

1. Leaving Germany

I can't remember the precise date, middle of July, late July; I just can't remember, and I did not take note of it. Too much had happened in too short a time. I was only 15 years old, although believed to be 18 by everyone, including my husband. Circumstances had forced me to live as if I was five or ten years older. It was as if I had been burning my candle in both ends at the same time, but it was also the outcome of my survival instinct kind of running wild, as it were, and it was working.

I was alive. I was kicking. I was with a sweet loving guy, who adored me, and we were making love literally day and night. What more could I want (?). Well, I could certainly have wanted to have my family with me, but they were lost. My adorable father exterminated by Churchill, and my mother, my wonderful grandmother and my aunt annihilated by Stalin; all lost to me and forever within a single year.

In the six months since the Russians had exterminated the rest of my family, I had been forced to cover at least 5 years of growing up in an all too short a time. I felt like I had to kind of think it through and try make peace with all these momentous events and how it affected me. I had never had time to grieve and in my own feeble mind take leave of the rest of my family after the Russians so viciously killed them.

Now, that I was at relative peace, literally in the arms of a truly loving human being, I had to try come to terms with all that happened, and to that end, I enlisted my young husband's love and help. His patience and understanding at that time gave me my new life, new hope and the belief I had a future ahead of me worth living. Until I met him, I was subsisting on my survival instinct, just that. I was like a cornered, trapped rat always looking to survive at any price. Once I met Lee on that fateful day in the American Zone in Berlin in July 1945, it all changed completely.

For six months, give and take a day or two, it had been as if my survival instinct did my thinking for me, made my decisions, planned ahead, accepted hardships and indignities; I, of my own free will never would have put up with. And yet, that is exactly what happened. I will always wonder, do all human beings have a latent survival instinct like that, which, perhaps, only a few of us are able to muster in situations such as what I went through.

I was this sweet, pretty, semi innocent 15 year old girl, with the precocious willowy figure and soft curled, flowing dark brown hair boys and men lusted for, but my survival instinct was something very different. In that was hidden strength, determination, even forcefulness I did not know I possessed. Where did it come from ? How did it take over my life ? How did it force me to survive ? I do not know, and I probably never will.

After Lee picked me up and I happily consented, I started to relax and went in search of my former self. I tried to explain to Lee how this felt to me, both because I perceived a need to confide in someone who was sympathetic, but also to reveal to Lee what was happening to me. He was both understanding and protective, beyond what most would have expected

from a 19 year old boy. It seems to me, maturity came much earlier to young people in the 1940s and 1950s, than is the case half a century later. In those days, we wanted to get started on life as soon as possible. Today, the opposite seems to be true.

I remember very little of our departure from Berlin. It was very early in the morning and we were packed into army busses and drove in a cortege with many army trucks through the sector occupied by Russia. There was an army officer in charge barking orders and instructions. I seem to remember something about, there would be rest stops every 3 or 4 hours only. Much to my surprise, there were at least a couple of women on the bus besides me. I have an idea they were connected with newspapers or radio or something like that.

As much as I appreciated escaping from the horrors of war, the ruins of Germany and most of all the atrocities of the Red Army, I was also very ambiguous about forsaking my fatherland and the feeling of leaving for good. This was after all, for better or worse, the land and culture of my origin, my family, my genes, all I knew, all I had been taught, all I had grown from. I know there are people, who are able to pick up and leave where they came from without a second thought, but not me. I was deeply rooted in every sense, but by then I also realized, Prussia was gone for good. The Russians had hated Prussia for at least seven centuries and Hitler had provided them with the opportunity to destroy it. With monsters like Stalin and Beria, and Churchill cooperating, such an opportunity would not be lost. Prussia had ceased to exist.

We did not know exactly where we were headed. I had heard Nordenham mentioned, which I believe is on the North Sea coast somewhere between Hamburg and Bremen, but at a certain point, during a stopover, we learned Antwerpen in fact was our destination. I vaguely remember passing through the city in the early hours of the morning and arriving in the port area perhaps around 8.00 A M. The bus stopped at the foot of the gangway of the ship, which was to carry us to New York. It looked huge to me, but Lee explained, it was a regular mixed cargo/passenger ship, a type which had been used on the run to the East Coast of South America for many years, and had been converted for wartime use.

We made our way up the gangway with the other passengers, and were assigned our cabins. Ours was very small with two bunks so narrow, it would be very difficult for the two of us to sleep together in one, but it did not bother us in the least. We were so young, so happy together, any minor hardship like that, was something we would only laugh about. At our young age, such minor inconveniences were truly trivial.

As it turned out, the ship would not be sailing for another 3 days, because it was still discharging cargo from USA, some of it probably destined for West Berlin! The booms and winches on the ship were very noisy, when cargo was being moved ashore and work was proceeding until late every night. It also started early every morning.

