



THE SECOND TATTOO

A Journey into Humanity's Abyss

Wilhelm Klein Jr.



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“It’s your birthday!” The gentle melodious voice of my mother penetrated the stillness of the room ever so softly as the sun’s rays temporarily distorted her image as she bent over me and kissed me. I loved that sunshine especially the sunbeams that radiated through the large windows of my room illuminating it and making areas seem so much brighter. It made getting out of bed a little easier. My sunbeams had tiny things dancing in and about them. A movement of swirling particles in these sunbeams fascinated me to wonderment. Because of this, it made leaving that enormously thick goose-down comforter for my sun-filled room an easier transition. This particular comforter claimed bragging rights in our town, and because of its sheer thickness and volume was of historic proportions. My mother’s ladies’ quilt society offered oath that this comforter was one of a kind and would stand for time and eternity in the annals of goose-down creations in all of Yugoslavia. She quietly accepted accolades from her circle such as “Katrina, child, you outdid yourself. Why so thick and use that much goose-down?” One could hear the ladies talking in the evenings in our home where the ladies’ sewing circle met.

A lady by the name of Adelhoffer, a stout spinster, was particularly fascinated with mom’s skills. Her inquiries were always met with a gentle answer from mom. “You know, Theresa, I really can’t tell you why.” “Well, child, it’s overkill. Maybe God only knows why you did it.” I think she was envious of that comforter. However, her statement of “God in heaven only knows,” would prove to be prophetic in time to come.

As mom shook my pillow, it seemed to intensify the dancing and swirling in the sun’s rays. The particles definitely glittered.

Since I was always inquisitive for answers, an array of questions arose which were placed into memory storage. As usual, my Mother was the target of my inquisitions. To her credit, with explanations she bravely and patiently answered most of them. To my chagrin, however, most of her explanations fled beyond my reach. Maybe I wasn’t listening which left me with more questions. “You mean this is dust in the sunshine?” “Well, yes” she said. “The dust is dirty. How can it fly, Mommy?” This kind of dialogue between Mother and son could have become an exhausting journey for both of us. Somehow, her Motherly wisdom turned the tide into another direction of pleasant things to come. She was a master of diplomacy for changing a subject.

“You are five years old today, Willi. Do you know that?” “How much is five years old,” I responded. “Well,” she replied. Before she could go any further, I interrupted with another question. “Does it mean I am old enough to use the outhouse now, Mommy?” My Mother’s hands seemed to move upward and it looked as though she seemed puzzled or was suppressing a smile. I wasn’t sure.

My brother and I were prisoners of the chamber pot. She insisted our toilet training would continue under her supervision with the pot as helper until further notice. You see, in our town of Kuzura, indoor plumbing was a luxury not yet attained by its citizens at this date.



Figure 1 Peter (2), Wilhelm (5) (Author)

“Not so loud, Liebling.” She used a diminutive meaning “honey” in our German dialectal tongue. “You’ll awake, little Peter. Let’s get you dressed, honey.” She helped me with my shoes, but I wouldn’t let her tie them.

She took a washcloth from a big white bowl and poured water from a pitcher, which was standing on a giant, massive, dark-brown dresser matching the armoire next to it and proceeded to wash my face. “Why can’t I tie my shoes?” I was unhappy. “Quiet. You’ll wake little Petey up as she pointed to him.” My little 2-1/2 year old brother was slumbering ever so peacefully under that big feather comforter. You had to look real close or you might have missed him under all that comfort. Petey and I shared a bed. He could lie in one spot all night and never move. However, I fell out of bed every other night. Mom usually found me sound asleep on the floor. It was a good 3-1/2 foot fall. Never did that fall wake me up – never any injury. It was a riddle to Mom and me. Her explanations were “you have fallen so much that your guardian angels make sure you fall softly.” Our bedroom was unheated. So, we kept the door open slightly to get heat from the kitchen tile stove and there wasn’t much. Mom compensated for the lack of heat with large heated bricks she placed under the comforter. This made first immersion into bed quite tolerable. “I find him on the ice-cold floor but his body is warm. He has angels watching over him I just know it.” To prove her point, she recounted several events from my early childhood that would give credence to God’s protection upon me.

“Rosina,” she addressed my aunt. “Do you remember when he fell into the dairy basement with about three feet of water in it?” He slipped under the planks covering the water. The planks served as temporary flooring so the dairy schedule of cheese making would not be interrupted. Dad Wilhelm witnessed this disaster from the far end of the basement and sprang into action. He ripped up some of those planks with his bare hands and fished out little Willi. It happened before Christmas, 1942. “Willi was drenched from head to foot, Rosina, yet the child hadn’t swallowed any water. He says repeatedly an angel saved him and he sticks to that story. Look at the winter of ’43. A speeding horse drawn sled hit him as he was crossing the street. The horses shied at the last moment, but the sled knocked him down.” I remember putting my hands out and feeling a little bump but nothing more. The driver jumped from his seat screaming “Willi, Willi. God, I’ve killed this child.” A crowd gathered, and to everyone’s amazement, I was unscathed. “Don’t tell Mama. If you do, she won’t let me play in the snow anymore.” Everyone laughed. The apologetic driver picked me up and took me to my Mother. “Frau Klein,

Willi took quite a hit. I saw him too late in all that snow. He's a miracle baby. Yes sir, somebody saved you my boy."

