

# **Schönwalde**



## **Memories from Childhood and Youth**

**by**

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## Introduction

Written in Maschen since 2002

Now, at the age of 65 and at the end of my professional career, I have started to put down on paper my memories of childhood and youth. I wish that the events of this long gone time should not get lost unceremoniously and should be preserved for the future generations. On the other hand of course, I have to ask myself, who could really still be interested in this story.

Many memories are faded and blurred. Of course, there are big gaps, especially in the memories of my earliest childhood; it was such a long time ago and also, my memory is not very good. Sometimes the described events will not be chronologically correct, but I'm telling them from my own point of view.

In spite of these shortcomings, I just started to write: at first spontaneously a few events and impressions which I immediately recalled and then others, which would slowly emerge from the dark throughout the writing process, having rested somewhere in my memory.

The dramatic events of our escape and our following deportation from East Prussia and the immediate postwar period take center stage of my childhood memories and influenced decisively the path my life took. By retelling them, I lived through the horror of that time once more.

While writing down my own memories I occasionally referred back to stories, accounts, and letters by others from the circle of friends and family, if it related to concrete dates. Many suggestions showed up while also looking through photographs and other documents, left over from childhood. These sources added to my own memories like pieces of a mosaic.

Unfortunately, many witnesses are silenced now and I no longer have the chance to research more deeply into the past. First and foremost I'm thinking of my deceased parents; have to blame myself for not asking intensively enough, when there was still the chance.

## Childhood in Schoenwalde/East Prussia Between 1937 and 1944

Whenever I think of Schoenwalde, which still happens quite often today, I feel much melancholy and a bitter pain.



*Postcard from 1936*

Not so much about the loss of my childhood but especially the fact that this beautiful piece of earth stopped to exist for myself and the family. It is irrevocably lost. I probably romanticized the old days, but sometimes those years in Schoenwalde, until the end of 1944, seem like a beautiful dream to me. The yearning for and the bond with the lost homeland will always be there.

Born on March 31<sup>st</sup> 1937, I grew up with my parents Heinz and Margarete Vogel [*nee* Alsen] (called “Vati” and “Mutti”), my maternal grandmother Wera Alsen [*nee* Moser] (“Omama”) and my three siblings Wolfgang, Brigitte and Elke, born in 1936, 1940 and 1943 on our farm/estate in Schoenwalde.



*Summer 1943*

In my often fragmented memories, especially in those of my earliest childhood, the beautiful events and occurrences emerge first. So I will never forget this unbelievably comforting feeling of running barefoot over the yard of Schoenwalde, when the winter was finally over and one could feel the warm earth under my bare feet. I still can literally smell the snow, which we had quite in abundance in East Prussia, when we played with our sleds or built snowmen. Spontaneously, I recall, the enjoyment of sitting on the porch eating our grandmother's homemade "Stritzel", a freshly baked white bread slathered with butter and golden honey.

Good memories involve listening to the chirping of the swallows and observing them while they built their nests under the eaves, and feeding their young ones. My special favorites were the storks, whose flapping wings I still can hear today and whose first flying attempts from the roof of the Dieckmann's house could be well observed from our garden. Also, the frog concert by the village pond belongs to the fond sounds of childhood.



*Harald and Wolfgang with hobby horses, 1939*

I can picture very clearly in front of me our house, the stables, the many animals and the big garden of Schoenwalde. We children had many opportunities to let off steam and to always discover something interesting on the farmyard, in the garden or on the fields.

## The Farm

Our property was situated at the east end of the village road and was, at more than 800 Morgen [500 acres], the largest property of the old village Schoenwalde, which was located 20km northeast of the capital Konigsberg. Following the village road, not far from the farm, was our second farm unit called the "other" farm which also included cottages and apartments. That's where the numerous employees, day laborers, the treasurer, the coachman, the cow milker's family, the pig farmer and various other employees for field, house and farmyard lived.

*Coachman Wiepening 1935*

From our living quarters one would go north, over the cobble stone road to the big cow stable, where one would find a lot of cows in the wintertime and over to the very left part the huge bull with a nose ring, in chains. Named Darwin, he commanded a lot of respect and even fear.



*Our house, view from the yard*

In front of the cow stable was, if I remember correctly, a dung heap and a silo. To the left of the cow stable was the horse stable. There, I still know, that the old Maschinski [one of the farm employees] fell at one point out off the hay loft opening, down to the stone floor and got injured on the head, very badly. In any case, I got an enormous fright from the pool of blood on the floor.

In front of the cow and horse stables was a pond. During the summer time it was used as a watering place and the horses were led there after the work. I remember that we boys rode often on top of the sweaty horsebacks through the pond, of course without a saddle, hanging on to the manes of the horses. It was strange for us children to observe the mating act of the many animals of the farm, while not really rationally comprehending the matter. In any case, we developed early on a natural sense of procreation.

In front of the above mentioned cow stable was a silo for animal feed, where beet greens were compacted with the help of a horse. The horse was called “Blindfuchs” [blind fox] and was a blind animal that had once

fallen into the silo and had to be rescued with enormous efforts.

Behind the cow and horse stables there was a wider path through our fields, passing by the 3 to 5 meter deep sand pit, leading in the western direction to a small neighboring village with the beautiful name of Poggenpfuhl. From there it went to Kuggen, also belonging to the parish Schoenwalde, the ancestral home of the Baron Huelleshem, who had an especially for him reserved seat in our church. Behind the above mentioned path, to the north stood the big field barn, behind which were our fields, reaching all the way to the Kugger Chaussee in the North.

At a right angle to the horse stable, to the left/south there was the barn with the garage for the tractor, a loud monster, the "FAMOR". Cumbersome to start, the deafening noise of the engine gave me always a huge fright as a child. I always had to cover my ears. One night that barn burned down. What a terrible and powerful experience for us children! As far as I know the cause of the fire was never identified. Only more than fifty (!) years later did I hear from Alfred Brosche, the old loyal friend of our family, that his father managed to get the tractor out of the burning barn and, totally shocking for me, that there had been a rumor and suspicion in the village that we children, Wolfgang and I together with the little Alfred Unger, had started the fire while playing carelessly with matches.

Connected to the barn at some distance was our Deputantenhaus [home for laborers], where our milkers (or, as they were called, Schweizer) family—the Ungers—lived. As already mentioned, I played a lot with their son Alfred Unger. In the south corner of the house lived the family Bagusch, who also worked for us. In another part of the house was my father's office, when he arrived in Schoenwalde in 1934 to take his position as a young farm inspector. Many years later the house was occupied by prisoners of war or foreign laborers (from Russia or Poland?). One memory stuck with me, that one time my father was hit in the head with a bottle when he was giving orders or trying to resolve a dispute. Somehow, I believe, alcohol was involved. I don't know what consequences this had in the end had, but I was frightened by the violence of this occasion and also by my father's severity in dealing with these workers. As far as I remember I felt something like fear, maybe a subconscious premonition of future events during the flight? One has to consider that there was a war already going on at this time, even though at least we children didn't feel anything of it in our quiet Schoenwalde.

Between the Schweizerhaus and our living quarters there was a little forest or a piece of property with various kinds of trees. Vati had a second driveway put in, diagonally from the village street to the courtyard, so that the four-in-hand horse wagons could get more easily to the yard, because the old driveway ran perpendicular from the village street to the courtyard.

On the right side of the yard was a row of stables, from the house to the north, first rabbit hutches and then the chicken coop. Attached to that was the blacksmith's shop, where our treasurer [Kaemmerer] Brosche reigned and which also was used to shoe the horses.



*Kaemmerer Friedrich Brosche 1935*

Here was, as far as I remember, also a fruit press that was used to make apple juice.

On the roof of the workshop was a “Dachreiter” [a ridge turret] with a bell, which was always rung at lunch and whose bright sound was heard far over the yard and open fields.



*Bell tower with bell*

It was said that it sounded in the East Prussian Platt [north German dialect] somewhat like this: “*Kommt aeaete, kommt aeaete, ihr hundsfuhle Kraeaete!*” [Come eat, come eat you lazy toads]. The familiar sound with its attributed meaning is in any case very clear in my memory....

Following the blacksmith shop were the pig sty and the barn for the sheep. About the latter I’m not 100% sure anymore but I distinctly remember how once the ram took me on his horns in the pasture behind the

stables, when I had climbed the fence to retrieve our ball. The heavy set animal came with enormous force towards me and rammed me repeatedly with full force and pushed me over, charging again and again. The scar from the burst upper lip is still there, under the beard, and I can still see and feel it. Wolfgang, too, remembers the occasion, because he marked the spot on his sketch of the farm, that he drew in 2001 with: “Hier (Kreuz) stiess dich der Bock.” [Here (X) is where the ram bumped you.]

## Our House

And now all about our house itself: Coming from the village road one would turn sharp right onto our property. To the right was the stately two story house, separated from the driveway by a wooden fence. By passing the gable and turning right, one would reach the forecourt. There was a rondell, a circular patch of grass, surrounded by a cobble stone path.



*Our house viewed from the garden*

Behind the corner of the house was the entrance, through which one would enter the Diele [foyer]. To the left of the foyer was the kitchen. Adjoining were the hallways to the maid's room, living room, dining room, veranda [sun porch] and the staircase to the upper floor. Of to the right was the “Herrenzimmer” [study], dad's empire. As far as I remember, there was a card table, next to the desk and a set of leather chairs, where a circle of my father's friends and neighbors used to play Skat [a card game] and where there was always the smell of cigars, beer and liquor in the air.

The telephone was either in the study or the foyer, I'm not quite sure anymore, but I still remember our phone number “Kuggen 67”. (The post office servicing Schoenwalde was in the neighboring village Kuggen).

On the second floor, to the left was my parents' bedroom and also the bathroom with WC [water closet = toilet] I'm unable to describe from memory the exact location of the other rooms, like the children's bedrooms, the guest room and other premises. But I seem to remember one more thing, that as a toddler I sometimes used to be tied to my crib, probably because I must have been restless in that phase. But this feeling of being tied to the bed and the agony that I felt then is one of my earliest - unpleasant- childhood memories.