Practically from the day I had met Lee in the American sector of West Berlin, I had become acquainted with copies of newspapers and magazines of a free press, something which I had essentially not known during my entire life. I was born in 1929 and we ceased to have free media of any kind by 1933, when Hitler took control. Consequently, all I had known,

was doctored Nazi dailies, magazines, various propaganda publications and newsreels in the local cinemas. We all knew where the “news” came from and who wrote it, but we were as hungry for information as anyone and consumed it anyway.

But from the day, Lee had left me for a little while in the makeshift library in the American sector in Berlin, I had become addicted to newspapers. Lee also liked to see at least one paper every day, so we went ashore together, while the ship was still discharging cargo, hunting for any newspapers we could find. We were not successful, and thankfully a supply of papers and magazines were delivered onboard before we sailed.

I had encountered some black servicemen in Berlin, but only at a distance so to speak, and they were the first blacks I ever saw. Onboard the ship, there were many black crew members, and also members of the housekeeping staff. That was my first real encounter with American blacks, and indeed any human beings of African origin.

Lee’s feelings about black people almost certainly originated with his father, but were very much also marked with his own experience, as I indeed was to learn in due course. I do not remember word for word what he said, when I asked him onboard the ship, but it was something like this: “The blacks have had a hard life, and racism is a sorry fact of life in the country to this date. We owe them the same respect and help we would accord anyone else. They are every bit as intelligent and inventive as we are, but they need a little help on the side of ambition.” Lee as much as told me, these had been his father’s words, but it still impressed me for such a young guy in 1945, to say that.

I think there were about 150 passengers onboard the ship, a mixed and motley lot. First of all, there were in fact two other couples like us. The girls were respectively French and Belgian, also young, but not as young as I. The largest group were discharged servicemen, who had been hurt or injured and no longer were fit for duty, but there were also many, who simply were returning as the American military presence in France and Belgium was scaling down, and there were people, who seemed to be refugees.

The dining room was set up cafeteria style for every one. Very sensible considering the purpose of the ship. The food was plentiful, but bland and there was very little in the way of vegetables or fruit, but at least oranges, which was a treat for me. The ship’s captain was a character. Lee told me, he could easily have taken his meals in the officer’s lounge, but he was gregarious and wanted to meet as many of his passengers as possible. He sat with us at least twice and demanded to hear our stories and background. He put us through several fire and emergency drills on the passage over the ocean, which annoyed Lee, but I believed to be very good. There were still many magnetic mines floating around, and ships were blowing up regularly at that time.

We were allowed to walk the length of the ship, even crawling up that part called the fore castle, the front point of the ship. We would stand there and enjoy the invigorating ocean air and look for other ships, of which we saw very few. The ocean was surprisingly calm, which Lee claimed was normal for that time of year. There was also quite a lot of fog once we encountered the Labrador current as we were getting closer to North America.

Our ship arrived at the pilot station outside New York during the night, and we were already sailing past Staten Island heading for the Hudson River by the time we were up and outside watching the approach. The weather was clear, sunny and warm. The sight of the city ahead of us, with Brooklyn, the East River on the right and the Statue of Liberty right ahead of us, was astonishing, outer worldly. I watched it all in amazement .

This was the city I had heard so much about, and already seen many pictures of. My grandfather had spent time here, and always spoke of New York with great fondness and my grandmother had always wanted to visit this city as well. In 1945 New York enjoyed a unique situation in the world as the major remaining centre of culture and civilization still at peace, far removed from war and pestilence, where refugees from all of Europe had sought shelter for generations and particularly during the last decade.

There were of course major cities also at peace in other parts of the Western Hemisphere, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City, Montreal and Toronto, but none of them were world centers like New York, none of them could aspire to the feeling of cosmopolitan splendour and centers of culture like this city. I got a feeling, that early morning, that my own life was going to be tied to and connected with this city sooner or later.

Our ship was being towed by a tugboat in front, but also proceeding under our own power, and we were also followed by another tugboat to help keep us on the straight and narrow, and keep us from drifting off or colliding with other ships. A young cadet was kindly providing us with this information as we proceeded past the Battery up towards our berth around 40th street. The tugs diligently eased us in between two piers, then gently pushed our ship alongside, where it was tied up with mooring lines. I watched all this with childish fascination and delight.

The customs and emigration procedures went easier and faster than I could have expected, based on what documentation already had been provided for me in Berlin and the magnificent marriage certificate issued by the Reverend Jennings and the two witnesses. I was given some kind of landed emigrant status and told I could apply for citizenship in due course. That was it.

The military had booked a hotel for Lee for one night, which we could extend, if we wanted and could afford. Lee had decided we should stay for a total of 3 days, which we did. The hotel was Edison on 47th street and I adored that place. It reminded me so much about a hotel, where I had stayed with my grandparents in Berlin as a child built in the best Bauhaus style of the time, and here I was in a wonderful Art Deco building, not so very different in style. Bauhaus and Art Deco influenced each other extensively, and I felt right at home. I have loved that place ever since.

