

Esther Minskoff

TRUTH *and*
CONSEQUENCES



Truth and Consequences

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Prologue

Before class started, the fat, pimply girl in the first row raised her hand and asked me, “What did you do during the war Dr. Schmidt?” The students knew that I had emigrated from Germany to the states in 1948, but no one had ever asked me this question in public. Whenever someone asked me this in private, I said that I worked with children and moved on to another topic sending the message that this was a taboo subject. I didn’t know why this time I blurted out the truth, but I did.

“I was the Director of the Berlin School for Handicapped Children.”

“Weren’t handicapped children killed by the Nazis?”

“Yes. One day all my students were taken away by soldiers. They were gassed and burned in a crematorium, just like the Jews.”

“Didn’t you try to stop them?”

“How could I? I was powerless. I would have been killed. What would you have done?” As I asked this question, I glared at the girl, placing blame on her for my impetuous response.

None of the students spoke. They were stunned into silence. It was as if they were frozen in time. This was not part of Psychology 231. I began lecturing on Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development. When the students looked up from their note taking, there was something new behind their eyes. Mingled together were shock, disgust, anger, and discomfort at not knowing how they would have reacted had they been confronted with evil in the guise of soldiers carrying innocent children to their deaths just because their brains were different, just because they were not considered part of the master race.

I was able to stem the flood of repressed memories that spilled forth from my unconscious into all parts of my brain: the occipital region where I saw a picture-perfect image of the sobbing children being put on buses; the temporal region where I heard their screams; the frontal region where I grasped the inevitability of their impending deaths; and the hippocampus awash with grief, horror, desperation, helplessness, and shame.

There is a focal point, an event that is more powerful than anything else in a person’s life, and this was that point for me – Dorothea Schmidt, Ph.D, formerly Director of the Berlin School for the Handicapped and now Assistant Professor of Psychology at American University in Washington, DC. Everything after that event was tainted by that

memory. And that memory even reached its tentacles back to tarnish everything that came before. It stained every engram etched into the protoplasm of my brain.

Chapter 1

Full Disclosure

Leon and I were four months into our affair when he asked me to tell him about my life in Germany. At the beginning of our affair, we hadn't spent much time talking. Instead, we were overwhelmed by our passionate relationship. Although I'd slept with a number of men over my lifetime, my relationship with Leon was different. It was all-consuming. When we made love, there was no outside world. It was just us, insulated in our cocoon, impervious to prying eyes. For the first time in my 40 years, I was in love with a man, my darling Leon.

Until then, sex for me was often a means to an end. I wanted something from the man I was having sex with, and I almost always got it. I often pretended to be sexually satisfied when I wasn't. I never did this with Leon. He always satisfied me. Leon hadn't had many sexual partners. Sex with me was something he couldn't have even fantasized. He felt as if he'd been thrust into a movie about an affair between a glamorous woman and her unlikely lover. We were like the characters in *Wuthering Heights*. He was Heathcliff and I was Cathy.

Here was Leon – short and stocky with black curly hair and pitch black eyes encircled by horn rimmed spectacles; and here was me – tall and slender with platinum blond hair and pale blue eyes. I tried to cultivate a certain image, a certain persona. I was a chain smoker which I thought gave me an air of sophistication, but smoking also relieved the tension that constantly pulsated in me. Leon smoked an aromatic pipe which added to his image as an intellectual. When I spoke to someone, I leaned in closely, invading their space, and staring deeply into their eyes as if I was sharing pearls of wisdom. My breath heavy with cigarette smoke mingled with my strong perfume to intoxicate the senses of those around me. I worked hard to create an image of sophistication and sexuality, and I succeeded.

I changed my hair and clothes to whatever style was most popular. In the 30's, I wore my hair in finger waves and in the 40's I wore a peek-a-boo style like Veronica

Lake. I liked the mysterious, seductive look this gave me. In professional settings, I wore suits, especially Chaneles. And in informal settings, I wore pants for a liberated look.

I was told that my face reflected my dual personality. It was like the drama/comedy mask. When I was serious, my face was angular, harsh, even intimidating. But when I smiled, the angles gave way to arcs and padding. Most of the time in the past when I wore my happy face, I was with children. I'm not sure why being with children made me happy. Was it their innocence, their goodness, their unquestioning acceptance of anyone who showed them affection? When I was with Leon, I wore my happy face. Maybe he, too, was good and innocent, and until then unquestioningly accepted me. But would he continue to do so when he found out what was hidden beneath the persona I'd so carefully cultivated?

At work and in most social situations, I was serious and seldom smiled, while on the other hand, Leon laughed all the time despite his submerged sadness. Leon told the corniest jokes which he appreciated more than anyone else. He had this loud, Santa ho-ho laugh. To Leon, life was precious; it was to be savored, especially since it had been stolen from his family. To me, life was something to be approached with wariness and caution because of potential dangers lurking behind every encounter.

Up until 1930, Leon and I shared a similar upbringing. We both came from affluent families. His father was a professor of psychiatry at the University of Berlin Medical School and his mother a psychoanalyst. My father was a business executive and my mother a member of the landed gentry and a lowly member of German aristocracy. Despite the dire post-World War I conditions of Germany, we led fairly privileged lives. But we differed in one respect which at first didn't seem that significant, but within a few years would be a matter of life or death. His family was Jewish; mine was not. There was no drop of Jewish blood to pollute my Aryan lineage, a lineage that contained a heavy infusion of evil.

Leon and I met through my brother, Kurt. They were brilliant students who competed with each other to get better grades and win more scholastic competitions, first in high school and then at the University of Berlin. Both were physics majors who were enthralled by the exciting new field of rocketry. In 1930, they entered doctoral programs. Kurt stayed at the University of Berlin, while Leon accepted a scholarship offer from Columbia University in New York to study with the world famous physicist Enrico Fermi. But more importantly, it got him out of Germany saving him from being murdered by the Nazis. Leon's parents were not as fortunate. They refused to leave Germany

because they were convinced that their well-educated, cultivated countrymen would never turn against them. How wrong they were. They died in Dachau.

After the war, Leon came back into my life through his contact with Kurt. During the war, Kurt was one of the closest aides to Werner Von Braun, the lead scientist working on the development of German rockets. At the end of the war, the U.S. Army surreptitiously got Von Braun, Kurt, and other scientists out of Germany and brought them to the states to work on American rockets in the space race against the Russians. The scientists' Nazi pasts were expunged so that they could lead the battle in the new war against the Russians. The war with the Nazis was quickly forgotten, and criminal pasts were eradicated. Kurt was given a job at the Applied Physics Laboratory, APL, at Johns Hopkins University just outside of Baltimore. This happened to be where Leon was working. He had completed his doctorate at Columbia and during the war had moved to the University of Chicago with Fermi. Leon and Kurt happily resumed their friendship, but now they worked cooperatively, not competitively.

In 1948, Kurt got me out of Germany and brought me to the U.S. Leon helped him negotiate the tangle of red tape involved in post-war immigration of Germans. Leon was able to get me a position teaching psychology at American University in Washington because of my fluency in English, my Ph.D. in psychology from a world-renown program, and my expertise on Piaget's theories of child development. He used his parents' German colleagues in psychiatry and psychology who now lived in the U.S. to guarantee me a job which was necessary for being granted immigration status. Had anyone known of my past contacts with high ranking Nazis, I would have been barred from entering the states. The only one who knew was Kurt, and he would never tell anyone, especially since he wanted to keep his own dirty hands hidden. I could never thank Leon enough for helping me make it to the states and getting me my job which I loved. Maybe that was part of the reason I loved Leon – he was instrumental in giving me a new life, a blessed life.

When I first came to America, Kurt and I shared an apartment in Baltimore. To thank Leon for his help getting me to the states and the job at American, we invited Leon over for a celebratory dinner. This was the first time since 1930 that I'd seen Leon. I would never have recognized him if I didn't know who he was. He wasn't someone I would have taken note of back in Germany. He was just a fellow student of my brother's. He wasn't important, and he certainly wasn't handsome. To me, he looked like just another Jewish intellectual. In 1930, there were lots of Jewish intellectuals in Berlin. Just a few years later, there were none.