That night our Heiland (Lord) was told that I was glad that he was on the job. I reminded him often that He could use some of my angels and send them to Daddy in the war. Didn't my Mommy say I have a lot of angels watching over me? I wouldn't mind sharing them especially if it helped my father, I told my Heiland. The word "Heiland" in the German tongue encompasses the word for Savior, God, Jesus, Healer, Physician, Healing Land, Supreme Being, Protector, Gentle God, and Alpha and Omega - a staple word in our faith.

Remembering also my dreams, I told my Mother about these dreams of death and destruction, which my little mind could not comprehend. I dreamed of an emaciated white cow that wanted to come into our house and bite everyone. This dream was so real it caused me great anxiety. Mom deducted this dream coincided with my sometimes falling out of bed. Mom was perplexed. She had to place her hand on my cheek many nights so I could drift off to sleep. "It's only a dream, honey. Don't be afraid. Dreams can't hurt you." Mom did her best to alleviate my fears, but it wasn't easy. It certainly troubled her. The white cow dreams would manifest themselves into hard reality years later.

Kuzura was a small peasant town, a mixture of Serbian, Slavic, Hungarian, and German peoples who all lived in relative harmony. Medical help was not readily available and Mom could not turn to my father Wilhelm, Sr., who had been conscripted to join the German occupational army in 1942 as a stable boy and caretaker of horses. So, Mom shared her concern regarding my dreams with her sewing circle. One cannot imagine all the solutions these expert child rearers offered. These people meant well, especially Frau Reichenbach, a hefty matron, whose child rearing days were mostly over. Her advice had proven results if actually practiced. "Katie, it is only a dream," as she stuffed another helping of apple strudel into her mouth. I heard her say it from my vantage point under the table and undetected. Nothing escaped me. "The child just has imaginations," she continued. "Be firm with him, Katie. Using the paddle will bring him around...white cows indeed!"

People were farmers. They lived simply, honor bound, and hard-working. In those times, the paddle could and would solve children's problems. From that moment on, I hated that lady and I told Mom so. My gentle Mom rebuked me a little. "Now, Willi, you know our Heiland does not want us to hate. Besides, we don't even possess a paddle." I began to smile from ear to ear. Trying to picture this gentle creature with a paddle in hand bent over me to address that sunless anatomy of mine, was not my Mother. No sir. I began to laugh. I asked, "Mommy, why do you never spank me?" Mom's discipline always incorporated object lessons that somehow got her message across. Oh, make no mistake, they cost tears and were perhaps more painful than a paddle but also were a lesson for life. Feeling a little guilty, I told my Mom I wanted to glue Frau Reichenbach's mouth shut. Mom looked at me and I was sure this is it. You just don't wish bad things on people. Here I thought I was courting disaster but my Mom began to laugh. "Honey, sometimes God glues everyone's mouth shut especially after you put your foot in it. It certainly improves one's looks." She began to laugh again. Well, this explanation was definitely out of my reach.

Peter and I were baptized into the Methodist faith, as was most of the Klein family. Mom made our Heiland very real, and to this day, the most integral part of our lives. Each night we first said little rehearsed prayers. Then Mom taught us by example talking to our Heiland as though He was right in the middle of us. There was nothing that you couldn't discuss with Him and ask of Him. I prayed for my dreams to stop and especially for my father's safety and return. A few more months and some of my dreams would take on a prophetic reality. Our life in Yugoslavia would be forever silenced.

"Now Honey, as soon as I get Petey up, we'll go into the kitchen and have our breakfast." Two glasses of hot milk were always waiting for us. I took two slices of wheat bread, broke them into pieces, and baptized them into the warm milk. Cereal was not part of our vocabulary.

The household at Aunt Enis, our great aunt, would arise about 4:30 a.m., except the children, naturally. Stable and yard worker, maids, Uncle Philip (Mom's brother), Aunt Enis, and Michael, her son, and Mom were all part of the Enis household. Animals were fed, milked and taken care of first. Stalls were cleaned and things were put in order.

The first breakfast was 6:00 a.m. consisting of coffee, milk and bread. Some used bowls, broke bread into them, poured coffee and then sugar on top, which completed this ritual.

The larger houses like my aunt's had two kitchens – a summer kitchen and a winter kitchen. Naturally, usage depended on seasonal elements. Looking back, I would say it was 50/50. All food was eaten in the kitchen. Unless beastly hot, we ate on enormous porches with protective red clay roofs. Grapes and flowers would climb out near every pillar making for a pleasant dining experience. Eating outside on summer evenings were my favorite times.

The preparation of food was second to none. The cooking was unrushed with great detail to herbs and spices. The kitchen had stoves for cooking and baking, cabinets for dishes and food storage. Shelves lined both walls and both kitchens were so similar except the summer kitchen had window screens and was not winterized. Refrigeration was a world away. Food was always fresh and of great variety. Each kitchen had counters but not running water or sinks. Washing dishes was done in pots and pans, which stood on the counter tops.

Mealtime allowed for interaction, conversation, news, gossip, and everyday concerns. It slowed down time. Breaking bread together gave one a certain sense of self-worth. You were an integral part of the table, an ecumenical group for sure – Methodist, Lutheran, Serbian Orthodox. All bowed their heads before meals, as Uncle Philip would lead us in, "Lord, come and be our guest." You honored God, not someone's religion.