After we had checked in to the hotel, we walked around the neighbourhood, Times Square, 42nd street; we walked over to Rockefeller Center and finally up to Central Park. I felt such a sense of peace, and I remember thinking, the Russians will never bother me again here!

We dropped in to some restaurant for supper, and it turned out to be Jewish. On the menu I found ox tongue and that brought tears to my eyes. I love ox tongue and it had been one of our favourite dishes at Grunerhof in my childhood. Lee was horrified. He said: "Renata, how can you eat that?" and I laughed with such happiness and forced him to try it. To his surprise, he found it quite edible.

We went to bed early exhausted from this immensely eventful day. I have an idea, I kept my arms around Lee all night, because I felt everything that was happening was so momentous, so huge for a little lost Prussian girl like me. It was almost as if I felt reborn in this incredible city. I had this feeling, all of humanity had come together and put their best efforts into this place, and this was the outcome. God I was happy.

I woke up reasonably early next morning and made love to my husband, and after I had fully exhausted him, and myself for that matter, and we were lying together wet and sweaty and happy, he put his arms around me, and said: "Dad told me, there are girls like that, but you have to search far and wide to find them. I knew, when I met you, I had found such a girl!" Then we showered together and went down for breakfast. That was another very happy experience for me, because I found marinated herring for breakfast, something I had feared I would never taste again, and it was very good.

We spent most of the day on sightseeing tours and it was very enjoyable. First, we were on a boat tour around the island of Manhattan and later a bus tour, which drove around the Battery, up to Central Park and back to Times Square. I could not believe how perfectly placed our hotel was. It was ideal. We had no fixed plans for our last day in the city, and I pleaded with Lee to visit the Metropolitan Museum. I think, the only reason he agreed, was because he could not come up with anything better, so we went.

Reluctantly, he admitted, the paintings had been enjoyable for him to view, but he did not care for sculptures. I was happy with that, because the paintings were my main interest as well. I could not believe how extensive a selection of European art we found there. The more I saw, the more convinced I became, America was in fact very civilized and I was not going to lose my culture and heritage here.

The next morning we went to the railway station, probably Grand Central, I am not sure, and started our journey to Kansas City. I can't remember if we went directly, or if we changed trains somewhere (St .Louis ?) . I watched the passing landscape, towns, villages, cities intently. This, after all, was going to be my new country and I wanted to know as much about it as I possibly could learn.

Lee had spoken with his family on the phone, and they were all at the station welcoming us. There was his mother "Mum", his sister Susan, her husband and 2 children, two uncles on his father's side and some of their children, Lee's two closest friends Jack and Gary, another family friend Clarence and many others.

The welcoming was really quite overwhelming. If my impression, that Americans are hospitable and warm hearted needed confirmation, this was it. They were so loving and

kind, and the fact, that I realistically, was “one of the enemy”, never even seemed to register. They made me feel right at home from that moment on.

During the 10-12 days, from our arrival in Antwerpen and until we stepped ashore in New York, not only had I asked Lee lots of questions about his life and his family, but he had also made a good effort to inform me of who was who in the Prentice clan and how everyone related and interacted. In my estimation, he did that with a sensitivity and maturity for his young age, you would never encounter today, at least not in the Western World. He just impressed me immensely and I loved him for it.

The missing link in all of this was Lee’s dad, who had died suddenly a little less than 2 years ago. It was so sad and so trifling how he was lost. He was a highly placed manager of plants and warehouses in the grain company, where he had spent all his working life. During a lunch hour, he had taken a fork lift to get some pallets of clover seeds moved to a shipping dock, when the fork lift tipped over on a slightly sloping floor and crushed him on the spot.

His personality and influence still suffused the life of the family to such a degree, I ended up feeling I knew him well, and I myself was moved in many ways by his thoughts, opinions and ideas to such a degree, many remain with me to this date, and they were all conveyed to me “2nd hand” as it were, not just by Lee, but by his sister, his mother, friends, even the Reverend Jennings, who had been a friend of his since they were young.

Obviously, he had been one of these individuals, who are endowed with that much extra energy than all the rest of us, allowing him to go off in all kinds of different directions, maintain and nurture many interests, which he then shared with friends, family and children. For one thing, he read more than most Americans seems to do, or at least did in the 1940s, including his children. For years I benefited from books he had collected, and no one now paid much attention to.

The other figure who was missing, if I can be so presumptuous to say so, when we arrived with the train, was Auntie Lou Ann, Lee’s mother’s sister. She was a very wealthy widow after a considerably older director of this very same grain company Lee’s father had worked for. Lou Ann was just a couple of years older than her sister, but at her present station, she did not go to railways or airports to welcome anyone, people came to her, and that was fine with us.

We paid our respects to Lou Ann the next day, and she was most graceful. She informed us, our “real” wedding had been arranged for late September. It would be held at her villa and she would be paying for all costs! That last part was not mentioned, but Lee informed me of that later. Lou Ann was in fact generous to a fault, but she was also quite mindful of her wealth and where it had placed her; of that one was never in doubt.

