. The priest is shamelessly flirting, staring at my mother, right past me. I turn to him, now I'm grown up. "Why are you staring at my wife. You, a priest, you ought to be ashamed of yourself." I go to a psychoanalyst's office. A young woman opens the door. "I have a strange story to tell you. I know you'll think I'm crazy," I say. She replies, "Fine," and whips out a form as we go upstairs where there are lots of people writing and talking to their counsellors. I know the young woman is going to ask me an endless set of questions to fill out the form, so I start right in before she can stop me,



and tell my story about the priest, illustrating with pillows. Everyone in the room is fascinated by my story.

I am now with my mother, perhaps ten years old. We are in the terribly sleazy hotel, looking at the spots on the wall paper. "These spots were here the last time we were here, quite a long time ago," she says. A cat dashes out of a door and down the hall at supercat speed.

## DREAM XV



### *The Scheme — Too Clever by Half!*

I have this flim-flam scheme for myself and my friends. The scheme has a certain clever basis in fact, but it is also some sort of technical fraud. It depends on a set of materials — playing cards, fool's gold, bric-a-brac — all of which is contained in a very large oversized briefcase.

We are in a room. My gang is in trouble. I am going to rescue them with the scheme, but alas my briefcase is lost. No! Thank God! It was in back of someone's car. It is found. I start unpacking the briefcase. All eyes are on me. I feel a great sense of power. Everyone is watching me. I keep unpacking things but I never quite find what I'm looking for. I find some "fool's gold". I know this has something to do with the scheme — but what? A woman in her underwear has had enough of this. I'm sorry to see her leave. Another woman demands, "Can't we have breakfast? I'm starving."

She doesn't believe in the scheme. I begin to have a feeling of panic. It looks like I'll have to "fess up" that I can't remember or produce the scheme. I will be disgraced, scorned, ridiculed by my gang. I wake up in a semi-panic.

## AFTER THE WAR

*As I gird on for fighting  
My sword upon my thigh,  
I'll think on the old ill fortunes  
Of better men than I*

- AE Housman

I HAD TROUBLE ADJUSTING AFTER THE WAR. Not because of any traumatic war experience, but because I was maladjusted to begin with. The war had only put that on hold. After bumming around for a month or two, I got a job as a mathematician at Douglas Aircraft. I chose Douglas because it was in Santa Monica. I didn't want to go to work in downtown Los Angeles. I had no knowledge of airplanes and no particular interest in them. I've always preferred small towns, the country, the outdoors, the suburbs to the big city. Where did this preference come from? Much of my childhood was spent in big cities.

I spent all day punching an electromechanical calculator — a Frieden machine — now as outdated as the horse and buggy. I had to multiply  $5 \times 5$  flutter matrices with complex elements. I did this with accuracy and speed; how, I don't know. But I also exhibited some analytical talents beyond my immediate assignment. I was successful at my job. But I was also bored, miserable, and lonely. There must be more to life than this, I thought. So I quit and went skiing at Alta, near Salt Lake City. Everyone thought I was crazy. I stayed until I ran out of money, and I had to go to work in the Bingham Coppermine to earn enough money to get home to Los Angeles.

In the Bingham Coppermine, I got another taste of what it was like to be a member of the underclass. Bingham, Utah, was then a small Western mining town, with one or two steeply angled streets inhabited by the permanent

population — the bosses and managers of the mine. The labourers and drifters, of whom for the moment I was one, lived in bunk houses and ate in community kitchens. The work was not bad as manual labour goes, for it was an “open mine”; that is, mining took place above ground, not as is common in deep shafts under the earth. But there was an atmosphere of meanness and fear of momentarily having to fight for your possessions or even your life. Many of the drifters were long wed to the ways of the hobo jungles and some were petty criminals who had learned the art of survival in prison. I counted the days until I had saved up enough money to take the bus back to Los Angeles. Unlike George Orwell, who wrote *Down and Out in Paris and London*, and lived it for several years, I only lived in this world for a month, but that was plenty. This brief experience reinforced a sense I’ve had all my life, of how easy it is to fall out of the apparently god-given security and ease of the middle-class, into the lawless underclass jungle; or for that matter, into the real jungle, as in Evelyn Waugh’s *A Handful of Dust*.