## Our Garden

There was a side staircase leading from the south facing the veranda down into the big garden, which consisted of the big lawn with the rondell in front of it.



*Grandmother Wera Alsen with Wolfgang, 1936*

Looking to the right, in the corner between village road and driveway, there was a tall Faulbaum [buckthorn tree], which exuded a heavy and sweet smell when in bloom. Passing by the kitchen and the maid's room, with the window with a view of the garden, one would reach a long garden path, which ended by the pergola, surrounded by trees and bushes. Here was a white garden bench and many family photos were snapped here.



*The four Vogel children, 1943*

To the right of said path, which led by a linden tree and asparagus beds, grew a huge raspberry patch in long rows. Behind the pergola were bushes and further down behind them was the fence to the neighbor Wengel, more precise the "Post" Wengels. The other Wengels in the village were not related to Buergermeister-Wengels [the village mayor]. We boys often climbed that fence to steal apples and plums. We were

especially fond of the plums, because we didn't have any in our own garden. If our father ever would have found out, we boys would have been most likely punished with the dreaded "der Gelbe Onkel" ["Yellow Uncle"], a light brown riding whip with which we've got occasionally acquainted. At the least we were threatened with it when we were disobedient.

From the pergola to the north, through all kinds of shrubs one would get to the afar mentioned sheep pasture. To the south of it was the range of the chicken coop and further back the rabbit hutches and the hot beds. To the left of the garden path were miscellaneous asparagus beds.

## The Fields

As already mentioned, there was a field path north of the stables which led, coming from the "New Chaussee" and passing the Gastwirtschaft [tavern] and Kolonialwarengeschaeft [grocery store] Braunert, to the village of Poggenpuhl. I remember very well, that the whole family (especially when we had visitors at Schoenwalde) would go for a stroll through the fields on Sundays. Pictures of those Sunday walks can be found in Muttis [mothers] old photo collection. The walk included naturally a visit of the stables.

I remember very well how we once hiked all the way to the Kugger forest. It must have been spring or early summer and I admired the beauty of the wild flowers, especially the lilies of the valley and the many other flowers, whose smell combined with the sound of the birds in the woods and the clearing I still remember very distinctly.

In the wintertime, which is usually very severe in Eastern Prussia, we played one of our favorite games, Schlittenscheudern [sled skidding] with the other village children on the frozen ponds. A post was driven into the ice and a sleigh was attached to it. One child would sit on it and the others would spin it in a circle around the post.

Let's get back to the above mentioned collection of old photos: it is almost a miracle that so many prints survived the flight and displacement. The oldest pictures, for instance one of my great grandfather Robert Moser (the conductor), and others of my grandparents are from before the First World War; others are from the twenties and thirties; the latest from the time up to 1944, the year when it was still peaceful here in the countryside and nobody suspected that everything would come to a terrible end pretty soon ... But I will return later, and in more detail, to those life deciding and important events.

## School Days

In August of 1943 I was enrolled into the village school, which was right next to the church. There is a picture of me from that day; proud in shorts and sandals and the Schultornister [knapsack for school books] on my back.



*[My] first day of school August 1943 (left Brigitte, middle M. Vogel)*

My teacher, the cantor Meller, was a strict gentleman, with a crew cut and the ever present cane in his hands, which wasn't just for pointing at the chalk board but also served on occasion as an instrument of corporal punishment for us students. I didn't perceive it as unnatural or unusual, that one had to get up on command at the beginning of class, raise the arm to the "Hitlergruss" and yell "Heil Hitler!".

The school equipment consisted of a backpack, which held the plate of slate Schiefertafel [writing slate], Griffel [slate pencil] and a sponge. As far as I remember, the lesson for us Neuklaessler [freshmen] started with the writing of "Krueckstoecken" ["walking sticks"], which means rows of parts of the lower case letters "n", "m" and "i" in Latin cursive, all neat in a row with attention to the upper and lower lines. If one made a mistake with the reciting or behaved improperly, one had to get up and step in front, hold out your hands and receive one or more hard hits on the fingertips. I remember too, that there were always hits on the buttocks. I believe, even though I was surprised and thought this painful punishment and type of punishment was unusually severe, I never thought of it as unjust. I mean, we children were more or less trained "auf Zucht und Order ausgerichtet" [in the spirit of discipline and order]. Ultimately, after all, it was wartime, and although still faraway and not noticeable by us at the time, it seemed "Das Soldatische" ["the spirit of soldiery"] had apparently infused our life.

I cannot quite remember any more if there was more than one class or if all ages were taught in one room. I also don't know how Wolfgang was taught since he was enrolled a year ahead of me. Schoenwalde and all the included neighboring hamlets were not highly populated. To my knowledge, Mr. Meller [Herr Meller], who was also the cantor of the church, was the only teacher of the school (later I learned that there had been another teacher).

On the way to school, along the village road, we had to pass the farm of the already mentioned mayor Wengel. A big dog would routinely come out and charge at us children, barking and growling fiercely, and terrify us. This, strangely, took seat in my memory, where as there are a lot of gaps about the lessons themselves and also about how long Wolfgang and I attended school until our evacuation in January 1945. There is a high probability that there was no school in the last weeks of winter in 1944/45 because of the approaching war action. In my family archive I found the following sentences on a surviving post card from January 4<sup>th</sup> 1945, written by the then eight year old Wolfgang to aunt Ingrid Flottwell in Berlin: "... We are

all healthy. Today is the end of our vacation. School will start at half past one..."

At the time when the school was forced to be closed, after a year and a half, due to the circumstances of the approaching war, I was able to read and write rather well. The basic rules of counting I also had mastered rather well. That winter was followed by three years without school, from 1945 to 1947, under the Russians. That we didn't forget how to read and write was due to our own initiative and maybe an inherent thirst for knowledge, but foremost due to my mother. I remember that Wolfgang and I devoured everything readable that we could get our fingers into in the time of cultural chaos of the Russian years. When we both finally got back to school in Hamburg-Curslack after those terrible three years under the Russians, we were only set back by one year. I'll come back to that later.

In our family there was always the talk that we children should and had to continue our education in Koenigsberg. That was the custom in our village. Already our parents had concluded their schooling in Koenigsberg; father, coming from Globuhnen and mother from Schoenwalde. The thought, to have to leave home or to have to exchange the familiar Schoenwalde with the big city of Koenigsberg was always terrible and unbearable for me. I often had nightmares, just thinking about having to leave the childhood home, and I would cling internally to our beautiful village with its familiar people, our house, the farm, fields and animals. Just don't think about losing all that, not even temporarily, so I thought. Was this only a childish fear or maybe already an unconscious premonition of the horrible events that, even without us knowing, were already slowly but inexorably rolling towards Eastern Prussia and which would destroy our idyllic world so brutally?

## The Party [Nazi] / Soldier and War

The National Socialism was not really a topic to be debated at home in Schoenwalde as far as I remember. I am sure that as a child I never heard any mention of the existence of concentration camps and persecution of the Jews. However, I believe to have heard the derogatory expression for Jews "Itzich" in those days. But within the family circle rumors about the camps or even medical experiments on human did not come up. But I recall to have heard later that Hans Decker - a student of medicine and a friend of the Moser's who had lived with them for a while - had talked about it or at least had made references. The notion of being critical of the regime was non-existent in our neighborhood. On the contrary, the Fuehrer [Adolf Hitler] was perceived as almost a god and one simply loved him. I still remember having been called by our parent or grandmother to listen to a speech on our "Volksempfaenger" [radio sold during the Nazi time] during which a feel of a holy shudder came over me.

Omama Wera Alsen wore a [Nazi] party badge. And Vati was a party member [NSDAP]; Mutti however, didn't, I think. Was she possibly more critical and skeptical than many others? We will never be able to know for sure. In a collection of old photographs I found a group picture in which my then young father wore a SA-uniform, including a party badge as far as I can remember. Even later - long after the war was over - an often used expression of his was [when a matter wasn't handled according to his liking]: "Under Hitler this would not have happened!" Unfortunately, I never talked with him about it. However, decades later, former Schoenwalders did not perceive him as such a gung-ho Nazi in contrast to others who were far more zealous such as the blacksmith Eggert or Opa [grandpa] Nohr or school director Meller and who were all known active party members in the village.

In spite of the terrible loss of our homeland, solely by Hitler's guilt, Vati [my father] - as mentioned above - apparently was still hanging on to some of the old principles of the perished Third Reich. This is partly understandable if one tries to put one's self into those times, but - on the other hand - totally incomprehensible in that the regime's character was basically criminal and that Hitler had Germany including East Prussia gambled away; apart from the fact that the committed crimes were atrocious and as a

result Germany's reputation suffered for all times! Unfortunately this topic was never fully resolved with Vati. It was impossible to convince him of the opposite. But it is easy to later judge someone if one's self did not experience those times!

Wolfgang and I had our favorite toys, all military. German soldiers, weapons, tanks, airplanes, artillery and accessories, all in miniature. At age six or seven we were well-versed in military matters such as officer ranks, type of airplanes etc.. It goes without saying that we were always proud of German war successes; the losses we either didn't hear about or didn't want to hear of.

Our mothers [Grete Vogel, *nee* Alsen] twin brother, uncle Hans Alsen was a young thirty year old, sharp Hauptmann [captain] in the Wehrmacht [German army] and was to us our revered idol and shining hero; he was fun loving and especially friendly towards us children during his [army-] leaves in Schoenwalde. That's how he will always remain in our memory. In August 1944 at the young age of thirty-one he was forever lost in action while fighting on the western front in France against the invading allies. Left are only a series of photos, most of them showing him in uniform including the one of his wedding with aunt Erika in Schoenwalde in April 1940.

*Wedding of Hans and Erika Alsen Schoenwalde, 30 April 1940*

Friedel [Friedrich] Moser, my "Grossvetter" [cousin once removed] went to the military already at the age of seventeen and who I during his visits to Schoenwalde liked very much and who I regarded so to speak as an older friend and who towered over us Vogel children - he too was lost during the battles in East Prussia in January [31], 1945 at the age of nineteen...