After that first meeting, we didn't see each other for two years. I never thought of him during that time. I was busy launching my teaching career and learning the ways of my new country. We met again in 1950 at a New Year's Eve party for APL staff. Everyone in the country was in a celebratory mood because the economy was booming and there was a euphoric feeling that the last half of the 20th century, unlike the first half, would bring peace and prosperity to all. Leon and I spent much of the evening talking about our lives since we'd last seen each other. We even kissed lightly at midnight. When the evening ended, I invited Leon to my apartment for a home-cooked German dinner the following Saturday. I don't know why I did that. I knew there would be more than food. It certainly wasn't Leon's looks or what he could do for me, which was nothing. He had already done all that I needed. I just liked talking to him. I especially liked laughing with him, something that was rare for me. His ho-ho laugh warmed me.

I spent the whole day making weiner schnitzel, spatzl, red cabbage, and strudel. I hadn't cooked like this since I lived in Germany. We ate every morsel of the food and we drank beer, lots of beer, as we reminisced about our pre-Nazi days in Germany. I was careful to avoid any mention of my life during the war. The food and especially the beer made me feel better than I had for a long time. Every muscle in my body relaxed. I always felt that I had to be on guard to cover up my past, but now I lowered it, just a bit.

After dinner, I shocked Leon and myself by plopping down on his lap. I was a bit tipsy from all the beer and more than a bit horny since I hadn't had sex for a while.

"Leon, I'm going to give you a very special dessert, one that will satisfy you like no other you've ever had."

I unzipped his fly and took him in my mouth and sucked as hard as I could. He was in a state of shocked ecstasy. I thought his eyes would pop out of his head. I laughed at his delight.

"This is the first time a woman has ever done this to me, and I certainly hope it's not the last." He roared with delight.

"Now it's my turn for dessert."

Since he hadn't done this before, I guided him and we both climaxed together. Leon was never the same after that. I tapped a part of him that he didn't know existed, and he was very proud to learn that he had a strong libido. Under his professorial façade, he was a raging sex maniac.

After that night, we met as often as possible. Sometimes we had dinner, but usually we just had sex. I found that I loved having sex with Leon. There were only a few others I had enjoyed it with. In most instances, it was something I did, and I did expertly. I could win an Oscar for how expertly I faked orgasms, but I didn't have to fake them with Leon. They were real. There was nothing I wanted from Leon other than to give him and myself pleasure. This may sound strange, but I realized that American freedom applied to sex. Now I was free to enjoy sex, while in Germany I didn't enjoy it. I used it to barter for something I coveted or to protect myself. Maybe there should be a new right included in the Bill of Rights – the right to enjoy sex.

When I wasn't with Leon, I thought about him. This, too, was another first for me. I realized that I was in love. I asked myself if I really loved Leon, or if unconsciously I wanted something from him, perhaps protection, perhaps forgiveness. He was a Jew who could protect me from the accusation that I had somehow been responsible for what had happened to the Jews in Germany during the war. I never considered myself a collaborator, but I certainly was silently complicit. I knew from the start what was happening to the Jews and to anyone who spoke up against the Nazis. Everyone knew. People didn't just disappear into thin air, unless it was their cremated ashes wafting on the breezes over Europe. I didn't consider myself an anti-Semite. I loved working with Max Wertheimer and my other Jewish professors. I even had sex with some of my Jewish classmates while I was an undergraduate. I couldn't love a Jew if I were an anti-Semite. Could I?

But there was more. Leon loved life despite his losses. I never really knew anyone who loved life like he did. When I was with him, I smiled most of the time. I even laughed loudly and giggled, something I hadn't done since I was a child. Not only had he kindled my sexual flames, he kindled a joie de vivre that I'd previously experienced only when I was with children. Leon had the innocence and goodness that I loved in children. Maybe I thought that he could make me innocent and good. Maybe he could erase what I'd done in the past and who I was when I lived in another land in another world in another age.

On the evening when he asked me about my life in Germany, we spoke in German. We usually spoke in English, but now we reverted to the language of our memories.

Leon said, "Ichliebedich,"

I answered, "Ichliebedichauch."

I realized I'd never spoken these words to a man before. I said the words over and over, savoring each mouthful. I said them in a soft voice, in a loud voice, in a high voice, in a low voice, in a sexy voice, in a baby voice, in English, and in French.

We both laughed and laughed, and then we hugged for a long time. We just stayed in each other's arms savoring our togetherness.

Leon said "I need to know all about you Dorothea. I want you to tell me about your life, especially what happened to you during the war."

I couldn't tell him everything. I only wanted him to know the parts that made me look good, the parts that made me look innocent. I needed to bide for time and decide what parts of my life I had to censor or change. If I told him everything, I would lose him. No one could love a woman with my past. And I didn't want to lose Leon. I wanted to be his wife. I wanted to be with him forever. But if I didn't tell him everything, any future we might have together would be built on a foundation of secrets that would inevitably crumble. Secrets have a way of intruding into reality no matter how much mortar is placed over them. Anyhow, there would be too many inexplicable holes if I tried to cover my past. I just couldn't lie; it wouldn't work. I really had no choice but to tell him the truth.

"That'll take a long time. There's a lot to tell. Let's go away for a weekend. We've never been to a hotel together. We've only been here at my apartment or your depressing, dirty pig sty of an apartment. Let's go to the beach."

So two weekends later, we went to Ocean City where we found a quaint bed and breakfast. We checked in as Mr. and Mrs. Leon Ackerman. I hid my left hand when we spoke to the inn's owner, not that he would have cared if we were married or not. It was off-season and he was glad to be renting a room.

On our first night, we made passionate love in our room. We made love in the bed and on the floor. We laughed at our endless sexual energy. We were like teenagers. In a way I was a teenager. I was having sex because it was fun, because it made me feel good and because it made Leon feel good. Every time we made love, I felt like a virgin...clean and pure.

On Saturday, we went to the beach. It was a warm, windy day with a brilliant blue sky overarching unblemished beige sands. There were no people to be seen, just chattering gulls swooping down into the water for a meal. We sat on a blanket looking out at the endless Atlantic. It was as if we were the only humans in the world.

Leon said, “Germany’s out there. I never want to go back there. I hate everything about it now. I loved it when I lived there, but after what the Germans did to my family and to six million Jews, I can only find hate in my heart for them. Basically, I’m not a hateful person and I believe in forgiveness, but I can’t forgive the Germans for allowing Hitler to do what he did.

Dorothea, do you ever want to go back?”

“Never. My memories are too horrible. I don’t want to relive them. I want to think I was born on September 19, 1948, the day I arrived in New York. A stork didn’t deliver me; the Ile de France did.”

“Tell me everything about your life. Start at the beginning when you were at the university.”

“Don’t you want to know about the Schmidt family first? Do you remember my parents?”

“Vaguely. I remember meeting your father who was quite intimidating, even frightening.”

“I’ll say he was. To everyone, but mostly to his family. He was successful and made lots of money which was the most important thing in his life. He was an executive at Seimens and was one of the people who was instrumental in their financial growth after the first war. What a cold man he was, only interested in business. He was rarely home. I don’t remember him ever kissing us or talking kindly to us. In fact, he rarely talked to us, especially to me. He was proud of Kurt and his accomplishments because they reflected positively on him. He bragged about him all the time. I was smart, but I wasn’t in Kurt’s league. And I’m not in your league either. My father died when I was 14, in an auto crash. He left us lots of money, but he wasn’t missed. In fact, I think we were relieved that he was out of our lives.”

“Did you actually hate your father?”

“I did. I felt like I was shit to him. He didn’t beat me. He just ignored me. I was non-existent to him. But he was cruelest to my mother. They had an arranged marriage. My mother, Marta, was from a land-rich Bavarian family, but they needed cash and my father supplied that. He kept the Von Steuben estate from going under, and he never let my mother forget that. Her family was minor royalty, but to listen to my father talk, you would think my mother was the Queen of England.