Upon my return to Los Angeles, I decided to try the life of a beach bum. I had to act out all my romantic fantasies. My friend, George Hodgins, and I rented a place in Laguna Beach. But I soon found out that hanging around the beach all day doing nothing was not for me. I had no car, no money, and no girl. Again, I was bored, depressed, and lonely. I next got a job with an oil exploration company. Our task was to drill wells, set off an explosive charge in them, and record the echoing shock waves with microphones placed on the ground, called “jugs”. To the skilled geologist, the shock wave pattern indicated the likelihood of oil deposits. We travelled first to Bakersfield and then to Wheatland, Wyoming. We worked outdoors and in primitive makeshift offices. It was several cuts above being a migrant labourer in the Bingham

Coppermine, but still it was an unsettled, uncomfortable, womanless, rootless, and lonely life. It too was not for me.

Once more I returned to Los Angeles. I was rehired by Douglas, this time in the guided missiles group as a mathematician, and I started to make my way up the corporate ladder. I now permanently joined the professional college educated, upper-middle-class, of which I've been a member for over forty years, and God willing, in which I will remain the rest of my life. Through all my post-war experiences, I learned that neither the life of the ski bum, nor yet that of the beach bum suited me. Nor was I cut out to be the adventurous Jack London type roustabout. The easiest way to make a living, I discovered, and yet minimize the subservience, fawning and climbing so often a part of a career in the world of business, is to be a skilled technical person, an engineer, scientist, mathematician. Luckily that's what I was. Being a technical expert assures one of a modest comfortable living, but it does not offer the glittering prizes of power, prestige, fame, glamour and luxury, and the love of beautiful women. That is yet another world. That is the ruling class; I wanted to belong to it. I had my eye on it. I had one foot in it. But I was never quite ready to make the total commitment or take the risks to make that jump. Perhaps I was not sufficiently ruthless, aggressive, single-minded or self-confident. The combination of my nature and my experiences of my childhood and youth, set limits I was unable to overcome. I had to be content to be a small winner. And that is indeed the title I wanted to give to these little memoirs: *Diary of a Small Winner*. But, as I said in my introduction, this title had already been pre-empted.

It was now the spring of 1947. I was twenty-six years old. My life was full of promise. At Douglas in the missiles group, I turned out to be a bright young man. Douglas and the American Telephone Company were jointly developing the Nike anti-aircraft guided missile. Working on "rocket

ships” was just the glamorous occupation that I’d always dreamed of. It tied right in with my childhood fascination with astronomy and space travel. We sent teams of engineers and technicians for long stays at White Sands proving ground in New Mexico, where we test fired our missiles. One day Jack Bromberg, the Nike project manager, asked me if I’d like to go to White Sands with the Douglas team. Would I? I was delighted. All of a sudden I had money, I was somebody important, though very junior in the pecking order; I was a member of the upper classes, I was a sahib.

White Sands is an army base in the middle of the desert, not far from Los Alamos, where the atomic bomb was developed. We lived in barracks and ate Army food but now I ate with the officers and belonged to the Officers' Club. I was paid a per diem of seven dollars per day — then quite a bit of money — in addition to my salary, which was about two hundred and fifty dollars per month. For the first time in my life I had money. I was rich. On weekends we would go to Las Cruces, the nearest town, or to El Paso and across the border to Juarez. I bummed around with several other young engineers and we became good friends. We had a lot of fun and no worries. It was a carefree, happy time.

On returning from my first White Sands trip, I met a woman, thirty-five with expensive clothes, and an apartment in Beverly Hills. She was pretty and had a very sexy super feminine figure. A dream girl. The sort of woman I had fantasized about all my life but never thought I could rate. But now I was no longer a down and out student, or a lowly private soldier. I was a bright young engineer with the future. Blanche and I became lovers. Blanche was great in bed and loved sex.

In that department, Blanche was one in a hundred, or more likely, one in a thousand. Our romance lasted three years. I often had guilt feelings. I didn’t really love Blanche, and all the time that I was sleeping with her, I was looking

over my shoulder for someone more educated and intelligent, and younger, and more athletic, and Lord knows what else — never understanding that such a person might be infinitely less sexy, less feminine, less glamorous, less loving. In short, I behaved in accordance with the pattern which I've since repeated countless times. I compared the flesh and blood women who love me, to a fantastic dream princess who could never exist in real life. In the end, the Dream Princess always wins and I'm left lonely and alone. Well, it's been fun looking, but it's time to outgrow this behaviour. Or perhaps it is now too late.