In our village we generally had no contact with soldiers, except for once, when in 1942 or 1943 a larger contingent of troops including many horses stayed for a short time with us in Schoenwalde under the command of our uncle Werner Nitsch, a Lieutenant in the Wehrmacht. I still remember well how the horses were kept behind our barns, camouflaged with branches. Whether the troops were on the way towards Russia or on the retreat I can't recall any longer.

## The Bombardment of Koenigsberg

In Schoenwalde reigned utter peace; but one time- I can't remember 1943 or 1944 [it was in August 1944] we witnessed the terrifying bombardment of Koenigsberg from a distance of 20k [12 miles]. First, we noticed a reign of Stanniol-Streifen [strip of aluminum foil] onto our fields which we either collected or had to collect. These had been dropped by enemy fighter bombers with the intention of interfering with German air defense. In a clear moon lit night we saw and heard a deep rumble of a formation of fighter bombers, flying smooth and unbelievably high but still recognizable in direction towards Koenigsberg. The fires in the city lit up the horizon and the next morning and day the sky was in a veil of smog. Even partial burned flakes of paper fell from the sky on our village coming from the shattered city. I don't remember how we children felt about it. We just lacked the power of imagination of what a bombed out city would look like. But only a few months later I saw and witnessed the bombed out Koenigsberg.

## Relatives and Travels

In Schoenwalde life continued in its usual peaceful way.



*The family in the garden in 1943 with Hertha Nitsch, 4<sup>th</sup> from the left and Hans Alsen, 2<sup>nd</sup> from right*

We had frequent visits from our relatives, such as from my favorite aunt Erika Alsen with her little son Ekkehard; aunt Hertha and uncle Werner Nitsch with Ursel, Inge, and Manfred; uncle Bernhard and aunt Erika Perband from Henneberg. I also remember an aunt of Vati's: Elli Schmidt, who loudly played piano and sang (e.g. "...wovon kann der Landser denn schon traemen") [=“what is a soldier left to dream about”]. As I later heard and read in conversations it was the peacefulness and hospitality that the relatives coming to Schoenwalde.

I also remember a trip of the Schoenwalde family to the Vogel-estate Globuhnen with their many horses as well as a trip during Pfingsten [Pentecost, a holiday commonly celebrated in Germany celebrating the descent of the Holy Spirit] to the beautiful estate Drewshof near Elbing of aunt Edith Alsen, the sister of our grandfather Reinhold Alsen, and a following trip to the beach at the Baltic resort Cranz. Aside from occasional trips to the capital of Koenigsberg, the family remained at home at the trusted Schoenwalde. I can also remember being taken to a horse race where my Vati—a passionate horse lover—had taken Wolfgang and me. My favorite horse was called Elmsfeuer [Elms fire = static discharges occurring in nature]. On occasion we traveled with Mutti to Koenigsberg by Kleinbahn [a narrow-gauge train] to go to the movies; the titles of the movies escape me but I remember the fascination I experienced about the war reports at the front and various victories.

Christmas 1944, as well as Brigitte's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday and January 15<sup>th</sup> 1945 were still peacefully celebrated in the snowed in Schoenwalde. Nobody had the slightest notion that in a very short time span all this would come to an end....

## The Escape in 1945

It must have been at the middle of January 1945, when the first refuges from eastern and northeastern part of East Prussia appeared at our farm, from places like Poggenpfehl and Poduhren to settle down with us. We became abruptly aware about the precarious and potential dangerous situation we were in—something nobody would image at all. Our house, the barns and stables filled up rapidly with refuges, while cannon fire was heard in the distance.

Finally, on January 20<sup>th</sup> 1945 we left Schoenwalde hastily and unprepared. Vati brought our family via horse slip or carriage with the essential baggage to the Kleinbahn station at the neighboring village Kondehnen: Omama, Mutti, the four children, our tailor Frau Nagel, Haustochter [refers to a voluntary position, room and board provided], Frä. [miss] Juedz. We were snowed in and it was freezing. The train, which was later cancelled due to the attacks, brought us eight refugees to the almost totally destroyed Königsberg which was surrounded and going to be conquered any time. We went to our relatives, the Mosers, who lived in the center of town near the Schlossteich [a small lake] and where the Vater Moser also had his medical practice. Due to the [2] previous bombings [in August 1944] by allies, their house was badly damaged but was still standing amid the bombed out neighborhood. The Mosers must have been extremely shocked when the eight of us appeared unannounced on the doorstep with our luggage and asking for shelter which they of course provided. We thought that our stay would only be temporary and that we would soon be able to go back to Schoenwalde. At that time we were unable to image that our homeland, our whole world, would have been lost forever...

By now the rest of the remaining villagers organized their departure from Schoenwalde—under very hard climatic conditions—to go westward. Most of them left by the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 1945, just shortly after our departure. I learned of this date decades later from Alfred Brosche. Before that—according to an order of the [Nazi-] party—no one was allowed to evacuate, although most families had packed their belongings secretly because of the ever approaching front. At the point the Russians were only a few kilometers away from our village and we were understandable panic stricken. Only a few [villagers] had remained at home because they were unable to gather their belongings and so they experienced the entry of the Russians between January 1945 and up to the end of 1947, accompanied by incomprehensible and horrifying incidents. When one reads private accounts (such as the Erlebnisbericht of Sofie Wieneke) one can only describe them as the most horrible nightmarish experiences. The experiences that our Vogel family went through during our later escape were not much less terrible...

## Vati's Fate

Vati was thirty eight years old at the time and had been exempted from serving in the military except for a short tour of duty as a reservist during the Poland campaign; he remained in Schoenwalde in order to maintain our farm; but was after all inducted to the Volksturm on January 20<sup>th</sup> just days after our departure [Volksturm was the last desperate attempt of the Hitler regime to win the war or at least hold back the advancing Russian front by drafting teenagers and elders who have been previously exempt from the military]. Before his induction Vati cared for the livestock and then let them all go free. The horses had already been given to the neighbors for the wagons. Had we only known that we would see Vati only three years later... For almost two years we had no sign of life from him and vice-versa.

On January 26<sup>th</sup> 1945 only six days after his recruitment to the Volksturm, Vati was seriously wounded near neighboring village of Neuhausen by grenade splinters and was sent to the military Yorck hospital in Koenigsberg; he lost two fingers on his left hand and suffered deep lacerations on his left thigh and foot. After five days, while he was temporarily bandaged and the hospital being bombed, he was transported on a military hospital transport ship via Pillau heading west and arriving finally in Kiel; he was now on safe grounds although heavily wounded. As I had mentioned, all this had been unknown to us at the time. About 45 years later, we discovered a letter of my father, addressed to the Brown couple, dated February 6<sup>th</sup> 1946 in which he describes in detail of his fate and that of relatives and acquaintances during the fateful year of 1945 and his painful emotions he experienced.

## The Fortress of Koenigsberg

We spent about four weeks in this heavily bombed and besieged city. Remarkably, most memories from that time had faded and even totally disappeared, probably due to the terrifying fear of possibly getting buried under the rubble.

Almost every night there were aerial attacks and we had to go down to the bomb shelter in the basement with just a bare amount of emergency luggage. I will never forget the mortal terror coming from the frightful howling of the sirens, the muffled sounds of the bombs impacts and their heavy vibrations. Once, during the day time looking out from the second floor of the apartment I clearly saw bombs landing in the nearby Schlossteich, creating huge fountains. I probably had not run fast enough into the basement. I also have a good recollection of the many destroyed and smoke-darkened buildings, probably among them Stadthalle [a concert hall, situated across from the Moser's apartment], passing remaining façades with bombed out windows and still attached stucco and stone figurines. There were such stone sculptures one finds on theater buildings with strangely smiling and sad expressions (comedy and tragedy masks). To this day when noticing such figurines I make an uneasy connection to the horrible experiences in the bombed out Koenigsberg. I then see the totally destroyed streets in my mind with its mountains of debris, bent steel trusses and burnt out cars.

One day we had to leave the Moser apartment and spend some frightful days and nights in a relatively solid bunker-like building near a garage, while the bombing steadily increased and the circle of siege around Koenigsberg became increasingly tighter.

## Pillau, February 1945

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 1945, we and the Moser family were transported on military vehicles in freezing weather to the harbor of Koenigsberg from which we were to be shipped along with masses of refugees through a sea channel to Pillau [a small harbor town on the open sea of the Baltic], also being under heavy attack. This particular date I took from my aunt Ilse Moser's memoirs.

This harbor served as a last escape route and was desperately defended by the German forces and indeed held successfully until April. From here we were to be transported via sea to Danzig, along with thousands of other refugees, in order to evade the ever advancing Russians.

During heavy fighting around Pillau, Vati's brother, Uncle Kurt Vogel fell during action on March the 2<sup>nd</sup> 1945, just a few days after our arrival. Fifty six year later, in 2001, we discovered his name on one the many memory plaques for the 5000 German soldiers...

At this point I want to also refer to the memoirs of my mother from 1948 to help refresh my own memories and which described the dramatic occurrences.

That's how I learned that we had to wait four days at the Navy encampment Schwalbenberg [in or near Pillau] under emergency conditions to wait to be transported from here towards the west. We were ordered to the harbor for boarding. There we were, along with hundreds of waiting refugees under the supervision of the military to board an old freighter. Long ladders enabled us to reach the belly of the ship where a chaotic crowd formed.

## Across the Bay Towards Danzig

After we finally reached the open sea while experiencing strong winds and uncomfortable swells, almost everyone became sea sick. While finally reaching the upper deck via long ladders we immediately vomited over the railing. I still recall how deadly wretched I felt during this crossing. The stench on this swaying ship became continuously more unbearable because many passengers weren't able to make it to the upper deck. These unbearable conditions in the belly of this freighter—where we refugees were laying on straw packed like sardines being afraid of the bombardments still remembering the terror of the prior weeks which we were unexpected, unprepared and helplessly subjected to, the uncertainty of what would await us in the future—made this trip a journey of hell and horror.