Susan, Lee’s sister, I fell in love with from the moment I met her. She was sweet, earthy, affectionate, warm hearted and unaffected. She taught primary school, and was apparently very popular in school. Her husband was a senior foreman (or something like that) at the

municipal water works; a quiet guy with a wonderful sense of humour. They suited each other so very well. He was about ten years older than Susan.

Lee's mother was unique all in her own way. I think she was in her late 50s then, sweet natured, chatty, unassuming, humble, never had a bad thing to say about anyone or anything, very likable and pleasant, very tolerant, but also with surprisingly few opinions about anything. She was rosy cheeked with thin, light grey hair, a little overweight, probably borderline diabetic, with some past health issues. She had had cysts removed twice. Neither of her children seemed to have taken very much from her, except that Susan also had some of the same "see no evil hear no evil" disposition.

Lee's mother was not very outgoing or energetic, and within a year of becoming widow, she had started to talk about going to live with her sister Lou Ann, whom she was close to, and who had encouraged her to do so. Lee had told me this could happen fairly soon, unless he pleaded with her not to leave, and since the house was fairly small, he thought this might be a good move for us all. After just 3 or 4 weeks, Lee's mother moved to the villa, as they all called it, and she was indeed very happy there.

Although both Lee and Susan loved their mother dearly, I got the distinct impression they, in many ways, had been their dad's kids, in the sense, they had taken their directions from him. He had inspired them, answered their questions, taken them hiking, fishing and camping and all the other things a lively, outgoing parent does. I remember Lee remarking a couple of times over the years, that his father had a strong personality.

One thing I was never really able to understand to my own satisfaction, was how Lee's parents relationship had worked. It became quite clear in due course, from everything I heard and learned, they had for years been living, more or less, separate lives. But that surely was not how they had started out.

For many years, Lee's father's work had involved a lot of travel and he had been responsible for warehouses and grain elevators in several mid Western states. Lee admitted to me, in a sort of low key manner, that his father had maintained steady girl friends in several locations he visited regularly, and that in all likelihood, he stayed with these women, whenever he was in their towns or villages. Lee never told me, and I did not want specifically to ask, but I do not think Lee had this information 2nd hand. I believe his father, one way or other, told him, or admitted it to him.

It is a bit like saying to your child or children: "I have you kids with your mother, but I have other women besides; get used to it!". Nothing new under the sun really. It seems, whenever human beings are in situations conducive to extra marital relations, they tend to occur. So much for our natural inclination and commitment to exclusive pair coupling, or pair coupling necessarily, but not necessarily pair coupling.

Of course, I knew and was familiar with different versions of conjugal unions, not least my dear grand parent's free wheeling matrimony. This, however, was evidently a little different. These partners, clearly, were not equal. The wife chose to stay put, while the

husband roamed. By implication, I was to gather more details about that over time.

Two days after we reached Lee's home, he went to see his old employer, the parts plant for diesel engines. I found his dedication admirable, although I understood as well, so many of his fellow workers, and even superiors were very good friends also. He brought me along and introduced me. I didn't mind at all, even though I felt a bit like a trophy in some respects, but they treated me like a little princess. They told Lee he could start back at work within a week, at his option, and he took them up on that on the spot.

We drove in a big American car. Lee told me, his father had been in habit of changing cars every couple of years, and this one had been nearly new, when he died. Lee did not care for it. He said: "It's too big for me. I feel out of place in it." Within a couple of months, he had convinced his sister and brother in law to take it, and we got a cute pick up truck. It was very simple and unpretentious, but all we needed, and suited us fine. My young husband loved back roads and out of the way places, and for that you needed a car like that.

The last member of the household, I have not mentioned yet, was a golden retriever called Max, surely the nicest, most affectionate dog I ever knew. He had been Lee's and his dad's dog, while his mother did not care too much for dogs, so now he was ours and I could not have been happier. He went everywhere with us, and always made me feel very secure. If we went in a store, he was very content to stay in the truck, and no one would dare try interfere with it or brake in, let alone steal it. At home, he liked to sleep near the front door, and he knew exactly who were welcome visitors and who were not. If I ever had a touch of loneliness, Max snapped me out of it, as if he had been a human being.

The first Saturday, after we arrived, we went to visit Reverend Jennings. It was really very emotional for me, because he had immediately taken such a caring and personal interest in me, when we met in Berlin, that I felt he was like a close and treasured relative and family member. This was so much more so, because I had lost all of my own family and he gave me this feeling like an uncle I never had. He told us, he was in contact with politicians and even senior military officers. He knew the Russians were doing dreadful things in Germany, and he expressed unreserved dismay at Roosevelt's and Hopkins' collaboration with these thugs. He looked forward to our September wedding.

Lee told me after the visit, Reverend Jennings was not in the best of health, with heart problems, and that he in fact was semi retired. He lived alone in a nice house and a house keeper was with him every day. Just like us, he had a nice dog, a Dalmatian I think. He asked me to visit, whenever I might find time, and I assured him, I would do so. He did in fact live within, what for me was walking distance, less than 2 miles. I promised myself, I was going to do just that, and Lee encouraged me. He thought it was a wonderful idea.