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## DREAM XVI



### *The Pool*

My son Paul — perhaps about ten years-old in the dream — and I are in a swimming pool. Perhaps Anne is also there. Paul wants to show off how he can swim. He starts toward to the other end under water. He seems to swim across, possibly he hits another swimmer. He starts to tumble but he progresses rapidly forward to the far end of the pool under water. I swim, keep looking at him, and follow. I know there's something wrong. We get to the far end of the pool. Paul stops and he's at the bottom. I take a deep breath, dive toward the bottom, grab Paul, and pull him to the surface. I'm hoping that he hasn't been under long enough to suffer brain damage from lack of oxygen to the brain. How

educated one is in dreams. Not at all your primal or caveman state. As we arrive at the surface, Paul opens his eyes and gives me the most angelic smile. I feel such love.

INTERPRETATION:

Paul needs my help with his new job, new town — swimming in a strange pool. Write to him, tell him you love him.

## DREAM XVII



### *The Lost Script*

I am in a play; I have one of the leading roles, and I can't find my script. I go around everywhere, ask everyone, but no script. I find heaps of books, they almost have a script of the play, but not quite. I ask Madame Director. At first she seemed helpful, but then she disappears. She's not even going to be at the opening performance. It is of no importance to her. I ask Jerry Fallert, a million people. Everyone turns me down. Ignores me. Some very well-dressed elegant women are practising for a French play. They have evidently learned their roles in the current play, the one I can't find my script for, so well that they need not even think about them. They are practicing for the tryouts for the next play. I think "I can speak French", and look at me, poor slob. Here are these elegant, desirable, sophisticated creatures who have completely mastered the current play, and are trying

for the next, and I can't even find the script. I will have to withdraw from the stage after muttering a few lines. I'll be the laughing stock of all my friends. I won't be able to show my face.

## FAMILY HISTORY

*What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness,  
Anger, discontent and drooping hopes?  
Degenerate something daughters,  
Life is too strong for you –  
It takes life to love life.*  
– Edgar Lee Masters

MY MOTHER, MATHILDE FORSTER (she dropped the dots over the ö when she came to America) was born in a Polish village called Breszany near Lemburg. My Uncle Ludwig, her brother and senior by three years, was born in Lemburg (Lvov). This part of Poland called Galicia, was then a province in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The most notable citizen of Breszany was Yashu, the village idiot. Somehow I retain the impression that Yashu spent most of his time hanging around the fountain in the village square. As a little boy, I was regaled with stories about Yashu, and often admonished to eat my soup, do my lessons, and mind my manners, or else there was a great danger that I would end up like Yashu.

The family moved to Vienna, the capital of Austria, when my mother was perhaps eight years old. Her father, Marcus Forster, was a doctor. He wore ordinary clothes of the period — as opposed to particularly Jewish garb — like Sigmund Freud, of whom he was a contemporary, and quite likely an acquaintance. My grandfather was an official of the Temple, but, according to my uncle, not overly strict in following the Jewish faith.

My mother's mother was Hinde Margulius. In her later years, if not before, she became peculiar and ended her days in an institution for the mentally ill. Prior to that she liked

making preserves. Apparently she had a whole house full of the stuff and kept on relentlessly making it until they finally carted her off to the booby hatch. I remember visiting my grandmother in a hospital when I was perhaps five years old. She died in about 1930. My grandfather had already been dead some years then.

I have the names of my grandparents from the documents I obtained when settling my Uncle Ludwig's estate. My mother always told me that her parents were named Martin and Helen. Another little touch of her refusal to be Jewish.

As I described earlier, I returned briefly to Vienna in 1933, just before I came to America. At that time I met my great uncle Jacob Hand, who was also a doctor, his wife Tante (aunt) Wanda — she was most likely my grandmother's sister — and their children, Emil and Walther, whom I have already mentioned. My Uncle Ludwig and I were in a more or less chronic state of hunger then and once a week we would descend upon Uncle Jacob's family for supper to fill our empty bellies. Uncle Jacob and his wife had a down-at-the-heel maid, who served meals when summoned by an electric bell on a cord. The scene was typical of the impoverished gentility which then prevailed in the Viennese middle-class.