The second breakfast would be at 7:30 a.m. Petey and I usually made our entrance about that time. The entire household, sitting at designated places, would wait until Uncle Philip prayed and wished all a good appetite. The kitchen was the center point for daily activity. Petey and I sat near the head of the table near Uncle Phil, revered and fussed over by all. This breakfast would resemble any current smorgasbord available today.

Oh, the bread! - The bread consisted of large round homemade loaves made with unbleached flour, each loaf weighing about four pounds. On baking days, the aroma of

this epicurean delight was so profound you simply succumbed to it. Any thought of diet and waistline would prove futile. The bread was baked on stone plates or inserts with a wood fire underneath it. No thermometers of any kind were available. You had instinct handed down from one generation to another. Recipes were unnecessary. You were taught, stored it, and passed it on. Bread was not sliced. If you wanted a piece, you took a loaf and cut a piece to your desired thickness.

When you entered the kitchen, you washed your hands in a bucket provided for that occasion. Cleanliness of body and soul, according to Uncle Phil, is man's first religion. I remember that statement to this day, especially remembering him checking my hands before each meal. As in all households, mealtimes were strictly observed. Punctuality and protocol was a way of life.

I felt special today. After all, this day was my birthday. Everyone congratulated me. Giving me gifts was not greatly practiced on such occasions. Mom baked my favorite cake and Uncle Phil stood up and told everyone, "Willi's gift will arrive tomorrow morning." The entire table smiled. It seemed they all knew what he was talking about, especially Mom.

Grown-ups can be very secretive when it comes to surprises for children, so I thought. "Take Petey and go to Grossvater," Mom said. "You'll have lunch there and I'll be there too." She reminded me that it was Sunday, and at 3:00 p.m., the church will meet at Grossvater's as usual. Grossvater's house was Peter's and my birth house. We lived with Grossmutter and Grossvater until our Dad was forced into the occupational German army in April of 1942.

Petey and I left by the kitchen door, stepped out onto our large tile porch and took two steps onto the court yard below, which was brick lined in its entirety. Most houses had a courtyard with a six-foot wooden fence and one huge entry gate for wagons and one gate for people in the front courtyard. The courtyard was separated with a lattice fence from the back yard. The back yard contained barns, animals, compost piles, outhouses and huge gardens. Fruit trees and a variety of shrubs graced the perimeter of the back yard. Everything had order and neatness to it.

I opened the gate, held Peter's hand and stepped out onto a brick sidewalk. Everyone had some kind of brick sidewalk. You installed them yourself as long as there was no mud. Design and stone was up to you. Kuzura streets were not paved. Main Street had a little gravel.

Grossvater's house was about six hundred feet away on the other side of the street. All houses were built very close to our streets. The front entrance started at the sidewalk and the best room was at the front of the house.

When walking, you could talk to your neighbors, right through the window. When curtains weren't drawn, the entire inner room was visible. The finest furniture of tables, sofas, glass, and credenzas had to be displayed.

As we walked, several neighbors greeted Petey and me through their open windows. One lady with the long name Lautenbach, who had six children of her own and with whom I played, greeted me with "Much luck on your birthday, Willi." She asked us to come into the front room. People in our town usually came into a house through the front

courtyard and the kitchen. I felt really special as she handed each a “Brunne-kipfel”, translated “well cookie” which is a type of sugar croissant. The meaning of well cookie was derived from the preparation of the dough. The dough had to be cooled. Since we had no refrigeration, people put the dough in sacks or cloth and hung it in deep-cold water wells to cool before forming and baking. The sugar croissant is purely an Austrian-Hungarian creation. The French claim it but Napoleon borrowed the recipe. We said, ‘thank you,’ and continued our journey.

Grossvater’s house was the largest house in Kuzura, made of brick and stucco. It was originally designed as an inn. The architecture paid great detail to the function of the house as well as the court yard including a semi-ornate large center entrance. To the right of the entrance was a huge room that served as a ballroom and bar of long ago. The left side of the house was our dairy. The rest of the house, or “L”, served as living quarters. Huge glass enclosed hallways, kitchens and tiled verandas shielded from sun and weather.



Figure 2 Kuzura Klein House (front)



Figure 3 Kuzura House (back yard)

We opened the gate and the odor of sour milk greeted us along with Hektor, our big white dog who adopted me long ago. As we turned the corner of the house, we saw a huge banquet table with fancy linens and dishes under our old walnut tree gracing the courtyard. Maids and Grossmutter rushed nervously about. She spotted me, grabbed me, kissed me, and proclaimed that our birthday child has finally arrived. “Why are we eating outside, Grossmutter,” I asked. “Oh, it’s such a pleasant day, sweetheart. Besides, this is better than being inside a stuffy kitchen. We’re having a special guest today. Can you guess who it is?” “Well, we are having church today, aren’t we? So, maybe it’s Pastor Drumm.” “You smart aleck. How could you guess that about him?” “Easy”, I replied. “He’s not been here for a while.” “Oh, but there are other Pastors who come, she challenged me. Why him?” “I like Pastor Drumm” I retorted. “He tells good jokes. He’s funny.” To this day, Pastor Drumm has set the standard high. Pastors without humor have a hard time holding me to

their sermons.