Lee's neighbourhood was modest but for me very cozy. The homes were, by European standards, small, simple bungalows, but the lots were relatively large, with quite extensive, empty lawns. Some had these characteristic white picket fences, others not. Most of the streets were tree lined, mainly with elms, huge elms, untouched by the elm disease, which only arrived in force several decades later. I will never forget walking those streets with

those magnificent elms, winter or summer. It was something truly uniquely American. I never saw such elm trees in Europe. I loved and admired those trees, and those streets and neighbourhoods were precious. I wish American artists would have made more of an effort painting them, and I wish I had made more of an effort simply taking photos of them.

Of course Lee took me all over the city, and showed me all the pertinent points, which I would not remember until I had seen it several times, and at more leisure, but I was obliged. When he went back to work, after just a few days, I could settle down to relaxed breakfasts with his sweet mother, and get a more leisurely view of everything. It worked out like a charm. In fact, she and I got along perfectly. Instinctively I felt, her marriage could not have been an easy one. Of course, her husband was a great man in his own right and in his own way, but, they were not, what I now call, energetically matched. That was their problem.

At my advanced age of 15, I perceived that, and I felt so much sympathy for Lee's mother, because of that. She should have been married to someone like Jennings, but that obviously was a little late to discover at this point. After just one day together, Lee's mother and I were hugging each other, like long lost relatives. I felt such a kindness towards her, and I felt I connected with her in ways her own children did not seem to. Eventually, I think they also perceived that, and found it a little strange, even slightly objectionable. Anyway, with my natural penchant for diplomacy, this was never a real problem, just a minor eccentricity.

After Lee's mother moved to the villa, Lee wanted to get rid of some superfluous furniture and accumulated knick knacks, and he said: "The house needs painting all over." I quite agreed with him, and told him: "This is something we can do over a couple of months;" and so we did. In fact, I did most of that painting, and Lee was the first one to acknowledge that. He said I was his sweetheart, lover, wife and housepainter, all in one! Poor Max got a bit of paint on him, other than that, it worked out very well, and I felt, I and we had put our own imprimatur on the house. All homes accumulate odours and scents, unique to each, and when you paint a house throughout, you reduce or suppress the smell, so you may have the opportunity to impose your own.

On my way across the Atlantic, it not so slowly dawned on me, what I had involved myself in, and that I had assumed all kinds of new responsibilities, without giving it any real prior thought. It had to work out, I told myself, or I was going to lose a great deal of self-respect, besides making my adorable young husband very sad and unhappy. Anyway, I was a tough little girl. I had dealt with challenges far exceeding housewifely duties, and I was very confident, this would work out just fine.

My cooking skills were rudimentary to put it mildly, because at Grunerhof, our cook was in complete control of everything connected with our food preparation, but she had allowed me to participate now and then, and on Sundays, mother and I got to practise our ways in the kitchen. The Prentice household appeared to have been leaning heavily on the meat and potatoes school of cooking, and I soon came to see it as a challenge to bring a lot more vegetables into our nutritional regime.

Our house had one of these white picket fences on both sides and facing the street. The house was somewhat further back on the lot than most, with a separate garage and a driveway to the street. Almost the entire lot was simply a huge lawn, which Lee diligently kept cut and trimmed. As soon as Lee's mum moved out, and we started to make changes to suit us, I started to plead with Lee, to let me grow some vegetables and plant some fruit trees.

He was very reluctant at first, but I took him by hand and we made our way through the neighbourhood to a little house I had seen during a walk with Max. There the people had made full use of their lot. It had very neat rows of vegetables of all kinds and in the background lovely fruit trees with apples, pears and even a grape vine on a pergola. "That is a real victory garden"; Lee told me. He went on to explain, the whole country had been encouraged to grow their own vegetable gardens like that, to free up manpower for the war effort and improve nutrition overall.

"My dad had intended to put in a garden like that, the year we lost him, so nothing came of it", he told me. He went on and mentioned, he actually knew the family with the lovely garden slightly. They were of Italian extraction, and Lee told me, they always grew fruit and vegetables. Much later I came to know the lady myself. She was a lovely Calabrian mama, with lots of children and already some grand children. She gave me bean seeds to plant in our garden and they grew beautifully with huge yellow bean pods.

With this newfound information, I was able to overcome Lee's reluctance. "My sweet love", I said to him, "this is what your dad intended. Let us just do it!". He could not find any way of countering that, and had to agree. Much later, he told me, he had been afraid, the gardening responsibilities would fall on him alone sooner or later. When that proved not to be the case, he was very happy, and encouraged me, even agreed to plant more fruit trees. In due course I went on to plant raspberries, strawberries, quince trees, Victoria plums and lots of vegetables.