Another of my relatives, known to me only by reputation, was my great aunt Rosa. She was famous for haggling with the streetcar conductors about the fare. When those emissaries of the establishment got fed up with her and called the police, Rosa would produce her "pink certificate". It seems that in Vienna at that time they had a very civilized custom of issuing a pink certificate to people who were slightly dotty, but otherwise harmless. The policeman would shrug his shoulders and walk away. Aunt Rosa rode the streetcar in triumph and for free.

My mother and my uncle grew up in Vienna in very comfortable circumstances. My mother was bright and pretty, and as a schoolgirl, was selected to dance before the Emperor, Franz Joseph. The Emperor stepped on her foot, whether inadvertently, or as a signal mark of Imperial favour, my mother did not say.

A few years later, at the end of the Great War, the Habsburg Empire and the whole world that my mother grew up in vanished into thin air. People, to keep from starving, were eating any stray cats and dogs that were unlucky enough to run the streets of Vienna.

From childhood on, my mother was keen on literature and languages. She often told me how, as a schoolgirl, she excelled in Latin and was always the first in her class to grasp some subtle point of grammar, and how overwhelmed she was on being introduced to Natasha Phillipovna, in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. Another great childhood favourite of hers was Umslopogas, a native chieftain in Rider Haggard's *Alain Quartermain*. My mother, like many middle-class Europeans of her generation, grew up a hopeless romantic.

My Uncle Ludwig liked to ice skate, and of course he loved the girls. He was very musical and played the piano by ear. Perhaps it was difficult for him to have such a bright and pretty sister, but he always loved her and thought the world of her.

Uncle Ludwig was only an indifferent student. When the First World War started he took a so-called 'not matura.' That is, he managed to get his graduation from the Gymnasium (the very difficult European high school) by volunteering for the war. His parents were aghast and bribed an official so that Ludwig was given a relatively cushy military assignment. This did not deter him in later years from regaling people with his (perhaps somewhat imaginary) war experiences when he could find an audience.

According to Ludwig, our family originally came from Polish Russia, perhaps the Ukraine. The family were landowners and small manufacturers, on the whole quite prosperous. Both of my maternal grandparents had other brothers and sisters. Whether any of them or their children and grandchildren escaped from the concentration camps I do not know. However, from my talks with Ludwig, I gather that maybe our family was lucky, and that perhaps most, if not all, of us escaped.

As I said earlier, at the time of my visit with Ludwig in 1968, I was a minor executive with the General Electric company. I had just concluded some business which had taken me to Switzerland and to Vienna where I stayed in a fancy hotel and was driven about in a chauffeured limousine.

Soon after my visit, Ludwig was released from the sanatorium. I mentioned earlier that, as a victim of the Nazi persecution, he had obtained a small pension from the German government. He could now resume his visits to the coffeehouses that he was so fond of. So this story has a happy ending. My whole family, myself, my ex-wife Anne, and my four children, all visited Ludwig again in Berlin in 1971, just before immigrating to New Zealand. It was a happy occasion for him.

My mother died in 1972 of a brain tumour, in Santa Barbara. My uncle died in Berlin in 1975 of, I believe, a stroke or heart attack.

Of my father, the famous movie director, Michael Curtiz, I know almost nothing beyond what can be found in the standard film biographies. He was born somewhere in Hungary, and ran away with the circus at the age of thirteen. He met my mother in Vienna near the end of World War I. I was born of that union, as they say, in 1920, an illegitimate child.

My father came to America a few years before my mother, in late 1926. He had already directed a large number



of European movies. His family name was Kertesz, which in Hungarian means gardener, but was born 'Mano Kaminer'. He eventually anglicized his name to Curtiz. I met him several times when I returned from the war in 1946, and we had many talks. I would watch him shoot a scene from one of his movies, and then we would have lunch. I was already familiar with what went on in the movie studio from my earlier career as an extra, so I was not overly impressed.

On one of these visits, I was still in my army uniform and could see that my father was proud of me. He was obviously nervous, more nervous than I. On another occasion, he was working on a movie called *Jim Thorpe*, a biography of the famous Indian athlete. My father pronounced it Jim Torpee. Like many European movie people, he never lost his heavy accent. I think he wanted to help me with a movie career, but at the same time he was afraid of breaking some unwritten Hollywood rule about nepotism. His own career was then in decline. I had by now the confidence of the seasoned soldier, and I had a college degree in mathematics. While I was attracted to the glamour of the movies, I could see that it would take an awful lot of fawning and hanging about to get a foot in the door. I decided to do it my way and forget about the movies. I was very proud.