Peter and I were told to sit on the veranda and not get in the way. The traffic to the table was dangerous. Between Grossmutter and her two helpers constantly moving about, it would have been disastrous if a body got in their way. Each time they passed us a delightful aroma seemed to follow them everywhere. The summer kitchen made it an even more enticing aroma. For a hungry child to sit still under these conditions was more than I could stand.

Just as I got up, Grossvater and my uncle Fritz came through the back yard near the kitchen. Uncle Fritz ran over to us and hugged us exclaiming, "Willi, happy birthday!" He informed us that his favorite pig had just birthed a whole bunch of little pigs. Grossvater was known for his blue ribbon pigs throughout the region. Raising pigs was a necessity. It supplemented income for the family.

Grossvater spoiled his pigs. He made a type of cottage cheese only for them. He attributed the health of his pigs and the superior meat quality to his creation. "How else can you explain this exploding proliferation among my animals," he was heard saying to prospective buyers. "Meine Herrn das kann nur der Kase sein," he reiterated over and over. "Gentlemen, it is the cheese." People became believers and gave him the honorary title of Milkman. The Klein name gave way to the milkman. Klein and milkman became a synonym. And most people preferred the latter. Our town held him in high esteem. Many swine fanciers ordered Grossvater's concoctions and it became a lively business on its own.

Fritzie was like an older brother to me. He took Peter by the hand and we marched through the gate into the back yard. Grossvater stepped out of the summer kitchen and told us enthusiastically, "Wait children, I'm coming too." Grossvater knew where we were headed and would not miss an opportunity to show off his pigs, especially to his favorite grandsons. Taking me by the hand, off we marched. "Can you imagine we have nineteen little pigs?" He was excited and that excitement became instantaneously contagious to this little group.

Fritz mirrored his father's excitement as we entered a custom built barn designed for pig comfort. Grossvater believed that God gave us animals and be master of them. He told me that these animals were like servants and a good master takes care of his entire household. Cruelty was the sign of a weak man he intoned and said so often.

The barn had a large, spacious middle aisle with stalls on each side. The attic contained straw, corn and supplies. Each stall had a door to an outside pen. The hired help cleaned each stall daily as well as the outside pen. Grossvater hated filthy pens. His pigs had a higher standard of living. Clean water and eating troughs were the order of the day. This protocol was repetitive from day to day.

Not being tall enough, Peter and I looked through the large gaps between planks of the stall where Fritzie's pig, with her offspring, lounged. He jumped into the stall, grabbed the squealing piglet, and handed it to Grossvater. Grossvater looked pleased all the while the little thing was making ear-deafening noises. "Fritzie," he said, "this little guy has good lines" and some other things which I didn't understand.

Looking back, I'm positive that Grossvater's pig endeavor and its success was his

respect for all of God's creations and creatures. He had names for each of them, talked to them and petted them. I'm positive these pigs loved him. They rewarded him in their own way as previously stated. When they saw him coming, pandemonium broke loose. They squealed with child-like joy. I can attest to that; I was there. A shrill, very irritated loud voice boomed into the barn. "Dada (Dad), do you know what time it is, and in your Sunday clothes and the children?" Unmistakably, this was Grossmutter's voice. Grossvater looked at his pocket watch and hurried out of the barn. "Coming mamma," I heard him say. "The children wanted to see the new arrivals. What else could I do?" This took the heat off him and would restore peace quickly. Anything that benefited her grandchildren's happiness, Grossmutter's temper would melt down rapidly and Grossvater knew when to play that card.

Grossvater was master of his domain but Grossmutter was captain of the ship. She guided her family through the many storms life brings to all of us. Grossvater succumbed to her wisdom long ago. Raising nine children and starting a small dairy business together, proved that Grossmutter was at the helm. Her family handed down her dairy experience. After marriage and several children and a move to Kuzura, she taught Grossvater the art of cheese making. Grossvater embraced the dairy business and became an enthusiastic cheese maker.

Fritzie, Petey and I were told to wash our hands in a big bowl near the well house. Hektor began to bark just as Pastor Drumm came through the front gate, pushing his bicycle having ridden nine kilometers from his town of Vrbas. Before we could greet him, an entire hoard of people came into the front courtyard where greetings and shaking of hands were lovingly exchanged. My people did not use the word "hello". You greeted foe or friend with the words "Gruss Gott" translated "God's greeting."

Uncle Joe and Aunt Susan with my three cousins, Othillie, my age; Rich-4 and Heidi-2 in tow, created more greetings and introductions. Uncle Joe had furlough and was home from the German army. Uncle Phil, Aunt Enis, Michael, who also was on leave, and my Mother were already seated at the table. Several neighbors and a family by the name of Roth, with their two daughters, Hilda-12, and Gretchen-15, joined us. Peter sat in the high chair next to Mom. I sat next to Grossvater. That's the way Grossvater wanted it. Pastor Drumm was seated at the head of the table. The head of the table was an undisputed honorary seat usually held by Grossvater. But, on this festive occasion, Pastor Drumm held court. Grossvater looked at his pocket watch and said, "Oh, two minutes after twelve, excellent, Grossmutter. Now let us pray. Come Lord Jesus, be our guest. In your name, our food be blessed." The entire table in unison joined Grossvater in this prayer ending with a loud "Amen."