At some point (I don't have a time frame any longer), our ship came to dock in Danzig-Neufahrwasser and again my memory now about details of this particular time is hazy. The war situation, the chaotic flight and the ensuing fatigue probably shrouded my perception and thoughts. Somehow everyone became apathetic and resigned to their fate; some tried in their frightful panic of the Russians to save their own skin by hiring a ship heading West because the land route was closed off [due to the Russian advance].

The attempts of Mutti and Omama to fight for a space on one of the refugee transporters were unsuccessful so that we were then assigned to emergency accommodations in Zoppot near Danzig, also situated by the Baltic Sea. The Moser family actually succeeded in reaching the West, most likely because uncle Kurt Moser had the status of a military reserve doctor. That took care of the Moser's for now, although there was always the great danger of being torpedoed and sunk by the Russians. As we later learned, more than ten thousand lost their lives in the Baltic Sea. [See page 38 for additional information added by Klaus Moser]

Even now many years after this dramatic journey on this refugee ship my thoughts go back to those days in February at the side of the sea reaching in its largeness all the way to its horizon with its swells and frigid waters.

## Zoppot - March to May 1945

In Zoppot we had relatives, the Mittmanns who took us in their still undamaged house. This gave us a chance to recuperate from the past ordeals.

The Russians had enclosed the entire area around Danzig; the fight between the Russians and the German defenders became increasingly tense which required us to spend more time in the bomb shelters. The ground vibrated from the bomb hits and many surrounding buildings were destroyed or were in flames. The burning Danzig in the distance made a particularly frightening picture. The house of the Mittmanns was also hit. Fragment of the grenades damaged the roof and window panes leaving the structure of the house in relative good shape.

With increased anxiety we were anticipating the arrival of the Russians while staying in the bunker, situated behind the house in a hollowed out slope. Our family and other refugees huddled closely on blankets and straw. I remember how my fear intensified to the point that I actually feared for my life the closer the gunfire and grenades advanced.

## The Russians Are Coming!

Finally one night on March 23, 1945 a single heavy armed Russian soldier of Asian appearance stormed through the door and threatened us with a Kalashnikov [Russian assault rifle]. Our immediate response was a frightful scream. The soldier yelled something that sounded like "Soldier!? Soldier!?" He obviously was looking for hiding German soldiers. He hastily searched the entire room and poked with his weapon everywhere to see if any men were hiding among the women and children. He then disappeared and the next wave of Russians showed up. Everyone froze. Our fear was justified because what happened next was indescribable.

Russians entered the bunker [a basement] screaming "Uhri, Uhri" [watches, watches] tearing brutally away our watches. I now still see the piles of watches on the soldiers' arms. They also robbed us of jewelry such as rings and necklaces. Just a slight delay or quiet refusal was answered with beating with the rifle butts. Then came the "Bestien" [beasts] how Mutti described them in her memoirs...who grabbed the women, including Mutti and raped them brutally. More Russians entered with the same intent we tried, unsuccessfully, to hide Mutti with blankets. Over and over again she was grabbed. Her screams and tears of despair I'll never forget...

We had to remain in this bunker for days, always in fear of the next Russians; one time a Russian Politoffzier [officer responsible for political work within the military] appeared in our bunker who in fluid German tried to inform us about the injustices the Germans had perpetrated. Since he behaved rather humanely we hoped that the worst was over; but that turned out to be a fallacy because the terror continued and the fear remained even though the military action around us diminished.

Mutti and other women were ordered to dig a mass grave and bury dead German Soldiers. Among them were several dead young German officers just shot by the Russians and who I had seen a few days ago laying outside the doors of the bunker and stretcher, their arms and legs heavily bandaged. A shudder came over me when I learned these totally helpless wounded were executed only a few feet away from us. Wolfgang my brother can remember seeing the wounded being led to the basement and shortly after hearing shots. The puddles of blood were still visible days later.

Many of such work details followed and we were never sure if Mutti would ever return to us to the bunker. On her return she was always totally exhausted and in despair.

Finally, about the end of March by now, we were allowed back to the Mittmann house which was still relatively unharmed. Everything around us was bombed out and showed signs of the previous fighting: a bomb crater, destroyed vehicles.

Wolfgang and I dared to check out the immediate neighborhood to make a ghastly discovery; in a wooded area very near us we noticed several persons hanging from a tree; apparently an entire family had committed suicide. A horror came over us when we came closer to verify that they were really human beings.

As far as I remember our accommodations were not far away from the Waldbuehne [concert stage in the woods] once we entered the bombed out school building we climbed a wide staircase that ended nowhere. We were totally unaware of the dangers of collapsing walls. Our spoils on return were school books and few

glass jars of food. During the day we searched in destroyed basement for anything edible. One day we searched a half-destroyed car, a cabriolet [convertible car] left by the Germans.

At the time of my eight birthday on March 31<sup>st</sup> of this fateful year [1945] more and more Poles appeared in Zoppot. We were almost more afraid of them than the Russians because of their hate towards the Germans. We were often spat at. We noticed people wearing arm bands showing a large letter P. As we learned, these were Germans who had opted for the Polish state [who had in effect denounced their German citizenship]; that way they avoided persecution by the Pol's and Russians, while the others [not wearing a P] were exposed to the discretions of the occupiers. As an eight year old I had no understanding what this hate was all about as well as many other things that in those days were happening.

Meanwhile Mutti and also aunt Erika Mittmann found work at the electric power plant. I don't remember how they were compensated; with money or food. My grandmother and Frau Nagel also worked hard by sewing and doing cleaning services probably in return for food. This was the time when Wolfgang and I were constantly on the hunt for anything edible or otherwise useful. One day, we found a large stash of cheese in an abandoned factory.

We had to get used to the fact that the Poles were playing the winners over us hated Germans and were humiliating us accordingly. Within a few weeks all Germans street signs were removed and we learned the Polish word for it was Ulitza [street]. Also the Zloty [Polish currency] was introduced.

In April 1945 the father of Erika Mittmann in company of others was arrested for interrogations. The reason was unclear to us but we became witnesses of these arbitrarily acts by our new rulers. He did not return from his last interrogations and his fate is unknown to us; jail, deportation or anything worse. Anyhow, these arbitrations increased our fear of more unpredictable repressions by the Poles to come to whom we became fair game.

Weeks passed; the end of the war was to come any day. It was unknown to us when the surrender of the Germans had happened if at all. We heard Russians saying "Gittler kaputh" [Hitler kaput = Hitler dead] more frequently. Mutti and Omama contemplated what to do next. They considered either to find a way to go west to the Reich [main land Germany] or to return to Schoenwalde.

The family's decision (with future disastrous results) was to secure a permit to go back to our village which was granted on May 20<sup>th</sup> 1945. We had lost all of our personal papers and Mutti declared Schoenwalde as our home address; she could have just as well given any other address anywhere in the West, in which case the next three years would have turned out quite different and would have spared us lots of agony. But at this point in time we still had a vague hope of finding our home intact and continuing our life in peace there.

## Return to Koenigsberg from Zoppot, May 1945

On May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1945 on the Tuesday after Pfingsten and after an eventful two months our family of six, including Frau Nagel started the difficult trip towards Koenigsberg. The fact that we had to travel through the now Polish region made this trip particularly dangerous because the Poles took every opportunity to harass us hated Germans.

I remember travelling in a train over a rather long and hazard bridge near Dirschau. By train I mean train cars made for freight and livestock and at one time a car for coal which was hard to embark.

On a train station of some East Prussian town we experienced—while waiting to continue our trip—a terrible situation; the Poles were selecting able people and threaten to separate Mutti and us. I remember our

fear we all had while desperately holding on to her and it was a miracle that we could stay together. Mutti wrote about the Poles spitting on us and calling us German pigs. I have forgotten—as Mutti wrote—that we were also robbed. It might sound contradictory but we're glad to leave the Polish territory behind us and looking forward entering the Russian part of East Prussia with the little baggage we were left with.

Finally, after a week-long trip, we reached the devastated Koenigsberg on May 25, 1945, hungry, exhausted and physically dirty, and where we unexpectedly found shelter and food for one night at a still existing German hospital to be able to rest a bit. Of course there was nothing to hold us here in this city of ruins and so the next day we started our final leg of our journey to Schoenwalde 20 kilometers by foot in the hope to find there everything in a half way decent condition...

## Schoenwalde Under Russian Occupation, 1945 to 1946

We were full of hope the closer we came to our village. Coming from the Kugger Chaussee we made the familiar turn south onto the Neue Chaussee with 2 km left to Schoenwalde. Wolfgang and I now couldn't wait any longer and started to run as fast as we could along the Chaussee to the Dorfstrasse, made a left at the transformer house, and finally—out of breath and full of expectations—reached the Neue Hofeinfahrt [entrance to the new farm]. An enormous shock hit us; the only things standing were the bare exterior walls of the living quarters, while everything else was reduced to a pile of rubble! Tears came to our eyes. Everything was destroyed and suddenly something in us went to pieces. The entire family was overcome by a feeling of horror, a deep grief and a powerlessness at the sight of the destroyed walls smeared with victory slogans and hammer and sickle marking in huge red letters as if to mock us. We understood that nothing would be the same again.

Our first accommodations were at the Kirchenkrug next to the church where we met up with other Schoenwalders who had also returned to the village. We slept on straw. Mutti found a short term job with a Russian from whom we received some food.

Our next accommodation was at the Dieckmanns near our farm on the other side of the Dorfstrasse in a house covered with either straw or reeds. Our shoemaker had there his shop and storks had been nesting on the ridge of the roof and we now had a direct view of our farm house. This view was very hard for to bear. What was worse was that we were forbidden to enter the premises. The Russians had converted it to a Kolkhoz [a collective farm] which meant in effect that we were dispossessed. I don't believe Mutti had ever claimed a right to it. Who would have such a presumptuous idea under those circumstances? Had we done that we would have shown that we were land owners which would have been an additional excuse of the communist occupiers to further harrass us. What we were left with was plain bitterness.