To complete this somewhat fragmentary family history, I should perhaps say a few words about my own children's early days.

My daughter, Mickey, learned to talk at a very early age, loved books and had a natural gift for language. We lived briefly in Texas, where Mickey acquired a Texas accent one could cut with a knife." Maike Cindai, (Cindy the little girl next door) plaiy with mai," Mickey would say. At the end of the day she would announce, "Ahm fixin' to go to bed." When she was a little older in her first year in grammar school, in Santa Barbara, she came home one day and

proudly announced, "I'm a soprano." This was the beginning of her musical career. She also referred to spaghetti as "gettish" and to predictions of temperature and rainfall as the "weather-cast". As I said, she had a way with words. She would walk about the house amid her toys and dolls, embroiled in the myriad of activities, and keep muttering, "I'm so busy I don't know what to do."

My son, John, was the world's cutest kid. In a crowd he would stand next to a perfect stranger and hold his hand, just from sheer trust, friendliness and love of humanity. He loved playing war. He would dig a big hole at the beach, jump into it, and with appropriate sound effects, defend it against an imaginary invading army. He would then jump out of the hole, and in the wink of an eye, become the attacking foe. In and out he jumped, playing all the parts of this dramatic battle at once.

He also owned a large collection of toy soldiers, his "men" spanning all the ages in the history of war. He and his friend, Gary D'Agostino from next door, would spend all day setting up their men, arguing endlessly about the rules of the forthcoming engagement. John's "men" included Robin Foot, and Herman Ben (Ben Hur). When John decided to go outside without shoes, it announced he was going "fairfoot."

At the age of five, my son Paul, the writer to be, decided to compose his autobiography. He sat down at his tiny desk, took a sheet of the little paper with giant lines that is used in the first grade and proudly began with his well-chosen title, "The Story of my Life". His first sentence was indeed admirable, for clarity, directness and dramatic force. It was: "When I was three years old I went to Mexico and got lost." Here this most promising story stopped, for Paul could not think of anything else noteworthy that had happened in his young life.

Paul's favourite game was beat-up. "Let's play beat-up," Paul would say to his brother John. John, who was the soul

of kindness, had no desire to beat up Paul, who was less than half his size and five years his junior. But Paul kept making and teasing him until finally John consented to beat him up (not too hard to be sure). Then Paul was happy.

My daughter Susie and I used to pretend that I was hypnotising her. She would sit in her little crib in her “jumpsuit” already for bed, and I would take a watch or some other shiny object on the chain, dangle it back and forth and repeat in best hypnotist manner, “you are getting sleepy... you are getting sleepy...”. Susie loved this game. She wasn’t getting the least bit sleepy. On the contrary, she was wide awake and soon she would take the watch, dangle it back and forth in front of my eyes, and try to hypnotize me. “Ir are getting sleepy,” she would repeat. For some reason she said “ir” for you.

Susie always had a great imagination. As a little girl of six, her favourite game was filly-foals. This consisted of hopping about on all fours, shaking her head, neighing, and in general pretending to be a small horse gambling about the meadows. The other day as I wrote this, I looked out the window and there were two little girls in the neighbour’s yard wildly hopping about on all fours playing “filly-foals”. How did they learn this game? It must be instinct. It brought back old times.

When somewhat older, perhaps eight or nine, Susie invented her own planet, complete with its own language. She spent many hours filling her notebooks with descriptions and drawings of her planet and vocabulary tables of its language. By the time she was ten, she had the vocabulary of a college professor.

All of the children loved animals. In addition to the family dog, Doc, and a succession of many, many cats, we had hamsters, guinea pigs, rats, snakes and goldfish. I do not recall ever having had a bird.