Our family believed in setting a fine table and Grossvater Klein's table reflected the culinary skills of Grossmutter and her helpers. The Austrian-Hungarian kitchen intertwined with French cooking was the order of each day. It is said that when Napoleon marched through Austria, French cooking left its mark as well and spread throughout the empire. When it comes to French cooking, Grossmutter was a step ahead of all French cooking "wannabees". You see, Grossmutter's forefathers came from an ever-disputed French region called Alsace Lorraine. Germany and France moved its borders constantly. Today it belongs to France.

A family by the name of Kister emigrated from Alsace Lorraine in 1781 to find a new life in the Austrian Empire. They brought with them a mixture of French and German influences, cooking being just one of them. One hundred years later, Grossmutter still used the fine-tuned recipes from her Mother.

The noon meal was the main meal for most households in our town and this particular Sunday meal was more festive because Pastor Drumm partook of it with us. You sensed a type of camaraderie between the diners, especially among grown-ups. Their conversation centered on many subjects, which I couldn't follow. When Pastor Drumm interjected the latest news of the war, the table became very quiet. "The war is going badly for Germany, I fear. Storm clouds are inevitably coming our way." His fears had substance to them and were not unfounded.

Our meal had begun with chicken noodle soup as was customary. No meal lacked the absence of soup. Not to have soup simply was not civilized. Soup was ladled out from large bowls from our resident garcon and her helpers.

Pastor Drumm's words were being digested. This created a strange silence and gripped our diners.



Figure 4 Pastor Drumm second from right

The soup tantalized my palette bringing about a state of contentment etched into my mind forever. Each spoonful became more repetitive. Forgetting my manners I found that soup more delightful by slurping it down. The more I slurped the better it tasted. I was convinced of that. My cousin Ottillie and Richard picked up the rhythm and soon were in unison creating a melodious crescendo of slurping. Fritz shook my arm and told me to stop it before Grossvater gets mad. Too late! The old milkman shifted his glasses onto his forehead and if you had known my Grossvater that was a signal his temperature had risen. You best get out of his way.

Pastor Drumm saved the day. He had a strong baritone laugh and he exercised that laugh in the nick of time. Soon the entire table joined him in a good laugh. Grossvater's glasses fell back down to his nose again as Pastor Drumm remarked smiling, "What would we do without children?" That's why I liked him. He understood children.

As the main course was being served, Pastor Drumm became animated. Chicken paprikash after all was his favorite. After taking a few bites, a kind of discourse followed. He began by lauding Grossmutter's choice of dish. "Children, this chicken is succulent

and delicate. The aromatic red paprika sauce, robust but not overpowering, has migrated into the dumplings giving this partaker a certain gastronomical satisfaction. There were smiles on everyone's face around this table. He just had a way with words. He appreciated the artistry and creativeness of this particular cooking that was so bountifully and fully displayed on this table. It was his way to give credit to one's accomplishments and Grossmutter was the current recipient. Grossmutter brought the table atmosphere to greater heights by declaring, "Pastor, I take your appraisal of my chicken as a compliment. But I know this, if my chickens had heard those words before they were butchered, I'm sure they would have jumped into the pot all on their own accord." Well, the table exploded with laughter, as did the Pastor. For a moment, all in attendance had a good time. But, the reality of World War II was ever so sobering. Ominous dark clouds hung over us for sure.

Grossmutter kept it going every so lightly. "Forgive me Pastor; your words are fit for a king. But, some of the context I just didn't quite understand." This time Pastor Drumm exploded with laughter all on his own declaring to the table, "Well, it's not a secret. But sometimes I have trouble understanding myself." The ice was broken. The table exploded once more with hearty laughter. Pastor Drumm had a way with words for sure. Somehow he could always make a negative into a positive and that's probably why he endeared himself so to his congregation. The meal ended with coffee and light fruit compote. Grossmutter said that dessert would be served after church service.

Additional church members started to arrive for the 3:00 service. More benches had been brought out so the entire congregation could be seated. Pastor Drumm stood up and, as he did, so did the entire congregation of about 25-30 people and he invited us to pray. He prayed a short prayer inviting our Lord Jesus to come into our midst.

The little Methodist congregation opened their songbooks as Pastor announced the hymns. Our parishioners owned their own hymnals. It was tradition to have our own copy and we carried it to the services with pride of ownership.

We had no music that afternoon. Our little pump organ was no longer working and, of course, there was nobody to play it. The gentleman who played the organ had been conscripted to the German army. Nevertheless, the Pastor, with his booming voice led us in several songs.

Pastor's message was about a young man who ran away from home, spent his father's money and got into trouble. That's about all I remember, but sitting quietly only because I was hoping to hear a funny line or joke. Pastor did tell one of his stories about a donkey falling into a soldier's trench during World War I. That was funny to me. Although the entire meaning of the story escaped me, I could just see soldiers jumping around as the donkey ran back and forth in that trench. The way the story sounded they wanted that donkey away from that trench. Many years later, Mom's exceptional memory brought that story to full biblical meaning. It seems the donkey jumped into the soldier's trench seeking protection from the loud bombardments going on. Thoroughly confused, the animal ran to and fro rebuffed with rifle butts. They wanted that donkey out.