We survived during this beautiful spring and summer of 1945 under the poorest conditions, cramped together with other families in a straw roofed house. Due to the poverty, our darling grandmother was approaching her end physically and spiritually. She became seriously sick and weak until she was unable to take in food and keep food down until she finally died on July 14<sup>th</sup> 1945 and was buried in the Schoenwalder Neuer Friedhof [new cemetery]. Alfred Brosche, the son of our Kaemmerer [treasurer], put together a casket out of some scrap wood. In the coming year Alfred had helped us whenever possible under the difficult living conditions by slipping us food.

The house of the family Bagusch and Schweitzer-family Unger, just south of our barn was now occupied by Russians who hired me for light garden work. It was my my job to pick grubs from the cabbage and lettuce heads. For that they provided me with a warm lunch. I was allowed to have a warm meal with them. How we communicated with each other I no longer know but I learned words and expression quickly such as Asha (groats) Khleb (bread), Voda (water), Maslo (butter), Kapusta (cabbage) as well as the davay (lets go),

eedee syuda (come here). Unfortunately I lost my job quickly because I was caught stealing. I had thrown a head of cabbage over the fence to later fetch it but had been observed and instead of getting a meal I got a whipping which hurt less than the shame of being discovered a thief and feeling bad for have broken the trust. It took me a long time to overcome this feeling of shame. I began to realize that my pilfering had put me morally on the same level as the Russians who had robbed us frequently and who had done so many injustices to us Germans.

Mutti and other German women went out at night, risking their lives to steal potatoes after the patrols had passed.

Once I was caught stealing a can of potatoes which I had to account for. Accompanied by a Russian officer on horseback, Mutti and I had to walk to the military commander in Neuhausen, about 10 - 15 kilometers from Schoenwalder. A higher ranking officer, possibly a military judge, admonished me not to steal again, after which we were dismissed.

Sometimes during this year—when only six people were left living at the Dieckmann house—we had to leave it with our meager effects for undisclosed reasons for a short time while we stayed with the former Fleischbeschauer [meat inspector] Behring.

In the fall of 1945 we found accommodations in a small cottage of the Ferners behind the stables and barns of the former mayor Wengel and we endured the particular cold winter of 1945/46; during our 8 months there we lived through two really bad experiences which had burned deeply into my memory:

One night we were attacked by roaming armed Russians who demanded at gunpoint our entire heavy clothing. I don't know how we were able to survive the cold without the clothing. But Mutti got up the courage the next morning to complain to the local commander and to identify the perpetrators; but instead of getting justice she was punched in the face.

The other incident took place during an extremely cold night: a rather young German woman came to our place and the neighboring cottages to beg. She was drunk and had the reputation of being a prostitute for the Russians. But as much as she was begging for food and shelter, no one would help her. She screamed loudly and whimpered until, some time during the night, the screaming stopped. Next morning she lay dead frozen stiff in the yard of the neighboring cottage.

As I had already mentioned this winter was extremely cold and to survive was a battle which required all of our energy. Mutti and some other women had found some kind of work for the Russians but it was extremely hard labor such as working in the nearby woods. The reward consisted of a meager food ration, not nearly enough to feed six people.

Wolfgang and I were constantly outside to scrape up some food in the cabbage heaps, looked for firewood and collected water. I remember we came across a frozen horse carcass behind a barn from which we cut as much meat as possible; if it was palatable or not was not an issue. We welcomed anything edible: partially rotten or frozen potatoes and turnip peels, bones which we then cooked up somehow to keep down our constant hunger. The bread and other foods that Mutti received for her work weren't enough to survive.

After 8 months, on Easter 1946, we were thrown out of the house by order of the Russians for unknown reasons. We Germans had no longer had any rights. The Russians who moved in were probably civilians because the [Russian] army had already moved out and we had noticed that more and more Russian civilians had moved into our villages; we later learned that a recruitment campaign was going on in the Soviet Union to find people willing to settle in the region of Northern East Prussia. These Russians we

called Zivilrussen [Russian civilians] as opposed to the occupying soldiers. At that time we were still unaware of the fact that Germany—based on decisions by the Allied powers—had irrevocably lost the East Prussian territory [which was ceded to Russia] and that we were now barely tolerated.

For a while we found accommodations in a school near a church, the fifth place since our return to Schoenwalde.

The school as well as the church had survived the war undamaged (as far as I know our house was the only one totally destroyed during the fighting in Jan/Feb 1945. Since there were marks of fire it was possible that retreating German soldiers used our farm to take shelter and then the Russians shot it to pieces).

Our village church had always played a role of being the center of our lives; we children were all baptized here, uncle Hans Alsen and aunt Erika, among others, were married there; but now the church was desecrated by the Russians soldiers who had converted it to a club, a dance hall and a movie theater for the occupying troops. After their retreat it was utilized for storing potatoes and later the Russians proceeded to totally dismantle the still standing intact structure piece by piece. But, thank heaven we had left Schoenwalde before that had happened. The wood was probably used as firewood, the brick and roof tiles were recycled for repair work or new construction. What they did with the altar and pulpit I'd rather not care to know. I suspect that the destruction of the church was part of a systematic plan to remove all traces of a century long German history and culture. However it's hard to understand why the church tower was left standing; it is still standing to this day, although in need of restoration.

But we had other things to worry about. Our main focus was the battle to physically survive. The mourning of our losses and the felling of having no justice as Germans was totally pushed into the background due to our prevailing apathy. We were practically prisoners in our own village and we always had to be ready to be exposed to random acts of retribution by the Russians such as having to move four times.

In June 1946 we finally received a sign of life from Vati in the form of a letter, probably through efforts of the Red Cross. We learned that he was still alive and had ended up in Hamburg after he had been wounded [in East Prussia]. I found an old postcard from Vati from September 8<sup>th</sup> 1946 addressed to Frau Dr. Koeppen Reinbek:

“...you will be the first to get the good news of the survival of my family. Yesterday I received a Russian postcard, however not written by my wife; she must have asked our Schoenwalde Gemeindegemeinschaft [a nurse of the parish] to contact us. She writes that we are healthy and in good spirits, that Mudding (Vatis Schwiegermutter) [Vati's mother-in-law Wera Alsen] had died in July 1945 and that we had received one postcard, dated July 20<sup>th</sup> and one letter. They are living in a neighboring village but it is not explained as to why they lived there and how they live. As sad as I am of the death of my mother-in-law this good and noble woman I am very happy...”

In an earlier letter from February 6<sup>th</sup> 1946 to family Braun he wrote:

“...most difficult and painful is the uncertainty of the fate of my family and closest relatives. My family only went as far as Danzig, where they encountered the Russians; it's a miracle my wife was not deported. There they experienced all of life's miseries. In their desperation and possibly their belief I had stayed in East Prussia, my entire family, my wife, the four children, and my mother-in-law had travelled penniless back to East Prussia. All this I learned from a relative who they stayed with and is now living in Schwerin/Mecklenburg. Although she stayed in Danzig and Zoppot until September, she never received any more news from them. They had already left in May with an official permit. I hope they had reached Schoenwalde. But only God know how they are and if they

are still alive. My mail doesn't get through to them. My house is also destroyed..."

A while later Vati received mail from aunt Ilse Moser who with her family arrived in Greifswald and later Stralsund in the Russian occupied zone and who describes their evacuation and the time after their arrival.

### Konradswalde, 1946 to 1947

When Mutti finally found work at the brick yard and the neighboring Konradswalde, we had to move again. Meanwhile, Frau Nagel had died which now left only five hungry mouths to feed. We left Schoenwalde and moved into a dilapidated house on a farm in Konradswalde. We lived there rather primitively on the upper floor. Our room was just below the roof rafters. Below us was a German family but they soon had to leave to make room for a Russian family, Musalov.

The first thing they did was to remove the tile oven [German style] to replace it with a typical large Russian oven. They used it for heating the house, to cook, and to sleep on during winter month to keep warm. We didn't have much contact with the Musalovs due to the language barrier—they spoke no German—and the few words we exchanged dealt primarily with matters concerning food.

While Mutti worked hard at the brick yard, Wolfgang and I went out to scrounge. We collected firewood secretly from the barn of the farm or other abandoned houses by removing rafters and boards and cut them into pieces. We also dismantled fences and posts and gathered dry branches in the woods.

The bread and milk that Mutti brought home was not nearly enough food and additional food was required. In the Spring, when the first greens began to sprout we collected wild herbs and plants; for example, sorrel, orache (Melde)—which tasted a bit like spinach—and especially stinging nettles and whatever else was edible to substitute for vegetables. I suspect the vitamins in these wild plants kept us in good shape.

During the summer we gathered berries and fruits from abandoned gardens as well as mushrooms from the woods. Vitally essential were potatoes which we got either by stealing, which was a common practice during the hunger period, or we collected the leftover ones from the field of the Kolshos after they had been harvested. Later in the year we also dug up the already frozen ground to find whatever remained. Potato peels, which we roasted on the stove, were also part of our menu.

But very important were also turnips with their very unpleasant and sharp taste which I still remember. We also ate the turnips the Russian discarded.

When we came across bones—fresh, old or frozen—we took them apart to collect the marrow to enrich the soup.

Whenever we came across grain of any kind that was always a welcomed find. We ground down the grains with a mortar and pestle. We quickly got used to the Russian term for mash or groats "Kasha" and when available we added a splash of butter to it.

Nothing was more special than when Mutti came home with a half or full loaf of bread. She then divided it precisely into one piece per day; we each went into a corner and savored every bit of it as a delicacy. If one kept a piece for later, one had to keep it safe from the mice which were beginning to become a real nuisance.

But another much worse and unpleasant plague was lice. They infested the entire body, the hair and the clothing, particularly in the seams. It was part of a daily ritual to fight these disgusting vermin by thorough

nightly examinations and destroying the lice and nits by crushing them between one's fingernails. But all efforts were useless because disinfectant was unavailable.