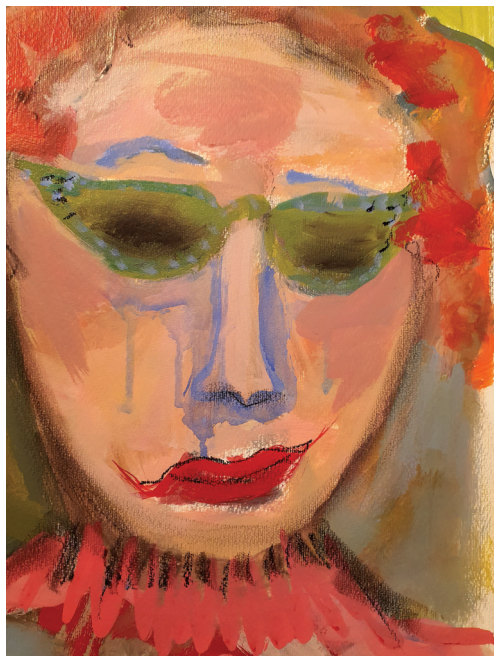
In the evening I read outloud to the children. A built-in

audience. The Greek myths, The Arabian nights, Anderson's and Grimm's fairy tales, stories from the Old Testament — I read them all. Often these stories were so beautiful that I was overcome with emotion and had to pause to collect myself. Sometimes I would stop and try to explain some point: "You see in those days they believed that..." The children, one and all, had little patience for this type of editorializing. "Read," they would say, "Go on and read." And so I read.

Should I ever become dictator or king of my own country, which I admit now seems quite unlikely, I would amend the criminal code so that in certain cases, the punishment of "No read" could be ordered. Criminals would be shipped to a desert island with adequate food, water and shelter but absolutely nothing to read. No books, no magazines, not even a half-page torn from a three-year-old newspaper. No read. The mere thought of this punishment would be so dreadful that exemplary behaviour would be assured. The jails would be empty; the judges and police on permanent holiday.

\* \* \*

## DREAM XVIII



### *You Look Older Now*

I am with a nice looking “older woman”, dark curly hair. She’s definitely past fifty. We are dressed up to go out. “You look older now,” she says to me. She senses that’s not exactly what I want to hear. “Older is nice,” she says, “you look very nice, but you look older.” The implication here, unspoken, is that now that I look older, in fact am older, of course — now I might be interested in her, while previously I would consider her too old. I say something like “It can’t be helped. I am getting older, everyone gets older”, and that’s just how I felt in the dream — resigned, a bit melancholy, but okay.

## DREAM XIX



### *A Dream of Death*

My son John and I and some other people are walking through the back of a restaurant, a loading area. Some Mexicans or Filipinos jump us. They have knives. I know I'm being cut though I feel no pain.

I'm outside on the pavement. There are lots of people around in groups of three or more. They are all very much alive; concerned with their own affairs. A medic comes by. Counts my pulse, twenty-seven, twenty-four... He says, "You won't make it." "You mean I'm going to snuff it? I've bought the farm?" "Yes," he says and moves on.

I'm lying on the pavement. I'm dying. "I want my son John," I say. People ignore me. "Shut up old man. Your son is

busy; he's on the phone".

"I want my son," I say.

What I want my son for is to say: "It's been a wonderful life and I loved it". I'm not afraid of death at all. I just regret leaving this life. If I have one regret it is that I didn't have more courage. I should have fought back against those Mexicans with the knife. I'm going to die anyway. I should have fought back.

*There was a king reigned in the east:  
There, when kings will sit to feast,  
They get their fill before they think  
With poisoned meat and poisoned drink.  
He gathered all that springs to birds  
From the many-venomed earth;  
First a little, thence to more,  
He sampled all her killing store;  
And easy, smiling, seasoned sound,  
Sate the king when healths went round.  
They put arsenic in his meat  
And stared aghast to watch him eat;  
They poured strychnine in his cup  
And shook to see him drink it up:  
They shook, they stared as whites their shirt:  
Them it was their poison hurt.  
--- I tell the tale that I heard told.  
Mithridates, he died old.*

AE Housman





Dad, now that you are gone, I wanted to connect  
your precious words with my paintings.

Lots of love, Mickey  
February, 2022

**L'dor V'dor.**





This memoir, written by Michael Curtis Forster (1920–2021), and illustrated by his daughter, Michelanne Forster, tells the story of a boy who didn't know he was Jewish, growing up in Vienna, Berlin, and Hollywood. With a bohemian screenwriter for a mother, and a well-known but absent film director for a father, we learn how poverty, antisemitism, and a thirst to 'fit in' as a new American, shaped his life. Written with honesty and wry humour, the memoir offers an insightful remembrance into a tumultuous and unique past.



THE NEW DREAM BOOK AND PERSONAL JOURNAL  
is a unique and honest story on what it means to  
become a wise person.







Mathilde Forster (Thilde Forster), Hollywood, 1932.