We visited my mother's ancestral home in Ansbach in Bavaria during the summers. It was a large estate with caretakers who lived at the house all year round. When we went there, the townspeople treated my mother as if she was royalty, and although she was, you certainly wouldn't know it from looking at her or being with her. She was plain looking and dressed simply. I always remember her having gray hair even when I was young. She wore it pulled back in a bun which made her look like an old spinster. Her interests were books and painting. She read voraciously in German, French, English, and Italian. And she made sure I learned these languages too which came in handy when I studied in Switzerland with Jean Piaget and when I worked with Maria Montessori who primarily spoke Italian, and of course, when I came here to America. And when she wasn't reading, she was painting. The walls of our apartment were covered with her oils of still life, outdoor scenes, and animals, but never people. Her paintings were quite good. They reflected her memories of home and her longing to go back to a better place, one where she was respected and valued.

She was petrified of my father. When he spoke to her, he talked to her like she was a dog. She actually cowered, and said "sir" to him. Kurt and I also had to address him as "sir," never "father." He probably would have preferred us to address him as "your lordship." I know he raped my mother. Every few nights, I would hear these sounds coming from their bedroom. He would be grunting and pumping, and she would be crying. Then there would be sounds of slapping. She didn't like to be seen afterwards, but sometimes I would spy her going to the kitchen to get ice for her red, swollen face. In the summers, she always wore long sleeves to hide the black and blue welts on her arms, but somehow I caught sight of them. What an animal he was."

"Did you or Kurt do anything to try to stop him?"

"What could we do? What would you have done?"

There was that nagging question again. What would you have done?

"I don't know. Talk to him."

"Yeah sure. Talk to him and tell him not to be a violent sadist. That would have stopped him.

Anyhow, I didn't have much of a relationship with my mother when I was a kid. I felt sorry for her. She wasn't a role model for me. I wanted a smart, assertive, attractive mother, not a meek, silent, plain woman. She didn't know what to do with me. I was beautiful and sexy and into boys at a young age. I was 15 when I first had sex. She never had a man other than my father. But the mother I disliked as a child ended up saving my

life when I was an adult. Without her, I wouldn't be here now. I'll tell you about that later.

My mother moved back to Ansbach in 1934. We had little contact until 1943 when I moved there too. I lived with her until '48 when I came to the states. Kurt wanted her to come here too, but she refused. She wanted to die in her home. She loved her estate passionately. The land had been in her family for generations so she had this mystical relationship with it. It saddened her to know that Kurt and I would sell the land after her death, but she knew it was inevitable. Neither Kurt nor I would ever have children to inherit the land and there were no other close relatives.

Five months ago my mother died in her own bed. She had a stroke and lingered for two months. Kurt went back when she had the stroke, and again when she died so he could be at the funeral. I couldn't go back because I refused to set foot on German soil, and because I didn't want to see my mother put in the ground. Before I left Germany, I told her everything that was in my heart because I knew I would never see her again. There were no unspoken words remaining between us. She knew I loved her, and I knew she loved me.

In '43 when I moved to Ansbach, I didn't love my mother. I didn't even like her. Growing up, I thought she was a helpless ninny letting herself be dominated by her cruel husband. I blamed her for being a victim of my father as much as I blamed my father for being a victimizer. But that changed when I went to live with her. I saw that she had survived and made a life for herself despite having had a hateful husband and children who didn't love her. In the five years I lived with her, I came to love her, especially because she saved me psychologically as well as physically. She proved to be a real mother, one who came to her child's rescue. And in the end, I think I proved to be a loving child to her.

We built a bond that will survive her death. She will always live on in my heart. You've seen the walls of my apartment covered with her paintings. Whenever, I look at them, I think of her. I'm having all her paintings shipped to me so someday when I have a big house, I will hang more, but I'll never have enough room for all of them. Somehow I'll find a way to show them to the world."

"There's one portrait of you that I love. It's the one in the entry hall. It shows you with a hundred different emotions on your face. You look happy, sad, angry, mean. It's hard to describe how she was able to convey all those emotions in one portrait."

"She could do that because she knew everything about me. She knew all the me's.

Kurt had her buried in the family cemetery on the grounds of the estate. He's in the process of disposing of the house and estate. It's not easy doing it long distance. She left us a lot of money and the property. She wisely put a lot of her money into Swiss banks because she knew what would happen to money in German banks. I want to do something special with the money. I haven't decided what yet.

When I was a child, the only one I loved was Kurt, probably because we shared our unhappy home. We were like two children shipwrecked on an island of hate. Over the years, I've helped cover up Kurt's secret. You know that he's homosexual. Everybody at APL knows, but nobody talks about it. In Germany, everybody knew too. He was protected from being sent to a concentration camp because of his importance to Von Braun and because of the protection I gave him. To stay safe in Nazi Germany, you had to have a protector. Von Braun and I were Kurt's protectors, and a man named Rolfe Neumann was my protector. When Kurt and I were teen agers, I'd bring boys to the apartment for sex and so would Kurt. I think my mother knew about our sexual escapades, but she was too timid to do anything. She stayed in the sitting room working on her paintings and playing loud music so she wouldn't hear the laughter and the sounds of sex. We scared her. I think everything scared her back then.

Did you know Kurt was homosexual when you were in school with him?"

"No. I was totally naïve about anything to do with sex. I didn't have sex until I was 23 and living in New York. I certainly didn't realize Kurt was homosexual and didn't find out until last year. No one at APL cares. Only your work is important there and his work is the best. We have to be very careful not to publicize anyone's sex life or political views because of McCarthy and his witch hunt. Being a communist or a homosexual will get you fired and sent to jail and will jeopardize the money for our research. So we are very discrete for the sake of our co-workers and for the sake of the work we're doing at the lab. In a way, we're living in Nazi times even here in the land of the free. McCarthy is our Hitler, but fortunately his power is limited. "

"I was close to many of the Nazi higher ups and I made sure that I talked about Kurt's female conquests which were totally fictitious. I don't think anybody believed me, but no one bothered him. There were more than a few closet homosexuals in the higher ups of the Nazi party."

"Your family was so different from mine. I loved my parents and they loved me and my two sisters. We loved being together. My parents were proud of the three of us, me for my science, my sister Liesl for her career in medicine, and my sister Gerta for her music. Only Gerta and I got out of Germany. Me, because I was lucky enough to go to

America to study and Gerta, because she was lucky enough to marry an Englishman and move to London. But the Nazis got her anyway. She died in a bombing raid in '44. She was pregnant, and the baby was killed too. So I'm the only surviving member of the Ackerman family.

Now tell me about your time at the university.”

Chapter 2

University

Telling Leon about my life at the University of Berlin filled me with joyous memories of discovering that I had a quick mind and that I reveled in learning. But it also brought back horrific memories of how I embarked on the road to evil.

“As an undergraduate, I majored in psychology and philosophy. I was fascinated by all areas of psychology, especially experimental. I believed that psychology was a science just like biology and chemistry, and human behavior should be subjected to the rules of scientific investigation. In 1932, I became a research assistant to Max Wertheimer, a brilliant researcher who was one of the founders of the field of Gestalt psychology. I carried out the research experiments he designed using the complex visual designs associated with Gestalt psychology. I marveled at how Wertheimer came up with interpretations that I never conceived of. He was able to integrate disparate findings into a complex, comprehensive theory of human perception. What a mind he had. He forged paths that no one before him thought to follow. It was a pleasure to watch his creativity unfold.

In my early day of graduate study, my life involved going to classes, carrying out experiments, reading voluminous books and complicated articles, and engaging in intellectually challenging discussions with my professors and the other students. My social life was limited to occasional sex with some of my fellow students. I enjoyed sex most after an exhilarating evening of work in the lab. It was as if new ideas stimulated my libido as well as my mind. I had no friends, but I didn't desire any. I was more than content with my life.”

“Dorothea, I know how you felt because I, too, was challenged by my graduate work with Fermi. I worshipped him. If you thought that Wertheimer was opening new

paths, Fermi was opening new worlds; worlds that could potentially destroy our planet. Of course, his work led to the atom bomb, but also to all the good that nuclear energy can do potentially. It was such a hard time for me because I was exhilarated by my graduate studies during my working hours and depressed by what was happening to my family in Germany. I went from the highest of highs from 8 in the morning until 8 at night and the lowest of lows from 8 to whenever I finally managed to fall asleep.”