The soldiers, after the skirmish had settled, began to tease their chaplain. "Well Padre, you can't find the Bible verse justifying this incident," a Sergeant hollered. Being a man

of the cloth, this chaplain was known to give a verse from the Bible on most occasions. He had a certain talent for it, but by this time, the soldiers just knew that their chaplain would cease and desist. He would be speechless so they thought. But God's undaunted servant stood up and said, "Boys, come a little closer. I'll admit you had me. But it seems to me that in the New Testament, there is a verse and it goes something like this. He came to his own and his own received him not." Laughter erupted as the congregation thoroughly enjoyed that story.

The closing of his sermon admonished the listeners that forgiveness is paramount to Christian living as our Heiland was the perfect practitioner. To receive forgiveness, one must also give forgiveness. Amen also served as a benediction. Only Pastor pronounced this "Ah men" with a long "h" sound in between. As the storm clouds of World War II totally engulfed us (many of our people and even myself, a child), the word forgiveness would become foreign to us.

"Grossmutter has an announcement everyone," Pastor Drumm said as he winked at me. Grossmutter announced, "No one is to leave. Cake and coffee is being served. There is plenty for everyone. More tables were brought out so everyone had a place. You should have seen the other children's faces as Grossmutter put a big Dobosh Torte with six layers of chocolate and a hard sugar glaze on top of it. "Katie, this beats all your previous creations," Grossmutter laughed. The circumference of this beauty had to be twenty inches. The staggering height of twelve inches had to be a record for a Dobosh Torte. Grossmutter held up the cake so all could see. There was applause and one gentleman even hollered, "Bravo." "Happy Birthday honey," she winked at me. Again – applause.

Mom began to slice the Torte and all the children were given a piece first. All our guests were enjoying themselves. Cake was not to be had every day, but when we did, we did justice in a hurry. I noticed Pastor Drumm tasting a particular doughnut but put it down when Mom served him a huge piece of my Dobosh Torte. As he surveyed the piece on his plate, he began with, "Children, children, I think I am going to fall into a culinary carnage. It just proves the flesh is weak." Everyone laughed. "So our Pastor lacks willpower," Uncle Joe was heard saying. Before anyone could laugh, Pastor already replied, "Not if my wife were here." By now, everyone knew it was my birthday and I didn't want it to end. Around 5:00 people were leaving hugging each other and shaking hands. 'Aufwiedersehen'.

It was a great afternoon and I was happy, but I missed my Dad. Would I see my Daddy again?

Mom, Grossmutter and her helpers cleared the tables. Uncle Phil and Michael took down some tables. Everyone pitched in. Grossmutter told Mom to stay for the evening meal and she gladly did so. She didn't have to go home and serve her household. It was a treat being served here.

The pigs began to squeal as Grossvater approached them. It was feeding time, and on Sundays, Grossvater was the cook. Boiled potatoes and boiled corn that Grossvater had been cooking in the backcourt all afternoon. Pastor Drumm joined Grossvater. Grossmutter put aprons on both. Fritz thought they looked silly.

Around 7:15, we all sat down to a table of ham, a variety of smoked sausages, fresh

garden truck, onions and garlic included. And, of course that wonderful bread! How our men could take an onion between two fingers, including sausage and bread, put it to their mouths, and slice it off near their lips was a mystery to me and still is today.

Partaking of a particular large piece of watermelon, I noticed Petey had fallen asleep in his highchair. I put my watermelon aside and leaned on Fritz. When Mom saw that, she said, "The children are tired and we had better put them to bed." For once I didn't argue. We all had a full day. Pastor asked to take leave, thanked us all and said a short prayer asking our Heiland for protection, as we would head home.

Twilight was upon us as Pastor remarked, "I hope my iron horse knows the way home." "Fritzie, why does Pastor call the bicycle a horse? I don't see a horse." "Tomorrow Willi, tomorrow. Just hold on," as he tried to place me on his shoulders. Mom carried Peter and off we headed.

Hektor was following us. Fritz tried to tell him to go back. But Hektor would have none of it. He growled. Fritz calmed him down, but Hektor was his own man. He followed us home. Hektor made sure I was safe.

Saying my prayers, I thanked my Heiland for a great day, for a great Mom and a great Grossmutter and Grossvater and for a great man like Pastor Drumm. Somehow I got stuck on the word "great." I heard somebody use the word "great" over and over again that afternoon and now I was practicing it on my Heiland.

Pastor Drumm's influence on my young life was profound even at the age of five and came to fruition in my adult life. As the Good Book says, "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he shall not depart from it." Certain events of my young life were so vivid that even today I sometimes question, "Did I really go through these things and what was the purpose?" Inevitably, I always come back to this: "that we were taught from the earliest age that God is in control".

June 5th 1944 was also my day. Time stands still when a child awaits a gift promised by Uncle Phil twenty-four hours earlier. As the aroma of chicory coffee brewing in the kitchen invaded our bedroom, I heard Uncle Phil's louder than usual voice. He gave the breakfast diners the impression that Willi's present should be given to the kids next door. After all, Willi probably wants to sleep the whole day away. Tearing off my nightshirt, I ran into the kitchen in my underwear. Nobody was going to get my present.

It was a spontaneous entrance unorthodox to our house convention. To renege on a child's gift that was so anticipated simply would not be allowed. "Here I am, Uncle Phil," I yelled. "You mean you are here for your breakfast," Uncle Phil melodiously announced. "Uncle Phil, you're silly. You know what I mean. You promised me a special gift." My reply was even louder. "Well, so I did," he responded. "Aunt Enis, you didn't give Willi's gift away yet, did you?" To my relief, Aunt Enis shook her head.