During our entire time of suffering we never had electric light in any of our accommodations. The Russians simply didn't do any repairs. We made due with homemade kerosene lamps made from empty cans. Christmas 1946 in Konradswalde was especially sad sitting in our barely heated room sadly thinking back of our peaceful Christmases in the past. Now we sat hungry around the Christmas tree "decorated" only with a few homemade candles made from old leftovers. I still remember the depressed mood we were in especially on Christmas Eve. This was a real low point in our life in the occupied East Prussia. There seemed to be no hope in sight for improvement of our condition and the prospect of having to go through another winter was utterly depressing. I remember us intensely praying to God to release us from this misery. I found it really admirable how Mutti brought us through these difficult times through hard physical labor on the Kolchos, the brick yard, the work in the forest and then—under great dangers—"organized" food for our five people because the supplements that Wolfgang and I brought home were insufficient. Although we showed symptoms of malnourishment, we stayed otherwise relatively healthy. We often had periods of diarrhea and developed boils on our legs that were later visible as dark color scars. Often our legs were swollen. Mutti had frost bite on her face and nose. But surprisingly we never had to see a doctor if there had been one available.



*Russian passport photo of Margarete Vogel, 1947*

In light of our situation of having no future prospects in the annexed East Prussia where we were living among the new Russian settlers practically as aliens and a minority, Mutti tried several times to apply for travel documents to the "Reich" [main land of Germany], as we still referred to that part of Germany. But her applications were turned down every time. Economically the life of the Russians was not much better than ours. They lived poorly here but—to our knowledge—their life in their former Russian homeland had not been any better in contrast to the standard of living of Germans; they had always been resigned to a frugal lifestyle as determined by their current regime.

But we were also impoverished culturally because nothing was offered to us and it was necessary to put all our efforts, due to poverty, towards one goal: to simply survive. There were no German newspapers, no radio, movies or theater. Our only information came from rumors and the few letters that reached the occupied East Prussia.

There were also no schools for us Germans; as I had already mentioned before, Wolfgang and I, by now ten and nine years old, retained our ability to read by using books or parts of books that we had fetched from abandoned houses. We also had, thank heavens, a basic knowledge of reading and writing from the time we had visited the village school. Mutti always encouraged us to maintain our reading and writing skills so as not to forget them at all. That must have been the reason that we only missed one school year when we were later admitted to the school of the spring of 1948 in Curslack; but more about that later.

The year 1947 marked the third year among the Russians and our longings grew to again live among Germans without hunger. Through the mail I had learned that a new kind of life existed in the West [of Germany] but we were faced with a new year of hunger.

## The Expulsion

In November of this year [1947] according to Mutti's writing we all of a sudden received an unexpected order to pack our belongings and be ready the next morning with one piece of luggage per person to be picked up from our house in Konradswalde for a transport to the West. Finally! Our enjoyment was overwhelming and indescribable.

We also received extra bread and food rations for the coming trip so that we could fill up for our journey. The Germans suspected the Russians just wanted us to be in a better physical condition to give the impression that we had not suffered hunger in the previous years. The result of these sudden food rations were that we developed swelled stomachs which stood in stark contrast to our spindly arms and legs.

After twelve days of waiting for our departure we were finally transported via track from Konradswalde to Königsberg on 28<sup>th</sup> of November 1947 by train westbound, destination unknown. We left East Prussia with feelings of euphoria, happiness, and even thankfulness because it meant escape from misery! However, we still didn't fully understand that our homeland was irrevocably and finally lost to us.

At this time of our expulsion we only had vague ideas of the newly created political realities in German, only that the situation in the Russian occupied zone [which in 1949 became GDR, aka East Germany] was clearly worse than in the three other western zones [American, English and French].

## Camp Wolfen

Our happiness of the end of our hunger was somehow dampened when we were informed that we had to settle in Bitterfeld in Sachsen-Anhalt, the Soviet zone. After traveling for one week we were sent to a camp in Wolfen near Bitterfeld.

A health record, issued on December 8, 1947, states that the Vogel family of five, last address Konradswalde/Samlend, was deloused on December 6, 1947 three times at the delousing center of the quarantine camp in Wolfen and was immunized against typhus and paratyphus. Our duration of stay was given as: from December 6<sup>th</sup> 1947 until January 8<sup>th</sup> 1948.

A second document from the district office for Umsiedler [re-settlers] was issued to us, assigning us to Nebra in the district of Querfurt, also in Sachsen-Anhalt, with a provision to provide us with accommodations in the community. But it never came to that because in the meantime we were able to make contact by mail with Vati in Hamburg-Curslack.

Although we regularly received food, life at the camp was rather depressing. Our quarters in the barracks were very cramped among hundreds and thousands of other refugees. [My sister] Elke—four and half years old—became seriously ill, probably due to undernourishment, and was admitted to the hospital section. Thanks to good medical treatment she slowly recuperated.



*Passport photo of Heinz Vogel, 1947*

On January 6<sup>th</sup> 1948 we were able to take Vati in our arms after a three year separation!

A day before he left Hamberg by train to pick up his family from Wolfen but which proved—under the current confrontational conditions between the East and West—very difficult. In any case, we immediately prepared to secretly leave the Eastern zone. As far as I remember the first attempt failed.

### The Escape across the East West Border

The second attempt was successful. I still remember wading with our family with baggage across a border river towards the western shore in the British zone. We had to hurry not to rouse the attention of the military guards during this illegal border crossing.

We finally boarded a severely overcrowded train that was headed towards Hamburg via Nordhausen/Ellrich/Walkenried in the south of the Harz Mountains, then Goettingen and Hannover. On about the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 1948 we arrived totally exhausted but otherwise well on the Woermbke farm in the marsh village Curslack near Hamburg-Bergedorf. This was the end of our odyssey!

### Curslack, 1948 to 1955

The 200 Morgen [125 acres] farm belonged to Frau Irmgard Woermbke; her husband had died in the war. She had three children: Inge, Gerda, and Herbert.

Already in October 1945 Vati had secured a job in a position of managing this farm through recommendations of Studienraetin [teacher in higher education] [Frau] Dr. Dora Koeppen, who had also taken care of Vati since his injury, recovery and release from the POW camp in Eutin [Schleswig-Holstein].

It was to his advantage of having intensive knowledge and experience from having run his own farm from East Prussia. As I learned from his surviving letters he still suffered physically as a result of his war injuries, especially from the loss of two fingers from his left hand. He also worried greatly about the uncertainty of his family's fate.

Amazing is the fact that during this chaos, particularly during the two or three years after the end of the war, it was possible through Suchlisten [list of names of people looking for their relatives] of the Red Cross to connect with other displaced Germans, scattered all over Germany.

In that way our uncle Bernhard Perband was able to get the address of his Schwager [brother-in-law] after

his release from his prisoner-of-war internment in southern Germany in the spring of 1946. He then went to see him and found work there for a half a year on the Woermbke farm. He had stayed in Vati's room. Luck had it that a farm woman, Frau Muenster from the other end of the village, was looking for a manger for her farm. Uncle Bernhard had all the qualifications that enabled him to start his job there in December 1946 (which he continued until 1954). In February 1947 his wife, aunt Erika Perband as well as aunt Dora Vogel—both refugees from East Prussia—joined him. I'm sure their escape and tales of suffering at the hands of the Russians could fill stacks of books... Through the above mentioned Suchlisten the two sisters had found the whereabouts of Bernhard and had been in contact with one another through the mail. Aunt Erika moved to uncle Bernhard's in Muenster, while Aunt Dora found room and work at Frau Woermbke.

Little by little we learned about the fate and the location of our relatives, including those Schoenwalders who had survived the flight and expulsion and who were now strewn as Fluechtlinge [refugees] all over Germany.

After having lived through a period of three years of hunger and oppressions, life in Curslack was paradise to us. There was plenty of food on the farm and we were treated friendly and helpfully; that didn't necessarily go without saying, since after all we had come as strangers from a strange land without any possessions, spoke a different dialog [East Prussian] and were dressed shabbily.

The Curslack [a village within a marsh land] stretched far and was situated directly beyond a dike and was full of well-kept reed-covered Fachwerk buildings; the people—primarily good-looking—were fruit and vegetable farmers who also raised flowers and had been able to keep their prosperity throughout the war chaos. Curslack, located southeast of Hamburg, was part of the greater Hamburg region. It was part of four villages on land that had once been situated in a marsh area of Vierlanden within a broad loop of the Elbe River with two curvy tributaries of the Elbe running through it.

The locals spoke Plattdeutsch [northern German dialect], a dialect used in Vierlanden that was well-understood by us as it did not differ much from our East Prussian dialog.

After overcoming our initial shyness we four kids made quick contact with the three children of Frau Woermbke and also later with neighborhood kids. It was apparent how our growth had lagged far behind due to malnourishment during the last three years. Photos of that time, even though a bit fuzzy, showed that clearly: rather short in height along with thin arms and legs and round stomachs. When I started school in Curslack in the spring at age eleven I was often teased because I was the smallest in the class although being a year older than them due to the three years without schooling under the Russians. This somehow developed into an inferiority complex which was reinforced by the fact that we were perceived as the poor refugees by the well-off Vierlaenders and as a result I suffered for years from extreme shyness.



*The reunited family, spring 1948, in Curslack*

Our united Vogel family of six lived in one room; we kids shared two bunk beds which is hard to imagine today but we were satisfied and happy in our new homeland. Vati and Mutti worked hard, we kids learned to know the farm and its fields as well as the neighborhood. We grew familiar with the beautiful village with its rivers, canals, well-kept fields and greenhouses.

I still remember the Meyer family which owned a nursery of flowers, only about 300 meters [about 1,000 feet] towards the dike of Curslack. Frau Mathilde's husband had perished in the war and she and her mother had worked the business. She had two sons, Klaus and Karsten, whom we quickly became friends with (the friendship with Karsten, who immigrated later to California and still lives there, has remained there to this day). The Meyers helped us whenever possible. Mathilde knitted us boys beautiful, soft and warm wool socks. We always enjoyed staying in their cozy reed-covered Fachwerk-house situated by the dike near the Dove-Elbe, a rather wide tributary of the Elbe River.

Behind the Woermbke house was the farm and the barns: the front part of the house was facing the dike and made up the living quarters while the back part was facing the yard with its stables and administration buildings. This kind of layout was typical for farm house of this area. There was also the "Haus mit dem Herz" [out house] for everybody (it was no fun to go there during bad weather or darkness).