“I don’t know if you were close to Fermi’s family, but I became close to Wertheimer and his family. I frequently had dinner at his home with his wife and children and other students and faculty. The first dinner I cooked for you was the same as what Wertheimer’s wife usually cooked for us. Her schnitzel was the best I ever had. For the first time I witnessed a loving family, something that was as unfamiliar to me as the ideas I was learning in class. I saw a father kiss his wife with affection when she kidded him about his moustache. I saw a father ask his children about their soccer games and music lessons. They never talked politics and when an issue about the plight of Jewish professors and students arose, people looked over at me as if to say, ‘Let’s not talk in front of her. She’s the enemy.’ But I wasn’t the enemy. At least, I didn’t think I was. But in 1933 my relationship with Wertheimer came to an end when he and his family fled Berlin for the states. He loved his work, but he loved his life and the lives of his family more. I hated to see him leave, but I felt that there were others to carry on his work.”

“I can’t believe how you reacted to Wertheimer leaving. You adored him so and yet you hardly cared that he was forced to leave. I can’t understand this. Why?”

“Why? I was selfish. I was totally self-centered. I was only interested in my life. Here was Wertheimer who had been so kind to me and had done everything he could to further my career, but I didn’t feel any special allegiance to him. And I couldn’t care less about the Jews. I think I believed a lot of the propaganda even though I knew Jews like Wertheimer who was a good human being and up until the time of Hitler, a good German. It’s like the propaganda about Jews didn’t apply to him. I viewed him as the exception. He was unique – he was a good Jew, but he was just one of a few.”

“What about me? Am I a good Jew? Am I an exception?”

“Leon, that was a different time. I was brainwashed to believe that Jews were responsible for World War I and they controlled all the money in the world and caused the depression. Of course, I know better now. I have lots of Jewish colleagues and friends. I don’t feel any prejudice toward Jews. Do you believe me?”

“I don’t know. You just can’t turn off feelings of hatred just like that.”

“It was the environment. Everyone believed what they were being told. It was totalitarianism – our minds were controlled.”

“And now your mind isn’t controlled.”

“No, not here in America. Leon, I would love you no matter what your religion – Buddhist, Catholic, Jew. I love you for who you are, not what you are.”

“Let me ask you what you would have done if Wertheimer had been taken away by the SS while he was at school with you? Would you have tried to save him or at least speak up? What would you have done?”

“I would have done nothing. What could I do? What would you have done?”

There was that question again, that ubiquitous question that has haunted me. What would you have done? Much of my life has centered around searching for support from others that I had no other choice than the action I took. That I did the right thing - that I chose to survive.

“I don’t know what I would have done, but I think I would have said something. I just couldn’t see someone who I cared about so much disappear from my life without speaking up in some way, even if it was just to say the word *no*.”

“In Germany, the word *no* was the same as leading a revolt. It was all or nothing. You were either for them or against them. There was no middle ground. There was no gray. Everything was black or white.

After Wertheimer left, Wolfgang Kohler became Director of the Psychological Institute and he more than filled the space Wertheimer left in my life. Kohler selected me as his research assistant. He told me that Max had given me the highest praise saying that of all his students I had the most promising future. You can imagine how that made me feel.”

“Yes, because Fermi told me the same thing so I understand exactly how you felt. Affirmation that you’ve chosen the career that you’ve craved by people who are most important to you professionally makes you believe in yourself and that you can make an impact in the world. It makes you feel that you’re more than just another human being. You’re a human being who can rise above the masses – that you have a special destiny.”

“I was so lucky to work with Kohler. He was a great scholar with a commanding personality. I was overwhelmed by his genius and his very presence. He was almost regal. I enjoyed working with Kohler even more than Wertheimer. These men were more

than my mentors; they were my idols. They were great scientists and good human beings. I wanted to be like them, but only professionally, not personally. I wanted to be a great scientist, but I had no desire to be a good human being. I wonder why they picked me. I was intelligent and hard working, but I wasn't a good human being. I think they knew that, and yet they supported me. Did they think there was a remote possibility that I would change, that somehow they could change me, that they could mold me personally as well as professionally? If they thought so, they were quite mistaken.

I found something in Kohler that I'd never personally witnessed in anyone before and maybe anyone since. Courage – a rare attribute in humans. He was infuriated by the Nazi treatment of Jews at the university. One third of the faculty had been fired and many others had left. When he asked me about my feelings concerning what was happening at the university and in Germany, I was noncommittal because I didn't really know how I felt. I didn't want to get involved in politics. I was only interested in psychology and my studies. I hated to see Wertheimer and some of the others leave, but I felt that their work could be carried on by non-Jews. Wasn't Kohler carrying on his work as well or even better than Wertheimer?

One night when we were working late in the lab, Kohler asked me to look at a letter he was writing in response to Hitler's statement that... *if the dismissal of Jewish scientists means the annihilation of contemporary German science, then we shall do without science for a few years*. I was shocked and frightened by Kohler's protest against what was happening at the university and the damage it was doing to German science. He asked me what I thought. I warned him not to publish his letter, that he would be fired if he did. I was frightened for him and more importantly, I was frightened for myself. People would think that I shared his feelings, and I didn't. This is why I feel that I was complicit in the Nazi treatment of the Jews. I didn't stand up like Kohler. I just kept quiet. I was the complete opposite of courageous; I was cowardly.

It's funny how Kohler reacted to me after that. He looked at me with pity as if I was someone who might be intelligent, but was a robot who could not think for herself. There was also a look of regret in his eyes as if he had succeeded in teaching me about psychology, but failed in teaching me about being human.

In September 1933, Kohler published an anti-Nazi article decrying the firing of Jews from universities. It was the last such article published in Germany. He expected to be arrested, but for some unknown reason he wasn't. Every day he would say that THEY would be coming for him, but THEY didn't. He didn't appear to be frightened, but I was. He was disappointed that none of his colleagues supported him. He called friends to

enlist their support, but they soon became former friends. I understood why they didn't back him. If I were a colleague, I wouldn't do so. Jeopardizing my career wasn't worth it. I thought it was wrong to fire the Jews, but not important enough to get into trouble. At that time, I didn't know if I was a coward, afraid to speak up against those in power, or if I really agreed that it was best to keep Germany for those considered true Germans. My thoughts about psychology were crystal clear, but my thoughts about politics and Germany were muddled. It was easier not to think of what was happening around me. I was not courageous. I was no Wolfgang Kohler. Most of the others who were courageous were clergy, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer who spoke up against Nazism, and look what happened to him. He was murdered in a concentration camp weeks before the end of the war. There was no way I was going to be courageous."

"But I'm sure there were other ways to be courageous that were safer."

"If there were, I didn't know of any and I didn't want to know of any."

When the Nazis made it mandatory to start each class with a Nazi salute, Kohler refused. That was the last straw for him. He emigrated to the U.S. in 1935. I hated to see him leave. This was the end of the Gestalt movement at the university and in Germany. This was the end of an era. No more creativity, no more productive thinking, no more intellectual freedom. This was the official beginning of Hitler's annihilation of science, including the science of psychology."

"Dorothea, have you tried contacting Wertheimer or Kohler since you've been in the states?"

"No. I could never face them. I think they'd look at me with disdain for what I became, and they'd be right. Kohler especially would look at me as a collaborator, even a traitor."

Germany had long been known as the best educated and most cultured country in Europe and really the world. Now Hitler was changing this. Education or true education where knowledge and truth were pursued was vilified. Free expression in the arts was censored. Intellectuals and artists had to flee or be killed. That was one of the things that surprised so many people after the war. How could a country that was known for its intellectuals and artists commit such horrendous crimes against humanity? Could people be both cultured and barbaric? Obviously, yes."

"That's what fooled my parents. They had been part of the intellectual community and couldn't believe that the people they knew so well would stand by and watch them be murdered."

“That was the end of the good graduate school life I thrived on. That is when I met Rolfe Neumann. He was a psychologist of no stature. He had done little research and was unpublished. He became the Director of the Psychological Institute because he had a doctorate in psychology from the University of Heidelberg, a prestigious school that Goebbels had attended. But more importantly, he was a staunch member of the Nazi Party. No, he wasn’t just staunch, he was rabid. Rolfe was bright, but not brilliant like his predecessor. His interest was not in psychology, but the Nazi Party. He was a rising star. He was an opportunist. He was the male counterpart of me. Well, not completely. I was an opportunist, but not a fanatical Nazi. Like most Germans, I was an enabler. I enabled the fanatics to get what they wanted. Without people like me, there would have been no Third Reich.”