Our Kansas City wedding late in September, after our preliminary wedding in Berlin in July, was a grand affair. There were really only two things I felt strongly about, where I insisted on having things my way. First of all, I did not want a floor length wedding dress, with one of these endless trains, but on that score I might have lost out. It became something like "when in Rome, do as the Romans do".

Unknown to me, Victorian style wedding dresses with long, long trains was the American style, kind of a manifestation of conspicuous consumption; what could I do. After a lot of discussion, I agreed to wear Lou Ann's wedding dress from decades ago, much to everyone's astonishment. I told them, I could not agree to such a waste of money, when I now learned, this perfectly good wedding dress still existed and was in excellent condition. Just a few minor alterations were needed.

Much to my delight, this wedding dress was from the 1920s, when short wedding dresses were popular, and Lou Ann, more than anyone, actually ended up supporting my decision

whole heartedly. She told me, in her inimitable American way: “Girl, you have got guts. I like it. You made the right choice for you!”.

There would be a live band, more like a minor orchestra in fact, and we had to dance a waltz. Since I was of German origin, everyone had set their sights on a Strauss waltz, in fact several. “There is enough French blood in me“, I told them, ”I want a French waltz!” What I had in mind, was a very specific waltz, which forms the 3rd movement in Berlioz’ symphony. It is very rarely played alone; nearly always simply as part of the symphony, which is fair enough. After all, that was what the composer intended, but it is the sweetest, most melodious waltz I have ever heard, and I have loved it since I was a child.

No one knew this waltz. No one had ever heard of it. Hardly anyone had ever even heard of Berlioz, but my sweetheart Lee was resourceful. He said: “This is where our friend Clarence might come in handy”. I will get to Clarence in more detail later, but he was very well read, had travelled widely, and as we discovered, knew Berlioz well, and was able to get his hands on a recording of the wonderful *Symphonie Phantastique*, in which the waltz forms the 3rd movement.

The band was then obliged to listen to that record over and over, until they knew the melody by heart. These were the ancient 78 records, and I think the 3rd movement took up one side, so it was relatively easy to play the same side repeatedly. It worked out beautifully. I got the dress I wanted, and we danced to that lovely waltz all evening.

The church was impressive and full of flowers. Reverend Jennings told the story of how he had married us in Berlin, on the condition he would marry us again in Kansas City. I was very moved and emotional through the entire service. I could not believe the love and kindness bestowed on me. If these people knew, what had happened to me earlier this year, they might not be so generous. And if they had any idea, of my real age, this would almost certainly not be happening either.

The church was full and so was Lou Ann’s villa. Two large tents had been erected in the garden and the weather was lovely. I knew only a few of the guests of course, but got to know many of them over the years. Since the story of my choice of waltz became known, so many of the men wanted me to dance it with them, and I could not in all fairness refuse. We stayed at Lou Ann’s that night, and we were both so exhausted we promptly fell asleep. The next morning we had a good laugh about the fact, we were too tired to make love on our own wedding night! Anyway, we did plenty of that other days and nights.

More or less from the day I arrived in Kansas City, I was a news and media addict. This had started already in the makeshift army library in Berlin, but from the day Lee and I reached his home, I have been devouring whatever news I could get my hands on. I was of course starved for informative and reliable news, since I had to grow up without, but I think it goes beyond that. All my family loved to read and we had subscribed to all kinds of newspapers, magazines and also foreign publications.

So, from the day we reached New York, I had been following every bit of news about the

conditions in Europe and the ongoing war in the Far East. Predictably, from my point of view, the Western Allies in Europe were slowly starting to wake up to the treachery of the Russians, their basic deceit and dishonesty, which we Prussians knew all about. I had had an instinctive liking for Truman since I first read about him and saw him on cinema news reels, and I felt so sorry for him, having to deal with the Russian thugs, and try clean up the mess left over from Roosevelt and Hopkins in Germany in particular, and in Europe generally.

Early in August, the U.S. bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki with nuclear bombs. I supported that at the time, and I do to this date. In the final analysis, I am convinced, it saved a great many lives, and finally persuaded the Japanese to give up their absurd war. The way Japan changed and arose peacefully, so few years after the war, as much as anything indicated, this had been the right course of action. Years later, I visited Japan, and I could see how radically the country changed and adapted to the post war world.

The domestic news, I mainly remember, from the immediate post war years, was the constant and incessant labour market strife. It bothered me, labour leaders were free to instigate and wage virtual war on employers, without the remotest consideration for the country and the communities affected. It was so glaringly obvious, the labour unions were and acted as monopolies and cartels, and should have been controlled accordingly. No one seems to have figured that out to this date.

Churchill in Britain had been voted out by the time we reached Kansas City. It appeared as if the British people felt the old war lover had done enough damage, and unceremoniously dumped him. Had it not been for his war mongering, Halifax and Chamberlain might not have issued their preposterous “guarantees” to Poland and Rumania, and there would have been no war in Western Europe. Hitler and Stalin would have been left to slug it out without Western interference; that was Churchill’s legacy.