Michael went to the door and brought in the cutest little white goat. "A baby goat, look Mama! I've got a baby goat. Hey Petey, wake up. I've got a baby goat," I cried. Picking up the little fur ball, I paraded around the kitchen for everyone to see. Everyone at that table was informed that from now on the little goat would sleep in my bed. Aunt Enis piped in, "Well child, that's not a problem at all, Willi, as long as your bed is in the barn."

Trying to convince grown-ups that a barn was no place to raise a baby goat is about as difficult as telling a swimmer to dive into an empty pool. "What are you going to name him," Mom asked. After thinking just a short time, I blurted out, "Snow White." "But that's a girl's name," she protested. I protested, "Mama, he is white and snow is white."

Our neighbors were amused and remarked that somebody had put me up to calling my little goat Snow White so it would match with our Cow, 'Princess' just like the fairy tale. Today, I find it amusing, but so help me, in naming my goat there was no conspiracy. After all, snow is white.

Mom reminded me that Hektor is coming and will be here shortly to escort me to kindergarten. "Will you watch my goat, Mama?" "He'll be right here when you get back. Snow White will have the entire back yard in which to play. I'll make sure," she promised. "But if he gets into my raspberry bushes or my strawberry patch, he'll wind up in the barn at a crib."

Hektor, announced himself by scratching on our kitchen door. Mom was always amazed that this dog at 8:30 sharp was ready to escort his little master to kindergarten. Mom addressed him several mornings with, "Dog, this is a mystery to me. How do you know what time it is?" Hektor ignored her. He pushed his big head under my arm and his big black eyes told me we had no time to waste and had to go. Hektor always insisted on going out that big gate first.

Uncle Phil, who was watching from the veranda, said to my Mother, "Just look at that dog. He makes sure things are safe on the street before Willi steps out. From my view here, Katie, right now he is in the ditch and Willi is on the sidewalk." When other kids joined me, Hektor paid more attention to me but stayed in the ditch. When it rained he walked next to me, perhaps he didn't want to get his feet wet in the ditch.

Our school was located on the other side of our street about one-fourth mile from Aunt Enis and just several blocks from Grossvater's. Our teacher had come all the way from Germany to begin her career among us Swabians. Our dialect amused her to no end. Her job wasn't easy as every other word had to be translated and corrected. She enjoyed her job, though. That was plain to see.

At 12:00 p.m., kindergarten was out and Hektor was there in the ditch. With Mom being busy in Aunt Ennis's household, Hektor and I headed to Grossvaters. My afternoons usually were spent with Grossvater and Grossmutter.

There was always something interesting happening at Grossvater's. Many people came with their milk buckets to deposit their milk, and buy cheese. It was kind of fun. There were a lot of interesting things for a kid to do.

As we passed my friend Mickey's house on the corner of Church and Post Streets, he spotted us and decided to tag along with us. My friend, Mickey Hermann, was seven years old but didn't attend German school anymore. We had become the best of friends. Naturally, my conversation shifted immediately to my baby goat. I told him I called my baby goat Snow White, and Mickey seemed satisfied with it. It was decided that after lunch we would go to see my goat.

"Why aren't you coming to school, Mickey?" I wanted to know. "My Mom received a

letter telling us that it would be better for me not to come to school. Now a Rabbi comes to our house to teach me,” Mickey explained it quite well. “Willi, the Rabbi is someone like Herr Drumm who comes to your house. They talk a lot but they like kids and that’s all I know,” was his explanation.

A loud voice echoed down the street. “Mickey Hermann, dinner in thirty minutes. Let Willi go home. We have food too.” Unmistakably, this would be Frau Hermann’s voice. As we neared Grossvater’s house, enticing and delectable odors were wafting at our noses. Grossmutter’s dinner was announcing its presence and welcoming the hungry diners.

Mickey fell prey to the aroma and decided to see what we were having for dinner. It was well known that anyone knocking on Grossvater’s door at mealtime could count on the milkman for a square meal. Any friend of Willi’s had priority. At many a meal, Mickey had become a regular table companion of the Kleins. Particularly, during hot summer days, noon meals were eaten under the old walnut tree in the courtyard.

Turning the corner, we saw that the entire household was already seated. Sumptuous dishes graced the table and, as usual, Grossvater pulled out his pocket watch. “12:14, children, a little late but passable...” Grossvater motioned to my chair next to him and a maid pointed Mickey to an empty chair next to her. Grossvater always insisted that an extra table setting had to be set. Its symbolism simply was that Jesus had an open invitation to our table. That’s how I understood it. Mickey benefited from that setting on many occasions. “Sit down, children, sit down,” Grossvater repeated several times.

Saying grace at Grossvater’s before any meal inviting the Lord Jesus to be our guest was never perfunctory and it never grew old. This always was special. Grossvater eloquently announced, “This goose looks roasted to perfection, Grossmutter. Boys, let’s dive in,” as he began to carve the big roast in front of him. “Children, you better eat quickly. It could be this goose might sprout legs and run right off the table.”

The entire table enjoyed Grossvater’s attempt at humor. His humorous side became quite evident. Most people would have never guessed there was a little bit of a prankster in him. It blossomed for sure at this meal. “Klein Bahtschie,” Mickey turned to Grossvater, “My Mother says I shouldn’t eat here so often because you eat a lot of pork and you know we aren’t supposed to eat any. Besides, Willi doesn’t like pork either.”