I saw Leon’s look change. I had said exactly what he was thinking. He was coming to understand the real Dorothea, not the glamorous, sexy Dorothea, but the Dorothea who had chosen to be part of the evil empire.

“I was afraid that because of my relationship with Wertheimer and Kohler, I would not make it through school. I was so close to finishing my doctorate. I had to finish so I could fulfill Wertheimer’s prediction that I would become a great psychologist. I would do anything to make that come true. Anything. I asked to be kept on as Rolfe’s research assistant. At our first meeting, there was no doubt that Rolfe was taken with me. Throughout the interview, his eyes were focused on my body. I knew that my intelligence and work ethic were of no importance to him; only my body was. He looked like Pavlov’s dog salivating for food as he eyed me up and down. I consciously made the decision to do whatever was necessary to realize my immediate goal – completion of my doctorate. The Institute had changed so quickly, from a place ruled by competence and search for knowledge to one ruled by power and politics.”

What I’m going to tell you now will shock you, but you should know. At my second meeting with Rolfe, I went into his office on the pretext of asking a question and I seduced him. It wasn’t hard. I got what I wanted. He immediately fast tracked the completion of my doctorate degree. Now I was Dr. Dorothea Schmidt. That was my greatest achievement up to that point in my life. I didn’t feel that I bought my degree with sex. I earned it through hard work. I just speeded up the award of the actual diploma by having an affair with Rolfe. Now I had another goal in life...to become a famous psychologist. Having my doctorate was the first step of many that would be needed for me to achieve this goal. As you can probably tell, I’m a careful planner and I had plans for myself. And you can also tell that I’m ruthless. I won’t let anything stand in the way of getting what I want.”

“That frightens me. I don’t really know anyone who’s ruthless.”

“I’m sure there are people you know who are ruthless, but you’re too naïve to see it. You’re an innocent. There are ruthless people everywhere, especially in university and research settings. Wherever there’s competition, there’s ruthlessness. In these settings, everyone is racing to be the first, to be the best, to be the very top of the pyramid.

I can’t tell you how quickly things changed at the university. Rolfe Neumann was now the face of psychology. Speaking of faces, Rolfe looked like me. We were both models of the Aryan race. He was blond, blue eyed, and had an angular face and slim body. He was really quite handsome, but he was short, very short. He was maybe 5’4” on his tip-toes, and I’m 5’7”. I liked wearing high heels so when he stood, he would be at my breast level. I liked towering over him so I would feel that I controlled him, which I did to an extent, but he also controlled me. I controlled him through sex and he controlled me through politics. Although he was short, Rolfe stood ramrod straight and exuded confidence. But there was one sign of weakness that betrayed this image. Rolfe bit his nails to the quick until they bled. When Rolfe and I were alone, he gnawed away at his nails as he worried or plotted. He usually wore leather gloves to hide his hands.

Rolfe was married to Gertrud, a homely, depressed woman who wanted a child more than anything, but couldn’t conceive. They consulted fertility specialists in Germany and Switzerland, but no one offered help. Rolfe couldn’t divorce Gertrud because she was Himmler’s cousin. Rolfe married her because of this connection, thinking it would open doors for him. Now he was chained to her. Rolfe relentlessly derided Gertrud for being barren adding to her depression so she let him do whatever he wanted. She knew of our affair since he took me to parties to publicly show off his gorgeous, brilliant mistress. He often kissed me in public so there would be no question of the nature of our relationship. I was his trophy girlfriend who epitomized Nazi womanhood.

After I got my doctorate, Rolfe still controlled me professionally. He had me continue working as his assistant and teaching two graduate courses in psychology. Life at the university changed drastically with Kohler’s departure. The work was stultifying. I had to teach the courses in a rigid, proscribed manner with lectures only and no student discussion allowed. I gave exams measuring the students’ rote mastery of the facts as presented. Only approved textbooks could be used. No outside readings. If there was anything deemed unacceptable in a text, it was blacked out. We got used to seeing the heavy black lines of censors in almost everything we read except Nazi controlled media. Independent thinking was outlawed. Research was halted. I didn’t feel as if I worked at a

university. I felt like I worked in a factory where we manufactured the same unthinking products; we manufactured cogs for the machinery of the Third Reich.”

“Dorothea, I never heard of anyone using sex to buy what they want in an academic situation. I’m sure it happens, but I don’t know of any instances of it.

Why are you telling me about your relationship with Rolfe? Do you want to shock me? Do you want to push me away?”

“No, I want you to see what happened in German universities so you understand how I was pushed into doing what I had to do.

I have to tell you about my past. I have to confess. Maybe I want absolution. I certainly don’t want to push you away. That’s the last thing in the world I want. Maybe I want you to prove to me that you’ll stay with me despite what I’ve done in the past.

Do you think I was a whore selling my body for a doctorate?”

“I don’t know. I really don’t know. I can’t begin to understand what you did because I’m not a woman, and I didn’t go to school in Nazi Germany in the thirties.”

“Leon, I’m not asking you to forgive what I did. You can’t. No one can. I want you to understand how I was transformed from an eager young woman only interested in learning and the world of ideas to a conniving, self-absorbed woman who would do anything to get what she wanted. I was always a liberated woman, one who viewed sex as a commodity to be traded. I never viewed sex as an expression of love until I met you. But I want you to know that I’m not that woman anymore. You have to help me find who I am now and who I can become. I need you to help make me the woman you will be proud of.”

“It’s so hard for me to understand what happened in German academia in such a short time. When I was at the University of Berlin it was like it was at Columbia – totally free expression and uninhibited quest for knowledge, especially in my field. You can’t create when you are intellectually repressed. But the Nazis needed to create new and deadlier weapons if they were to win the war so they had to go outside of the university system. That’s what they did with Von Braun and Kurt. They created the Army Rocket Center at Peenemunde where Von Braun designed the V-2 rocket. That couldn’t have been done in a university setting once the Nazis took over.

Dorothea, did you ever ask Kurt about his experiences with Von Braun in Peenemunde? ”

“No. He made it clear that he didn’t want to talk about it. I haven’t told him the things I’ve told you so I don’t expect him to tell me about things that would shame him.

I had to escape from Rolfe and that horrible factory I worked in. I started exploring new areas of psychology and became interested in the work of Jean Piaget, a Swiss child psychologist. I saw a place for myself as THE German expert in child psychology. This seemed like a safe area of psychology, one that wouldn’t conflict with Nazi doctrine. No one was working in that area in Germany then and I knew that Piaget was having a significant impact on psychology world-wide. This was my key for making a name for myself, and becoming a leader in German psychology.”

Chapter 3

Switzerland

We left the beach because it got too windy. Our eyes stung from the blowing sand which dammed the flow of tears threatening to flood our faces. We had dinner in a seafood restaurant that was almost empty because it was off-season. I’d looked forward to eating the famous Maryland crab cakes, but they tasted like cardboard. My taste buds had been numbed. I didn’t feel comfortable talking in the restaurant even though there were no people close by so I waited to resume my confession until we got back to the privacy of our room. The room that had been a cozy love nest was now a confessional.

“My way out of Germany and the awful life I was living was escaping to Switzerland, if even for a year. I contacted Piaget to find out about doing a year of post-doctoral study with him in Geneva. He was eager to have me join his research team because of my background in perception and my experience with Wertheimer and Kohler. He said that I would be welcomed if I got permission from the German government. This would only be possible with Rolfe’s support, but that might be difficult. He wouldn’t want me away for a whole year. How would he feed his sexual addiction?

I presented my plans for studying with Piaget to Rolfe, stressing how close Geneva was to Berlin and how he could visit me frequently. I painted a romantic picture of us enjoying the beautiful city and the Alps. He said that he would have to think about it for a few days. I was surprised when he came to see me the very next day and told me that he didn’t object to me leaving, but he wanted something in return. He wanted

something that was unimaginable, that was unthinkable. I know this is hard to believe, but he wanted me to have his baby.”

I stopped talking at this point because Leon looked as if he was going to be sick. I had thought that my disclosures about my close contacts with the Nazis would affect Leon most, but I was wrong - it was this. He coughed uncontrollably and rushed to the bathroom where I heard him vomiting. When he came out, his skin looked gray and scaly. I couldn't see his eyes because his glasses were fogged up.