During 1945 and 46, the founding of the U.N., and the subsequent construction of the U.N. building along the East River in New York, on land generously donated by the Rockefeller family, raised great and unrealistic hopes for world peace. As young as I was, I found it hard to believe, so much faith could be placed in a “world parliament”, when such powers as Russia, and China had veto powers from the very outset. These countries had no concept of democracy, and simple, basic human rights and decency. Russia, at the time, was ruled by the mass murderers Stalin and Beria, and they had veto power in the U.N.! That was all I needed to know, this forum would be nothing but a farce in due course.

September 5. 1945, Igor Sergeievich Gouzenko, who was the cipher clerk and an intelligence officer at the Russian embassy in Ottawa in Canada, defected, and exposed the Russian espionage activities in North America, subsequently much of the Western World. At the time, it was greeted with complete disbelief in USA as much as in Canada and in the U.K. It was kind of like: “How could our comrades in arms, the Russians and the Red Army have been pulling something like this ?” From my point of view, it was about time they woke up to what Russia and Stalin was all about. It is my understanding, many date the start of the Cold War from this date.

These were the comrades in arms, Roosevelt and Hopkins had squandered tens of billions of \$ of arms, material, equipment and food aid on. These were the comrades in arms, Churchill and Roosevelt had rolled the red carpet out for, so they could walk in and take over all of Eastern Europe, country after country, and where they were not able simply to take over without a fight, they made every effort to stir up trouble and strife for years to come, such as in Greece and Persia. One had to admire Tito, who knew exactly who and what he was dealing with, and kicked them out of Yugoslavia. The sad fact of the matter, is American tax payers helped finance the Russian take over of Eastern Europe and the start of the Cold War.

The rest of the 1940s was marked by the extended implosion of the old British Empire, in India, Egypt, Sudan, Palestine, the West Indies and indeed throughout Africa. I am reasonably certain, that would not have proceeded nearly as fast, as disorderly and as dishonourably, if Britain had stuck to Baldwin's sensible policy of staying out of trouble by staying out of Europe. That was not to be. The great genius Chamberlain came to power, ably assisted by the foreign affairs virtuoso Halifax, finally prodded by the imperialist megalomaniac Churchill. When the ridiculous viceroy of India, Mountbatten / Battenberg was cuckolded by Nehru, the incoming prime minister, it summed up the British place in the world, the world was laughing. Britain was not taken seriously any longer.

In March 1946, Churchill made his Iron Curtain speech here in our state Missouri, as if any of this was news. It should not have been. Churchill personally for years had aided and abetted Stalin and Russia in their quest to take over as much of Europe as they could grab, and Churchill had been instrumental in dragging Roosevelt and USA into this servile relationship. Now, at the very least one year after it should have been quite obvious for anyone to see, Churchill was warning an iron curtain had descended on Europe. He failed to admit his own and Roosevelt's miscalculations and trust in the perfidious Russians, and the part they had played paving the way for Stalin.

Western Europe remained fairly unsettled during much of the remaining 1940s. There was communist agitation in Italy and France for years, obviously instigated and financed by Russia. Neither country had a viable constitution, making each country easy pickings for interference and subversion.

All of Europe appeared to be starving during the latter part of the decade, and any country in the Western Hemisphere capable, provided generous food aid, notably USA, Canada, Argentina, also Australia and New Zealand. No one in Europe today, appears to have any knowledge or recollection of that crucial aid.

August and September had been tremendously hectic months for me, Lee as well, but at least he had his job to go to every day. I think that always acts as a kind of stabilizing factor in your life. By early October, my life started to settle down to more of a steady routine as well, with which I was happy and contented. Every day, I had to reflect on how dismal my personal prospects had appeared to be just a few months ago, and how sanguine and confident I was able to feel now. I would never be able to repay the debt I owed to Lee and

Reverend Jennings, my two wonderful saviours.

Early in October, we planted the fruit trees, Lee had agreed to let me get and find space for, apricots, peaches and pears, two of each. Lee and I drove out to a nursery outside the city and selected the best we could find. Then Lee and I dug the holes, and gave each tree a few handfuls of bone meal mixed in with the soil, nothing else, but lots of water of course, and a five foot steel pole to steady the little trees. They all grew happily and bloomed next spring, eventually bearing good fruit year after year. I also carefully dug strips of Lee's fine lawn up, to be ready early in spring to be seeded with lettuce, carrots, kale and mustard greens.

From early October, I started to walk over to visit Reverend Jennings, at least once a week, but often twice. I loved the Reverend for many reasons. Without him, I would still be stuck in Berlin, of that I am certain, and I did not want to even think about in what state or situation. I also loved his keen interest in history, not least the history of Germany and Europe. I got the idea, to try bake a few of our traditional Christmas cookies from my childhood, for which I more or less could remember the recipes. Some would be for my husband, and some I brought to Jennings. They both loved them, so I kept baking them for the rest of the Prentice family, both for Thanksgiving and for Christmas. It seemed no one baked cookies like that, and they all loved the idea of what I was doing. It became an annual event. The ingredients are so simple, but the spices and flavours are unique, cloves, allspice, cardamom, cocoa, brown sugar, cinnamon, citrus peel and assorted nuts. In later years I tried to use whole grain flour, and it was even better.