With great showmanship and flourish, Grossvater carved a rather substantial portion of roast and put it on his plate. Triumphantly, he held a small cut piece near his mouth, smacked his lips and slowly began in earnest to eat it. Mickey and I stared. “Here Willi, have some,” he offered. “Pretty good, isn’t it?” After tasting that little morsel, I agreed. “The best, Grossvater,” I replied. “Come on Mickey, this goose is good.” Mickey carefully began to eat a little piece and with suspicion aside, he made a meal of it. “Grossvater, I don’t see any Drumstick,” Mickey commented to Grossvater. “But my father says you are one of the smartest men in town and, if you say this is goose, well then, it’s okay.” “Mickey, I would never invite you to eat something that wasn’t delicious. Willi just stated it was the best.”

Grossvater was in rare form. Dining with Grossvater and Grossmutter was always an event. There was an unmistakable aura of well-being among the partakers. Today was no exception. Recalling Pastor Drumm’s words, “A dinner such as this is a feast, a domestic

triumph, a feast for a king. Don't give the recipe away. Keep it in the family." Yes sir, Pastor Drumm knew what he was talking about. Grossvater continued, "Having you boys as table companions is an honor and sharing this goose defies all description. A little faith in your fellow man is what this is all about. Yes sir, you boys won't forget this dinner."

"Grossmutter, didn't you want to save this big gander for Christmas? You must have done this for Willi because he hates pork." That part of it was true. I knew our pigs in Grossvater's barn were called pork. To this day, I can honestly say that pork products are at the bottom of my food chain. Before Grossvater could speak another word, Grossmutter took the floor and this way lay madness! "I don't know about this roast," she said energetically, "but I know one big gander will get his goose plucked for sure." The grown-ups were laughing including Grossvater. He loved the way Grossmutter could take a hilarious situation to another level.

Well, this would have ended the farce, but the loud voice of Frau Hermann was heard. She entered the courtyard inquiring if we had an extra diner because she was missing one. She greeted everyone with a smile, especially Grossvater. You couldn't help liking him even though he was temperamental at times. People said he had so many good sides, which evened out his character.

"Well Mickey, I see you cleaned your plate. It must have been good," she declared with slight sarcasm. "What did you eat?" "Goose, Mama, a roasted one," Mickey happily replied. I noticed Grossvater began to fumble with his collar. "Goose. Goose? Is that so," she suspiciously inquired. "Well, not really." Grossvater interrupted Grossmutter who was ready to confess her innocence in this little game. "Frau Hermann, come sit down. Your presence graces our table. Try a bit of this goose. I can recommend it.

Grossmutter left the table to get the dessert. She was talking to herself out loud, "maybe we really did have goose." The grownups were laughing again. Frau Hermann was smiling. She knew what that goose was really all about. "Klein Bahtschie, if that's goose on that platter," she commented, "I need to get glasses." Laughter erupted from all corners of the table. Frau Hermann mentioned that she and Herr Hermann's dinner was waiting. "Mickey," she said with matriarchal authority, "since you have eaten already, you may stay and play with Willi, but if you get hungry, I am sure there is plenty more of Grossvater's goose left."

Leaving, she looked at Grossvater, turned and smiled at all of us. "Tell me Klein Bahtschie, how many legs did that goose have?" The diners drowned themselves in laughter but I didn't know exactly why.

Minutes later, we were enjoying Grossmutter's pudding and fruit compote, when Lentil Hermann, Mickey's oldest sister, arrived carrying a large platter displaying a freshly plucked goose. You see, when Frau Hermann left, she headed straight for the butcher shop on the west side of Church Street across from their house. "Grossvater, with compliments from Mother," Lentil laughingly presented the platter to my Grossvater. There was a note attached to both legs of the goose informing Grossvater that Mickey ate so much goose that she was afraid her offspring would deplete Grossvater's goose herd. Now that Mickey and Willi liked goose so much, she wanted to be a contributor to the children's nourishment. Bedlam erupted. Diners, laughing, ran from the table. Mickey and I started

laughing too, but we weren't sure why except these grown-ups were acting awfully silly over just a goose. This dinner goose was noteworthy. Within minutes, laughter had spread up and down Church Street.

Fritz Roth, our neighbor across the street, came over upon hearing all about the goose, slapped Grossvater on his shoulder and exclaimed that someone should record this event for posterity. And so it has.

The Kleins and Hermanns had a trusted friendship. The little humor between them cemented this trust. Perilous times were upon us all. To survive them would require trust in God and your fellow man. The Klein household's first order was to trust in God. Practicing your religion was not as important as practicing your personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. True faith in God's word transcends the most vigorously practiced religious order. We were known as faith people. Many of our town's people attested to it.

Herr Hermann once told Pastor Drumm at a chance meeting at the dairy, "If all Christians would be like the Klein bunch here, then maybe Jesus was the Messiah after all." That's very heavy. The Hermann's practiced their Jewish religion but in a more modern way. They did adhere to some tradition. Noticeably, Herr Hermann often remarked to Grossvater that he had a hard time believing in any deity.



Figure 5 (What Hektor looked like) Hungarian Kuvasz

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