“I've never heard of anything like this. I can't conceive of anybody doing something like this. Why did he want you to do this?”

“He felt that he couldn't move up politically without children. Even though he made it known to all that it was Gertrud's fault that he couldn't have children, he knew some people thought it might be his fault. He might be infertile. He might be a less than perfect German. Hitler was considered a perfect German even though he looked like a Charlie Chaplin character and didn't have children and wasn't even married. Goebbels was considered a perfect German even though he looked like a ferret and was handicapped. Fat, greasy Goering with his perverted lifestyle was considered a perfect German. But there were different standards for lower level climbers like Rolfe. Although he looked like a handsome Aryan, he had to be virile enough to produce a child. Did you know the Nazis created a selective breeding program, not for animals, but for humans. It was called the Lebensborn Program where SS officers had children with women who fit the Aryan model. I wonder how those kids turned out. I'm sure not good. All the deviant recessive genes were sure to be expressed with such an inbreeding program.

Rolfe felt that together we could produce the perfect Aryan baby. I could have the baby while I was in Switzerland and then give it to him to present to the world as his own. No one would ever know that it wasn't his and Gertrud's. He would tell people that they had found a cure for Gertrud's infertility. She was a recluse so no one would see her for the nine months of my pregnancy. I knew that I had used Rolfe for my own ends, but now he was using me. If I agreed to do this, I could ask anything of him. Anything. He would be mine to use as I wanted. He would be my pawn. I couldn't and wouldn't say no. If I did, my career would be over and my dream of becoming a world-renown psychologist would be dashed. He would just keep me as his mistress, or throw me away altogether. What would happen to me? Do you believe me when I say that I felt that I had no choice?”

Leon didn't answer. His body stiffened with corpse-like rigidity. His head was bent so far down that I thought he would fall over.

“Competence was no longer required for career success in Germany; only one’s connection to the Nazi Party and its leaders. I had to keep my connection open no matter what. I agreed to his outrageous request so I could use my work with Piaget as a stepping stone to become the expert on child psychology in Germany, and because it would take me to Switzerland and away from Rolfe who I despised even more after this request. He was unaware of my feelings because I was a great actress feigning sexual satisfaction and telling him that he was the best lover I ever had.

I surprised myself with my reaction to his request to have his baby. I didn’t find it repugnant; I just viewed it as a necessary evil to achieve my goal. I’m a great believer in the adage that the ends justify the means. And if you think of it, this type of surrogacy was commonplace in the Bible. Didn’t Abraham arrange for Hagar to carry his child since Sarah was barren? Didn’t Jacob sire children with his wife Leah’s handmaids? “

At last Leon spoke. His face was red with rage.

“Dorothea, I’m at a loss for words. This is the most despicable thing I’ve ever heard of. Rolfe was an animal to ask you to do this, but he was a Nazi animal so it isn’t a surprise. But I’m shocked at your response. I can’t believe that you would use your body like this. Having a child was unimportant to you. Your career was the only thing that mattered in your life. A baby just didn’t matter. This sounds like a science fiction novel or a horror novel. And to compare yourself to Hagar and Rolfe to Abraham is mind boggling. You come up with all kinds of rationalizations to justify your actions.”

“At that time I gave little thought to actually being pregnant and producing a baby. I didn’t dread it or welcome it. It was just something I had to withstand for nine months. I’d always used my body as a means of getting what I wanted. This was just another way. I would do anything, anything that was necessary to keep control of Rolfe so he would do whatever I wanted. What a symbiotic relationship we had, each feeding off the other. Two parasites needing each other for survival. When I look back now, I can’t believe how readily I accepted his proposition. I had no qualms about having the baby. Now, I think I must have been crazy to do this. Although I carefully planned all the steps in my life, rationality was less important than expediency. I told you I was ruthless, didn’t I?”

“This goes beyond ruthlessness. This is the epitome of immorality. You didn’t care about the life you were going to create.”

“I just didn’t think about it. I had only one goal and that was to get to Switzerland no matter what I had to do.

I stopped using a diaphragm and Rolfe insisted on having sex every night so I could get pregnant quickly and within two months I was pregnant. The month after finding out, I left for Switzerland. I was happy to get away from this scheming dwarf with his drive to move up in the Nazi hierarchy; who would do anything to achieve what he wanted. I hated him for that, but I hated myself for being just like him. I was his mirror image. I couldn't change myself. I didn't want to change myself. Maybe Rolfe felt the same way, except that he loved me. He wasn't prostituting his body like I was. But more importantly, I was prostituting my soul, if I even had one. I didn't hate myself then for what I did, but now I despise myself for what I did and what ultimately happened.

Rolfe made me take a woman named Hilda as a companion while I was in Geneva. She was to watch over me to make sure that my pregnancy went well and also make sure I didn't have relations with any men. She was my chastity belt although I didn't need one because I was totally immersed in my work and uninterested in having relations with anyone. Rolfe visited me every two weeks. He didn't want to go sightseeing or out to dinner. He just wanted to have sex and talk about the perfect child developing inside me. He constantly caressed and kissed my stomach. He fantasized about how the baby would look. It would be a boy who would be blond, and blue eyed, but also tall. He'd have Rolfe's drive and ambition and my intelligence. Someday he'd become a military or political leader of a Germany that would rule the world. Rolfe would be revered as the father of this great man. When Rolfe talked about his son, I shut my mind not caring about the baby who was growing within me. I just wanted the pregnancy to go fast, but I didn't want my time in Switzerland to go fast. I loved the city, but more importantly I loved being steeped in research and stimulating intellectual challenges. I felt like I did when I studied with Wertheimer and Kohler.

I dreaded Rolfe's visits. But then they stopped abruptly because he got a new job working for Joseph Goebbels, the Reich Minister of Propaganda who ruled over all communications – radio, press, publishing, cinema. This was Rolfe's dream come true. He was working for one of the most powerful men in Germany. Rolfe was chosen to work with Goebbels based on his background in psychology, his commitment to Nazism, and his attending the University of Heidelberg, Goebbels's alma mater. They both shared a passionate allegiance to their alma mater. Although Goebbels got a Ph.D. in literature, he was responsible for the book burnings throughout Germany. Obviously a love of great literature was not instilled in him at Heidelberg.

Goebbels hired Rolfe to utilize his background in psychology to design ways to use subliminal perception to spread Nazi messages. This could be through the cinema, radio, any means. Although propaganda was all around; there were certain messages that

might be best sent to people's unconscious. Rolfe was enthralled with this challenge. He had never been excited about any intellectual challenges before. He thought this was his chance to move up and maybe even become Goebbels's second in command someday. Just as I worshipped Wertheimer and Kohler, Rolfe worshipped Goebbels. He would do anything for him, anything.

I told everyone I worked with in Switzerland that I was pregnant and that my husband had unexpectedly died. I wore a huge diamond wedding ring that Rolfe had given me. I knew everyone doubted my story, but the Swiss were too polite to ask questions or openly express doubts.

I was challenged by Piaget's research approach which was so different from what I had used with Wertheimer and Kohler. Piaget had studied with the great French psychologist Alfred Binet, the father of the intelligence test. Binet had revolutionary ideas, especially his concept of the educability of intelligence. He thought that intelligence was not something static, but something malleable that could be shaped through education. I devoured Binet's books on the mind and the brain, and on retarded children. His views were divergent from the generally accepted view put forth by the great thinker Francis Galton that nature, and not nurture, was the most critical determinant of intelligence. Working with Piaget, I adopted his views of the importance of nurture which was inconsistent with the Nazi view that nature determined the inferiority of Jews and other undesirables. The nature view of this issue was the very basis of the German eugenics movement and the eventual extermination of everyone deemed inferior. Genes that contributed to the creation of Einstein and Freud and even Max Wertheimer had to be prevented from perpetuating. I was aware that I had to tread carefully on this issue. I had to present the idea of the educability of intelligence as a way of making the master race even better. I had to retain the duality of believing that nature determined the inferiority of some, while believing that nurture could enhance the superiority of others. That would be my contribution to German psychology.