The large stretch of fields consisting of heavy clay soil were actually laid out in long narrow strips for agriculture and pastures and also planted with fruit trees surrounded left and right with ditches for drainage. Those fields ran from behind the house all the way towards a high knoll where Vierland ended in the north. Here at the end of the northern field stood the above mentioned Muenster farm run by the Perbands.

In the first few weeks since our arrival in Curslack we children were invited to the Rathaus [town hall] in Hamburg to receive CARE packages full of delicacies such as chocolate, toys and soap. It was an unforgettable event!

In April 1948 Wolfgang and I started elementary school; I was eleven years old and entered the fourth grade, Wolfgang the fifth grade. Brigitte, although being eight years old since January, had to start in the

first grade. Elke followed two years later. Although my school knowledge had gaps, especially in math, I was able to keep up pretty well with my fellow students. I suppose the teacher's understandings also helped me. We were served a hot meal in school: a simple but tasty Eintopf [stew-like dish] and we were required to bring our own bowl and spoon from home.

The school building was situated directly next to the beautiful baroque church with its gorgeous seventeenth century interior and free standing bell tower. I found this Curslack church to be very similar to other churches in the Vierlaender villages.

I liked school very much and was able to keep up with the rest of the class. In 1948 our class was transferred from Curslack to the neighboring village of Neuengamme, located on the other side of the Dove-Elbe River. Our home teacher was a young but excellent teacher, Fraulein Riedel, who cared very much for me and whom I really adored.

In early summer 1948, we went on a class trip to Sylt [Resort Island in the North Sea]. This was a totally new world and it meant a lot to me after years of being deprived! It was a time of recuperation on this beautiful island of the North Sea, with its immense dunes, surf and quiet shallows. I still remember that during the summer camp in Puan Klent on Sylt I was constantly craving food from all that swimming and running on the beach.

More and more we integrated and got used to living in the west. We somehow drew a veil over the past, our homeland and our return trip [from Zoppot to Schoenwalde]; and in particular we didn't want to remember the years under the Russians. If it had not been for aunt Ilse Moser, who by now had settled in Stralsund, urging Mutti to put down her memories on paper, the details of this crucial period of our lives would have been lost forever. Mutti must have really forced herself to compose this hand-written report from memory titled "Die Fluchtgeschichte von Pillau ab" [the story of our flight since Pillau] about the experiences from February 1945 until our expulsion November 1947.

We learned of the whereabouts and lives of our relatives in the now occupied Germany through a so-called Rundbrief [circular letter]. There were also visits of relatives and Schoenwalders from whom we learned their fate during their flight from East Prussia.

One day we unexpectedly received mail from Brussels [Belgium] from a Belgian named Fernand Diet who had during the war worked on our family farm as a prisoner of war at the time and had been able to find our whereabouts through Suchlisten. Through Mutti's excellent knowledge of French a certain friendship developed between him and us. And now he was sending us package with food, clothing and sweets. He remembered the good peaceful times in Schoenwalde in spite of being a POW, and he even sent an old photo from Schoenwalde.

In the spring of 1949, I passed the high school examination and enrolled in the gymnasium [higher education facility] Hansa Schule in Hamberg-Bergedorf, six kilometers from us. Every morning I traveled by Kleinbahn of the BGE (Bergedorf-Geesthachter Eisenbahn) from Curslack to Bergedorf train station. From there it was a half-hour walk uphill to the school. The following year I chose as a major classical languages, with emphasis on Latin and Greek; the other major would have had emphasis on sciences which was not my cup of tea.

I soon joined the church choir because I could sing pretty well, which meant going to church every Sunday rain or shine whether I felt like it or not to sing under Kantor Sellhorn liturgical songs and chorales for several voices. Adding to that we had practice afternoons and performed for wedding and funerals. I even earned a little money, DM20 per year; that was a huge sum at the time. We had just gone through a currency

reform in Germany and everything was available in the stores. With my first paycheck I bought a Boy Box, a small camera; I still have my first pictures.

Unfortunately in 1952 we had to look for a new place to live because Frau Woermbke remarried and her new husband, Herr Pietsch, took over the family farm business. That was hard for us because Vati was now without work and we had to look for a new accommodation for six people. After a long search we found a small simple three room apartment in a dilapidated old Fachwerk house near church in Curslack. As I learned from Mutti's writing we had to spend DM100 to have the place painted. The Plums Klo [outhouse] was located in the garden.

Vati found work in a business for road and trench construction work that was not very satisfying as he was used to running his own farm. Mutti earned additional money at the farm of the Steffens family in Neuengamme which enabled us to come up with the monthly rent of DM40.

On Palm Sunday 1952 Wolfgang and I were confirmed in Curslack on a beautiful spring day. Proudly we showed off our first suit and tie. A group photograph was made of all candidates including Pastor Fliedner.

In the following year Vati again was unemployed; he now worked part time on the Woermbke farm; he also tried to lease a farm but nothing came of it. But his efforts to find a suitable work situation, either being self-employed or an administrative position in agriculture were finally successful.

## Sinstorf from 1955

In April 1955 Vati took over the administration of the farm Hastedt, located in Hamburg-Sinstorf on the southern border of Niedersachsen [Lower Saxony]. That meant that our family had to leave Vierlanden which we came to like so much and moved into the area of Harburg. The departure from Curslack was difficult because we now had to leave our new friends and acquaintances and we children had to change schools.

The new farm was nicer than expected. We moved into the administrative building which was situated along the stables and barns on a parcel of land in a former park that had many old oak trees. It was accessible by a long driveway with linden trees along the sides. The owner of the farm, Dr. Hastedt, was a physician specializing in tropical diseases, with an office in Hamburg and a villa next to the administrative building: he soon was convinced of Vati's abilities and experiences in his field.

The farm was a rather large conventionally run business of all kinds of agriculture and livestock employing about 10 employees. During the root crop and grain harvest additional part time help was employed.

Vati's work days were long and stressful, for besides doing the supervision he also had to add a helping hand, doing the books at night, the planning and logistics. Muti ran the house and kitchen, including that of Dr. Hastedt, who after his divorce lived alone; his son Claas, living in a boarding school, showed up in Sinstorf during school holidays.

Generally we had a pretty good income; however, cash was not plentiful. As a six person family we lived rent-free. Little money was left for purchases of new articles and for personal items which was problematic since our needs were increasing as we kids grew up.

After Wolfgang finished Realschule [high school], he got a well-paid assistant job at the Bundesbahn [railroad]. After my school transfer [from Curslack] I attended the Gymnasium [high school] in Hamburg-Harburg and had—at age 18—still more years to graduate. Brigitte and Elke's school in Sinstorf was only a

few steps away from the farm and they became fond of it.

Sinstorf had become our new Heimat [homeland] and remained so even after we children were strewn all over the globe and our parents were still alive. It became a focal point and meeting place for visits of the family and from people all over the world. It was here where we met our future life partners, the seven grandchildren ran around and from where we four siblings started our careers.

## Epilogue

### Return to the Old Country in 1995 and 2001

After a reunion in November 1991 of former Schoenwalders which was an unforgettable event for Muti and former Schoenwalders still alive, I became increasingly eager to travel to East Prussia.

It wasn't until 1991, 46 years after the end of the war, that the Russian administration allowed travel into that area which had been up to then as a military zone totally restricted for travel [for Westerners]. This land—my own homeland—is now called Kaliningradskaya Oblast [region of Kaliningrad], while the southern part of East Prussia had been ceded to Poland through a decision by the Allied forces.

In 1992 the first Schoenwalders travelled to Koenigsberg by bus and from there to our village. One year later, Erwin Bagusch, who had been working on our farm for two generations, had a memorial stone put up by the remaining church steeple to honor those of the church community who had perished during the war.

Other trips followed; unfortunately I was never able to participate on these trips due to time conflict with my job. But finally, on July 2, 1995 I was able to go on my long awaited trip to the past. I was full of expectations. Fifty years had passed since we had been expelled and the expectation of what I would find in Schoenwalde made my anticipations unbearable. Already when we approached the clear area view of the coastline of the Frische Nehrung and then Koenigsberg released indescribable emotions inside of me. When I finally got off the plane and stepped on East Prussian soil it released a feeling in me of being back at home. I simply had to stop and wait, unable to utter a word and stared at the immense blue skies with its white clouds.

During our bus trip from the airport to Koenigsberg along tree line road and fields I intended to hold on to every moment of this return trip. But upon entering Koenigsberg I quickly sobered up, because this city had now little in common with the beautiful old Koenigsberg. Our accommodations for Mutti's friend Christa Greve, her son Hans-Wilhelm from Australia and me were on a converted hotel ship anchored on the Pregel river.

The next morning we hired a taxi, whose driver, Sergey, also worked as a translator, to get to Schoenwalde as soon as possible, a distance of 20 kilometers.

Just as we were dragging ourselves fifty years ago from Zoppot to Schoenwalde, we were now traveling of course under different conditions and full of anticipation, south on the Kogger Chaussee towards Schoenwalde. Then—in May 1945—there was still a German street sign saying Schoenwalde, but now it had been replaced with sign in Cyrillic letters: Yaroslavskoye, 2 kilometers. So that was now the name of our village... The trees lining the Chaussee were now full grown linden trees. The fields—formerly well-kept—were for the most part lying fallow and were heavily overgrown with a blanket of wild flowers and thistles. Otherwise the area looked familiar to me and I had no difficulty orienting myself. The fields were still situated to the left and beyond there were still the high trees that had once belonged to our farm.

At the intersection of the Neue Chaussee and Dorfstrasse I found the familiar transformer building, from which it was only a few hundred meters to our old farm. I decided now to walk, along a stretch of road lined with overgrown bushes covering up dilapidated houses, when I suddenly came upon the farm's entrance—my heart beating wildly—to get a view of the neglected yard with the only remaining cow barn!



*The cow barn in 1995*



*The cow barn in 1919*

The area to the right of the driveway had once been occupied by our living quarters but bushes and nettles had overgrown the destroyed remains. The emotions I felt at this moment were indescribable. How long had I have dreamt of this moment...