When Lee and I adored the sight of each other the first time on that memorable day in Berlin, we looked at each other with simple, natural, pure and basic lust. We have both admitted that to each other many times. Neither of us ever considered that to be primitive or wrong, if anything, we both agreed, how right and how natural that was and should be. Lee used to say, probably paraphrasing his dad: "Lust is what you build on. Then you work on love, tenderness, loyalty and enduring friendship." That was my boy, my man. I loved that and that was what I related to. We certainly came to love and respect each other very quickly as well, but our lust for each other never waned.

And that meant many things between us. It made me feel, I could chase him and tease him as often and as much as I liked, and I did. It also meant he could play with me nearly any which way he might like, and he certainly did that too. Lee and I never went through a time, where we kind of explored our relationship, or even explored each other physically. We were like "ready made" for each other. As young as we were, we were both well versed in human intimacies, and I have never known love making more joyous and satisfying than with Lee. He told me the same, and I know he meant it. We understood from the day we met and literally hooked up, we could take all kinds of liberties with each other in our love life, and we did. That made it all that much more lively. I never knew what my lover was going to spring on me, and he never knew what I might be likely to do. It was playful and spirited, but always mutually respectful and loving.

We both knew, we each were sexually experienced, and our life was all the better for it.

But, there was also between us, a tacit agreement, we were going to share the details of what made us so good at making love, sooner or later. We felt, we owed that to each other, but it was not urgent, as long as neither of us tried to weasel out of that deal. The question was: who was going to start off and when!

Here I want to interject something else, which I consider relevant. I had a full and joyous love life, when I was all of 15 years old. Of course, I know full well, it was not supposed to be like that. Everyone for nearly a year had assumed I was a good three years older than I really was, and frankly, in most respects, I even felt that way. I was like an actress who grew into the part, because of circumstances and expediency, and it worked. No one would ever convince me, I was “not ready” to have a love life, or that it might be “harmful” to me later in life, or any number of other nonsensical arguments, against teenagers having a sex life, and doing what nature intended and entitled them to.

If children are not given increasing responsibilities in their lives, and in the household, and if they continue to be treated as children even when they are teenagers, then they will not be ready or well equipped to make decisions on their own, when they reach the age, when lust normally asserts itself. All too often, I have found that to be an inherent problem of American life. Children are not given responsibilities as soon as they are willing and able to accept them; their natural urges and inclinations are suppressed, and they are discouraged from learning decision making pertaining to themselves and their evolving lives. Teenage pregnancies is one result, and there are many others.

This reminded me very much about something from my own childhood, which my “sister” Heike and I had observed regularly. We were always treated, more or less, as adults, as young as 10 or 12, in workers’ families; while in our own families, we were looked upon more as big children, and we were not encouraged to make too many decisions on our own. In school, I observed 13/14 year old kids, sons and daughters from working class families, and from small farm families, who acted as young adults, quite in charge of themselves, and entirely capable of making day to day decisions for themselves.

In America, I found the exact same conditions, but even more pronounced. The higher up the income scale families might find themselves, the more likely the children were to be stifled in their natural need for independence. There seems to be an inclination on the parts of parents, to “protect” their children, as it were, from the outside world, instead of helping them to experience and get used to the real world, with all its risks, dangers, prospects and endless possibilities.

Had my own family been intact, and had we not been exposed to the horrors and dislocations of WWII, I would in all likelihood not have known much about sex and a love life for another 3 to 5 years. In that respect, I paid an exorbitant price for that knowledge and privilege. In any event, it served to open my eyes, to issues and conditions, I feel can be improved upon with more knowledge, exposure and experience.

For my birthday in October, my 16th to me, and 19th to everyone else including my adorable husband, I had asked Lee, if we could just celebrate it alone together, and he was happy to

oblige me. All the festivities connected with our wedding went on for quite a while, and we needed to relax in every sense. Lee's dad had left the Prentices quite comfortable, with fairly substantial life insurances, and when he felt like it, Lee was not adverse to splurge a bit now and then. My birthday was such an occasion.

Lee told me we were going to dine in style in a historical setting. That turned out to be the Muehlebach Hotel downtown Kansas City. The Muehlebach then was probably about 30 years old, so it was still very modern and impressive. It had been a center for business and political activity since it opened, and was, unofficially, known as the Western White House during Truman's years in power. I loved it. I do not remember very much about the food, but I think it was very good. The place was impressive and it felt good to be in a place frequented by President Truman, whom I admired and liked very much.

I was now 16 years old, "officially 19", married, domesticated, settled, legally landed and prospective citizen of USA. Now I was going to apply myself to all of this new life, making sense of it, understanding the traits and distinctions of the country and making my peace with all of it.