Piaget used very different research methods than Wertheimer. He used a naturalist, observational approach. But I felt the same excitement that I experienced when I conducted research in Berlin. Piaget put me on a team studying the principle of conservation in children from 6 to 8. I worked with children to study when they developed the ability to perceive something as the same no matter how its appearance changed. I did experiments where I poured water from a tall thin glass into a short squat glass and asked the children if there was the same amount of water in the two glasses. I marveled at how they saw the water in the tall glass as having more even though they saw me pour it into the squat glass. Then, at a certain age they were able to perceive that

the amount of water was the same regardless of the size of the container. Whenever I witnessed this transition, I experienced an excitement like Madame Curie must have felt when she discovered radium. How I loved watching the human mind blossom like a sunflower leaning toward the sunlight.

In Germany, my research subjects had been adults, but now they were children, adorable children speaking French in their beguiling way. I'd learned French in school, but living in Switzerland improved my fluency and I sounded like the *Deutsche Schweiz* who speak German as their first language and French as their second. I found that I loved being with children. I had never really spent time with children before. There was something about their innocence that warmed my heart. I laughed a lot when I was with them. They wanted to hug me and sit on my lap. Some kids who realized I was pregnant, rubbed my belly and said that I would have a pretty baby like me. Unlike Rolfe, they thought that I would have a daughter. When the kids touched me, I responded differently than when I responded to adults. There was something about a child's touch that made me feel clean. I was surprised to find this part of myself. I knew that I didn't particularly like adults, but I liked children; in fact, I loved children. Where did this softness in me come from? It made me look at myself in a new way. I wasn't just driven by abstract ideas and ambition. There was something else inside me. How could I keep this alive when I went back to Germany? Did I want to keep it alive? Love of children was not something that was valued in militant Germany. It was soft and there was no room for softness in the Third Reich. In fact, there was no room for love of people over love of state. This was apparent from the many instances in which children turned their parents into the authorities for doing something that might possibly be considered subversive. Or husbands turning in their wives or wives turning in their husbands. Human love was a weakness, something that needed to be eradicated. Only blind love of the state and its leaders was good."

"Dorothea, you are a study in contradictions. Here you were having a baby that you didn't care about and yet you fell in love with kids you didn't know. How can you say you value human love when you embrace an ideology that wants to eradicate human love?"

"When I was alone in my flat or in a café, I sometimes asked myself unanswerable questions like that, questions that philosophers and scientists have been asking since the beginning of time. When did people lose their innocence as they moved from childhood to adulthood? Why did they lose their innocence? Were the Nazis once sweet, innocent children? As hard as it is to believe, is it possible that even Hitler was once a sweet, innocent child? What made them change? Is evil inherent in all adults? I didn't believe in

God and the whole concept of original sin. I found myself rethinking my courses in philosophy when I was an undergraduate at the university. I wished that I had some of the textbooks I used for these courses, but they were packed away in boxes back in my apartment in Berlin. I came to Switzerland to study child development, not anticipating that I would face very different questions about the nature of man. It's funny, but I sometimes thought about this after a child touched me, especially when a child stroked my pregnant belly. I never thought about good and evil when I was in Germany. Maybe because there was no good there, only evil.

As you said there was another oddity about me when I lived in Switzerland. Although I liked children, I had no feeling for the baby I was carrying. I didn't respond emotionally when the baby moved. I just thought that it was growing and getting closer to being born and me being done with this ordeal. I felt like a truck carrying cargo. This was cargo I had to deliver to collect future payment from Rolfe. However, I acted very differently when I was with people. I talked about how I loved my growing baby and couldn't wait to observe my own child when he went through the same stages of development we were studying. To myself, I said that I hoped never to see this child. The thought that this was Rolfe's child filled me with revulsion. I didn't think of it as my child; only Rolfe's.

Oh how I loved living in Geneva on beautiful Lac Lemman with its serene, relaxed ambiance. It was hard to believe there was a war brewing just north of where I was. I often spent evenings walking the narrow cobbled streets and having a glass of wine in a neighborhood café. Some of my fellow workers arranged a day trip to Mount Blanc in Chamonix. I felt cleansed atop the mountain as I look down at the peaceful valleys below. Life was so different here. I was not in another country. I was on another planet. I wondered if I could live here permanently, even though I knew it wasn't possible. Rolfe wouldn't let me."

"Did you even inquire about living in Switzerland? You might have been able to stay if you had asked Piaget. Are you sure you really were interested in staying?"

"No, I didn't really want to stay. I had to go back to Germany and do what I thought I was destined to do – become Germany's leading psychologist. Staying in Switzerland was just an idle dream. I never considered it a real possibility.

I've always been healthy and everything went smoothly throughout the pregnancy. Exactly at 40 weeks I went into labor. I'd made arrangements to have the baby at a clinic near my apartment. As soon as I went into labor, Hilda called for a taxi to drive us there, and then she called Rolfe. He couldn't come because he had important meetings with

Goebbels, and obviously he didn't want anyone to know about the baby. I didn't want him there anyhow and was glad he wouldn't get to see his child born. I was given general anesthesia and had a normal vaginal delivery. When I awoke, I found that I had had a son. The baby had blond hair and very light skin. Like all newborns, he was ugly. Arrangements had been made to take the baby to Germany immediately. A car with a wet nurse came to whisk Hilda and the baby away and deliver him to Gertrud and Rolfe. Gertrud had stayed in the country with family so people would think that she had had the baby while she was away.

When I contacted the clinic about having the baby, I also made arrangements to be sterilized. I didn't want any more children. My tubes were tied while I was sedated for the delivery. I stayed in the hospital for seven days and was given medication to dry up the milk in my breasts. I spent most of the time sleeping and reading. I made it known that I didn't want visitors. Other than painful breasts and some heavy bleeding, it was an uneventful time. I was elated that the pregnancy was over. I didn't like being fat even though I hadn't gained much weight and some people didn't even realize I was pregnant because I wore loose clothing. I admit that I am vain. I know I have a beautiful body. I knew I had to keep my beauty if I was to keep Rolfe and I needed Rolfe. At night when I bathed, I examined my body for hints of stretch marks and any evidence that my breasts sagged. After six weeks, there was no evidence that I'd been pregnant. I was proud of my flat stomach and upturned breasts. And I know you like them a lot too. Eh?"

I took Leon's hands and placed them on my breasts. He pulled them away like they were hot coals. I thought of trying to have sex with him to dilute the ugliness of what I had just told him, but I knew he didn't want me then. Maybe he wouldn't ever want me. And I wanted him more than ever, not just his body - him. The more I talked, the more I felt him distance himself from me. It was as if he were on a train and I was on the station platform seeing him moving farther and farther away from me. I had to show him that there was more to me, there was some good in me.

Leon looked at my hands and said, "Don't touch me. I feel dirty when you touch me. I can't believe you CHOSE not to have any children. I can't believe any woman would voluntarily do that. I WANT children someday. I need to have children someday."

When I heard him say these words, I knew I had lost him. But I had to go on so he would see that there was good in me despite what I had done. Maybe his love would be strong enough to withstand what I had done and who I had been. I kept talking as if I were in a trance. I couldn't stop. The more I talked, the more Leon squirmed and contorted his face. He looked as if he were being burned alive.

“I told people at work that the baby was in Germany being raised by my husband’s family. Again, most people reacted with surprise that I could just give up my newborn without a care. I think people thought that I had given the baby up for adoption. When people asked me if I missed the baby, I said yes, of course. But I didn’t miss the baby. I never thought of him. And I certainly didn’t miss Hilda. I hated having her in the apartment even though she occupied a small maid’s room behind the kitchen. I never allowed her to enter the living room or kitchen when I was home. I didn’t want to see her because she reminded me of Rolfe. I felt that Hilda was a spy for Rolfe, and I was probably right because I later learned that Hilda was Rolfe’s cousin. All these relatives. Gertrud had Himmler and Hilda had Rolfe.

I hated to see my year of post-doctoral study with Piaget come to an end. It had been a productive year for my mind. I hadn’t spent much time with Piaget, but the time I did spend with him was filled with intellectual conversations and laughter. He was like a jolly uncle. Maybe I like your pipe so much because it reminds me of Piaget and his ever-present pipe.