I was now again in Schoenwalde. While just standing there, reflecting, memories—now full of sadness—came over me. Those of a happy childhood, but also those of the miserable post war years that had followed

it. I was alone in this moment of time, unable to share my overwhelming feelings that I had to silently absorb by myself.

It would have been hard for Muti to stomach this sight; besides, in July 1995 she had been admitted to a nursing home in Hamburg after being seriously injured in a traffic accident; she died there in October, age 82. I suspect she would have been unable to follow my impression of Schoenwalde, my descriptions about the pitiful conditions of the village with its decaying structures, the overgrown fields, the destroyed church and its cemetery, the obliteration by the Russians of anything that was left of German culture, the once so beautiful city of Koenigsberg being nothing of what it once was, any description Samland with its wide dunes of the Kurische Nehrung—all that would have opened old wounds. I also decided not to show her any of the numerous photos I had taken on this relatively short trip!

However, one last service I did at her funeral was pouring a handful of soil from our garden in Schoenwalde into her grave.

In spite of the painful experiences during my first trip I went back six years later with other former Schoenwalders for the purpose of looking for remains and also in the company of my [three] siblings Wolfgang, Brigitte and Elke, who had especially travelled from Sweden, USA and Australia respectively and who surely experienced similar emotions as I had on my first trip.

There, where once our house had stood, the Russian families now living there had cleared the basement of debris and had found several rather well preserved china pieces and ceramic objects as well as partially rusted cutlery. The Russians handed them over to us and we compensated them well with a handsome sum.

We continued to dig on this rainy July day in the ruins for more possible lost objects. And Brigitte actually found a leg of her doll! I then was able to locate the corner stone at the southeast corner of the former wall so that we could reconstruct in our mind the former house. Brigitte and Elke collected a few pieces of broken glass for memory.

The Russian, Natasha, had after the political changes in Russia in the 1990's received a twelve Hektar [30 acres] of the former Kolchos; she showed us a boulder with the inscription R A 1914 which was part of the wall of the cow barn. She asked me if I knew what it stood for: of course I could explain to the suppressed Natasha that it referred to my grandfather Reinhold Alsen, who had the barn built in 1914...

All the numerous impressions here were unforgettable: the still well-situated village with its crumbling structures, the surrounding partially unplowed fields covered with wild flowers, our stroll to Poggenpuhl with Alfred Brosche, and another one along the Kleinbahntrasse [the rail bed of the train] from Kondehnen to Konradswalde, the drive on the old tree lined chaussee, as well as our walks in Koenigsberg to search for traces of old [German] remains, the trip to the seaside resort of Rauschen with its bluff, the excursion to the Kurisch Nehrung and the one to the port of Pillau via Fischhausen, from where our flight from East Prussia had begun in February 1945. On an enormous memorial we actually found the name of our uncle Kurt Vogel who was among the thousands of [German] soldiers who had perished there while defending the port of Pillau.



During these two trips [to East Prussia] as well as the years before and after them, a variety of thoughts have repeatedly entered my mind.

I, myself, have come to a clear understanding that East Prussia is lost forever to Germany and will in the future remain part of Russia, Poland and Lithuania [respectfully], gambled away after being a part of German history for over 700 years, within 6 years through Hitler's delusions of grandeur and German guilt. Nevertheless, often I have trouble accepting reality or to put it another way: to give up all claims to forgo my homeland. Maybe I will be seen as a "ewig Gestriger" [someone living in the past].

There was no possibility for us refugees to permanently return to our homeland, had we wanted to, because the winners [of the war], Stalin and Churchill especially had long ago carved up East Prussia and the other eastern territories and ceded them to other nations, chasing the remaining Germans out of their homeland and therefore making a return for them an impossibility. It is an unprecedented case in European history. It is also my view that the expulsion of the 12 million Germans from their traditional and inherited homeland constitutes a crime by International law, now and in the future. And it took 46 years after the war's end for Germans to be permitted to travel back to the old homeland in the northern part of East Prussia, initially only in tour groups.

Theoretically our return to the old settlements would only be possible by again using and implementing another expulsion of the now living people of different nationalities who have settled there since 1945 by the current governing regime. No one in their right mind would want that. Besides, concepts of this nature are looked upon in this country and condemned as being revanchist. After all, the Oder-Neisse-Linie [referring to the new border between Poland and Germany formed by the Oder and Neisse rivers] had been legally accepted by the German government even though some people didn't agree with it in the beginning. Add to this, the will, energy and investment power for a new start in the once blossoming and now mostly totally dilapidated former German territories is practically non-existent, especially where the already aged generation is concerned. They have in this regard resigned long ago. After their flight and expulsion they have made a new life for themselves in the West and are, after initial resentment, total integrated.

The unmistakable and distinctive dialect, though, is on its way to becoming extinct (just imagine the Bavarian dialect had disappeared!). In a few years it will be gone forever as well as the original names on maps for cities, lakes, rivers and landscapes. All that we will have to come to terms with.

However, we should not accept the falsification of the history of the lost former eastern territories and the ignoring of, the erasing, and one-sided anti-German interpretations of German contributions to the Polish, Russian and other historical books—nevertheless we should in the interest of maintaining a peaceful Europe strive for understanding and reconciliation with the current generation living there. The encounters, together with open conversation with these people who we had met there, were for the most part very friendly and understanding—a big step in the right direction.

What remains in the end is a deep mourning for the loss of our homeland East Prussia combined with sad and often painful memories of the good times past. The memory for Schoenwalde will stay with me as long as I live.

## Appendix 1: My Ancestors

### My Paternal Ancestors

		<b>Born</b>	<b>Died</b>
Father	<u>Heinz</u> Benno Gottfried Vogel	16 Sept. 1906 Globuhnen	5 July 1977 Hamburg-Sinstorf
a) Grandfather	Alfred Vogel	7 Sept. 1873 Globuhnen	24 June 1939 Bad Pyrmont
b) Grandmother	<u>Martha</u> Elise Vogel, nee. Schmidt	25 June 1883 Mahlendorf	30 May 1943 Koenigsberg
Great Grandfather	a): Gottfried Vogel	_____	_____
			Globuhnen
Great Grandmother	a): Marie Vogel, nee Feyerabend	_____	_____
			Globuhnen
Great Grandfather	b): Franz Schmidt	21 July 1858 Mahlendorf	12 August 1935 Mahlendorf
Great Grandmother	b): Bertha Schmidt, nee Wienrich	8 April 1856 _____	9 August 1932 Mahlendorf

### My Maternal Ancestors

		<b>Born</b>	<b>Died</b>
Mother	<u>Margarete</u> Emma Louise Vogel, nee Alsen	26 Sept. 1913 Schoenwalde	15 Oct. 1995 Hamburg
a) Grandfather	Reinhold Alsen	14 Nov. 1873 Drewshof	9 June 1931 Elbing
b) Grandmother	<u>Wera</u> Clara Lilly, nee Moser	22 June 1886 St. Petersburg, Russia	14 July 1945 Schoenwalde
Great Grandfather	a): Carl <u>Ludwig</u> Alsen	14 Sept. 1831 _____	30 Oct. 1889 _____
Great Grandmother	a): <u>Emma</u> Louise Charlotte Alsen, nee Thiel	1 August 1840 _____	8 April 1899 _____
Great Grandfather	b): Robert Moser	28 Feb. 1856 Koenigsberg	30 Jan. 1937 Usedom
Great Grandmother	b): Marie Moser	2 Nov. 1861 _____	21 March 1944 _____
Grt. Grt. Grandfather	b): Ludwig (Louis) Moser	14 May 1821 Koenigsberg	31 Dec. 1892 Koenigsberg
Grt. Grt. Grandmother	b): Clara Moser, nee v. Gramatzki	1 April 1836 Sassen	8 May 1904 Koenigsberg

## Appendix 2: Pre-World War II and Current Names

<b>Pre-World War II Names</b>	<b>Current Names</b>
Cranz	Selenogradsk
Danzig	Gdansk
Dirschau	Tczew
Drewshof	Elblag-Drewnik
Elbing	Elblag
Fischhausen	Primorsk
Frische Nehrung	Vislinski Kosa
Frisches Haff	Vislinski Zalif
Globuhnen	350 Hektar [875 acre] Farm, 25 km south of Koenigsberg in the former district of Preussisch-Eylau; no longer exists
Henneberg	165 Hektar [412 acre] farm of the family Perbands; no longer exists
Kondehnen	Aistovo
Konradswalde	Konstantinovka
Koenigsberg [Pr]	Kaliningrad
Kuggen	Pervomaiskoye
Kurisches Haff	Kurshski Zalif
Kurische Nehrung	Kurshkaya Kosa
Mahlendorf	Situated in the former district of Heiligenbeil; today near the current Ivanzovo
Neuhausen	Guryevsk
Pillau	Baltisk
Poduhren	3 km south of Schoenwalde towards Waldau; possibly non-existent today
Poggenpful	Mendeleyevo; 2km from Schoenwalde
Pregel (river)	Pregolya
Preussisch-Eylau	Bagrationovsk
Rauschen	Svetlogorsk
Sassen	Sasiny
Schwalbenberg	near Pillau
Schoenwalde	Yaroslavskoye
Weichsel (river)	Vistula
Zoppot	Sopot

## Notes

The conversions of the agricultural terms are based on the following measurements: 4 Morgen = 1 hektare = 2.5 acres

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Footnote from page 16

In the period between January and May of 1945, 2,401,367 refugees were safely evacuated from East and West Prussia and Pomerania to the main land of Germany, transported on 1,100 ships over the Baltic Sea. During the evacuation 33, 082 people perished (=1.3% of the total saved); the heaviest losses occurred on these ships:

<u>Sinking Date</u>	<u>Ships Name</u>	<u>Total people drowned</u>
4/16/45	GOYA	6,666
5/3/45	CAP ARCONA	5,594
1/30/45	WILHELM GUSTLOFF	5,384
2/10/45	STEUBEN	4,561
5/3/45	THIELBEK	2,414

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All maps, including the table of the ancestors, following the hand drawn sketch by Harald Vogel were added by Klaus Moser to give the reader a better understanding of the border changes and the migration in East Prussia and Eastern Europe.