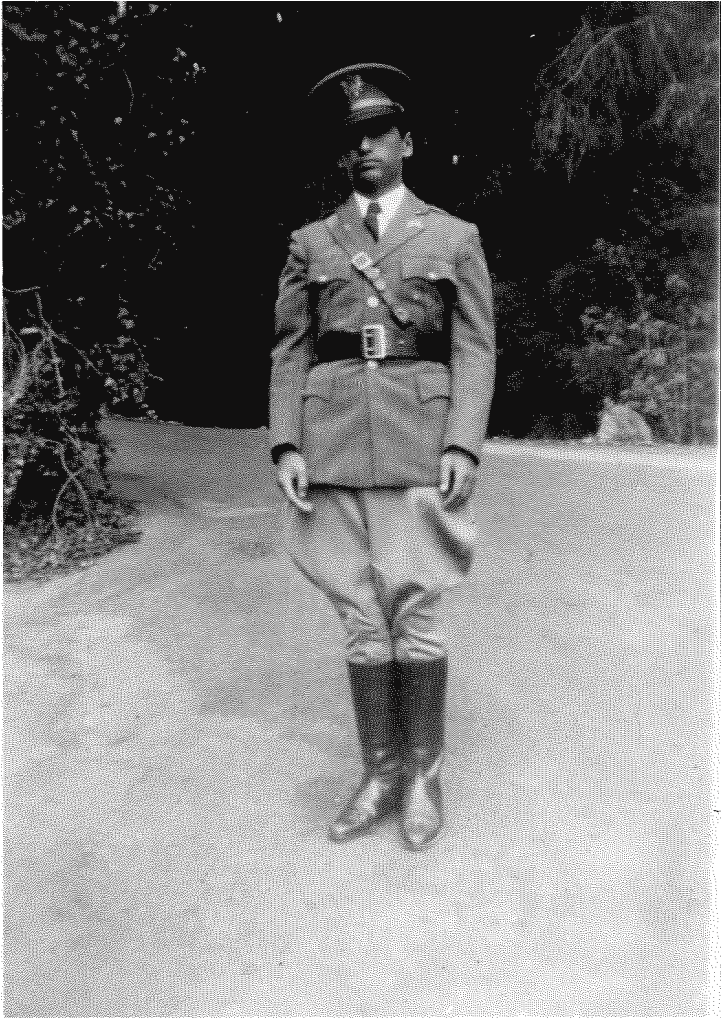


Warner Bros. publicity photo of Michael Curtiz  
(aka Mano Kaminer & Mihaly Kertesz), 1930.





Ludwig Forster, Brazil, Spring 1935.



Michael in his Raenford Academy military uniform, aged sixteen.



Mike, after the war, Santa Monica, undated.



The newly weds- Mike and Anne (nee Johnson) at  
Lorraine Johnson's home in Solana Beach, California, 1951.

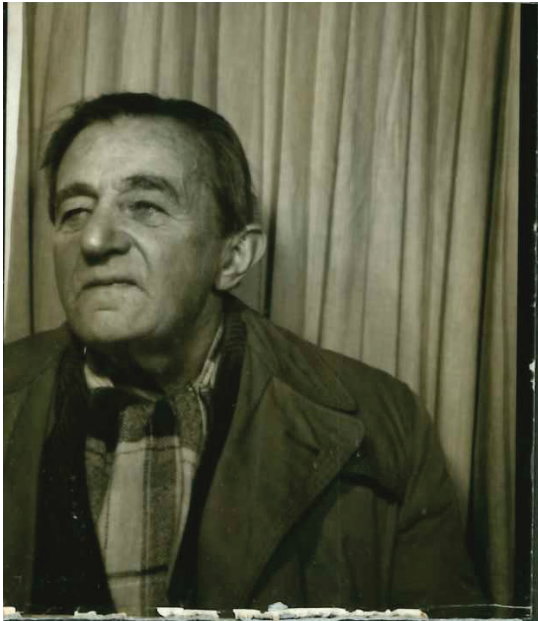


Thilde, work photo, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, 1960's.





Mike, the young executive, Santa Barbara, 1960.



Ludwig, photo booth portrait, Berlin, undated.



The Forster family: Mike,  
Paul Edward, John David,  
Michelanne, Susan Carolyn,  
Virginia Anne,  
Santa Barbara, 1965.