My colleagues gave me a farewell party on my last evening in Geneva. I was so pleased at the speeches people made about me. Most mentioned my brilliance, my intellectual curiosity, my special way with children, and my professionalism. I glowed with each accolade. One person even said that I was unlike most Germans. This was meant as a compliment. It was left hanging since no one wanted to get into a political discussion of what most Germans were like. Little did they know that I really was like most Germans. Piaget made kind remarks about me and wished me success back in Germany. He kissed me warmly on both cheeks. I think I had more kisses in my year in Geneva than I’d had my whole previous life.

I dreaded returning to militant Berlin. There were no soldiers to be seen on the streets of Geneva. No huge swastika flags hanging from buildings. No smug, pompous people strutting down the streets. No Jews with yellow stars scurrying to stay out of harm’s way. I hoped that someday Germany would be like Switzerland, but I knew that wouldn’t happen for a long, long time. Germany had to take dramatic steps on the world stage to regain its respect. I hoped that I would do creative work in child psychology to help German psychology regain its stature. My work would be one small brick in the rebuilding of Germany as a great nation. I believed that the militancy was necessary for rebuilding Germany, but it was just a means to an end which was a great Germany that ruled the world. I was a true believer.

And you'll be surprised to learn that my return to Germany did give me the opportunity to do good even though goodness was a rare commodity."

"I'm surprised how you kept seeing yourself as part of a future Germany even if that was a Germany that was bent on destroying the world."

"I didn't know that then. No one knew."

"Yeah sure. No one knew. That's what you keep saying. No one knew."

Chapter 4

Return to Germany

Although it was late, neither of us was ready to end my shocking disclosures. It was like being unable to stop a collision of two cars heading at each other at high speeds. So I kept talking, hoping to erase the look of revulsion on Leon's face. I was foolishly hoping that when I told him about the good in me, his view of me would miraculously change. That the good in me could somehow erase the evil in me.

"When I returned to Germany, Rolfe had a new apartment for me. Although I knew the apartment had been confiscated from Jews, I'm sorry to say that I felt no guilt then about occupying it. I felt that someone had to live in it. It couldn't be left empty. Could it?"

Leon cynically laughed. "Yes, it could have. At least you didn't have to be the one to occupy it."

I ignored what he said, not wanting to get into an argument over something so trivial, at least it seemed trivial at that point.

"It was elegantly furnished with a library filled with books by authors that ironically had been banned by the Nazis – Freud, Mann, Proust, Remarque. Rolfe didn't seem to care that these were the very books that his boss was burning. They were well-worn, obviously having been repeatedly read. I felt that if I touched them, I would be touching the people who had read them. Somehow I would be invading their minds. It sounds contradictory, but I didn't want any reminder of the actual people whose apartment I was luxuriating in. Living with contradictions was the only way I could survive. That's how all the Germans were able to survive.

In the music room there was an ornate brass music stand holding sheet music, awaiting the return of the musician who had lived in the apartment. There was a large phonograph and shelves heavy with albums, especially music by the Berlin Philharmonic. I later learned that the apartment had been owned by Fritz Himmel, the first violinist of the Berlin Philharmonic, who was featured on many of the records. I didn't play them. I didn't want to hear ghost music that had filled this room in happier times. Again, there was that inconsistency. I was glad to listen to music in rooms other than the music room and read books in rooms other than the library.

“Did you sleep in Himmel's bed?”

“Yes.”

“That's the ultimate invasion of another person, sleeping in his bed. You wouldn't read Himmel's books or listen to his records, but you would sleep in his bed where he had made love. Jesus Dorothea!” He screamed these last words at the top of his lungs.

Again, I ignored his comment. I saw that he was getting increasingly wound up, and I thought I could stop this by just moving on.

“I fooled myself into thinking that it was my apartment when really I was just a squatter.”

“No, you were a lot worse than a squatter. You were a thief.”

“I never asked Rolfe where Himmel was. I knew he'd either fled on his own or had been taken away. After the war, I learned that he escaped to Singapore and eventually to America where he became first violinist for the New York Symphony. Last year I heard him play at a concert at Carnegie Hall in New York. I chose not to go backstage and introduce myself. I didn't think he would appreciate meeting the person who'd benefited from his having to leave Germany. But really I was afraid he'd make a scene and call attention to me. I've tried to keep my past in Nazi Germany as secret as possible, and this would certainly open me up to scrutiny.

I felt like a person who had found a treasure on the street. It was finders keepers, losers weepers; and I was the finder and Himmel was the weeper, like Niobe. I thought that perhaps that was an apt comparison because the Jews were punished for their arrogance, just like Niobe had been punished for bragging about her 14 children who were then slain. Perhaps the Nazis modeled their viciousness after the Greek Gods. There's no shortage of examples of mass killings in mythology and from the very start of recorded history. The Nazis were just following a well-worn tradition. They were acting

out man's innate urge to annihilate itself. I wonder if other species have such a suicidal drive.”

“Dorothea, I knew of Himmel when I was growing up. My sister Gerta was a promising musician and had been part of a special program by the Berlin Philharmonic to find talented kids and nurture their careers. Gerta started playing the violin at age 4. At 10, she took lessons from one of the violinists from the Philharmonic and he introduced her to Himmel. He even hosted a party for the children in the program so Gerta was actually in that apartment. She heard Himmel play in that music room. She said hearing him was one of the great experiences of her life. Unfortunately, she had a short life, a very short life. She died at 27. I'm filled with horror that you were one of the Germans to profit from the Jews leaving. How could you do that? How could you lie in his bed and not think of him?”

“I kept him out of my consciousness. It's what I did whenever the idea of the Jews came into my mind. I had a part of my brain that placed things in isolation. It was like a ward for people with a contagious disease. I knew that if that part of my mind opened up, it would contaminate the rest of my brain. I would have to face the reality of what was happening. That was the only way I could survive.”

“Was your taking Himmel's apartment any different from the Nazis taking the gold out of the teeth of people in the death camps?”

“Leon, that's cruel, and yes, it is. There's no comparison. I didn't kill anybody. I didn't know if Himmel was dead or alive.”

“And if you knew, would it matter?”

“I didn't know. I just refused to think about it.”

“I can't talk about this anymore. I keep picturing a happy Gerta listening to music in Himmel's apartment and a pregnant Gerta being crushed by walls as her home in London is bombed.

Let's talk about something else. I feel like I'm getting a heart attack, but it's just pain at the thought of my beautiful, talented Gerta being murdered.”

Leon rhythmically rubbed his hand over his heart as if he could massage away the pain.

“So what did you do when you got back from Switzerland?”

“When I got back, Rolfe’s relationship with me changed. When he wasn’t working which was most of the time, he spent the rest of his time at the apartment with me. He didn’t have to be home with Gertrud because she was occupied with the baby. He said he felt like we were really married. He was content to spend hours droning on and on about the success he was having at work. He felt as though I’d brought him luck; that I was responsible for his moving upward. And the more he loved me, the more I despised him and the more adept I became at hiding my feelings. I also became adept at squashing any thoughts of what was happening to me and to Germany. To consider how I had become Rolfe’s whore and how Germany was destroying the world were topics I couldn’t and wouldn’t consider. I was the perfect example of Freud’s concept of repression. This defense mechanism protected me from facing unthinkable thoughts.

What was happening to the Jews was evident all around me, but I refused to send the messages of what I was seeing to my brain for processing. I couldn’t miss seeing Jews wearing yellow Stars of David as they walked the street with their heads cast down with their eyes glued to the sidewalk futilely hoping to avoid attention. I never considered that if Wertheimer or Himmel were still in Germany, they might be these cowering shadows hoping for anonymity. I couldn’t ignore the ubiquitous signs on store fronts, at concerts, and in doctor’s offices saying *No Jews Allowed*.

There were times when I walked down the street and saw Nazis beating Jews. There was always a crowd around watching the spectacle. People in the crowd enjoyed the show as they cheered on the aggressors. It was like the Romans cheering the lions as they devoured the Christians at the Coliseum. Most of the time I scurried away, not wanting to be confronted by the horror that was becoming an everyday occurrence on the streets of Berlin.

But the first time I saw this, I stayed. I couldn’t move; I was rooted to the spot. Three policemen were beating a Jewish man with their night sticks. He was an old defenseless man who had been carrying a bag with rolls which were strewn all over the sidewalk. This was some formidable enemy – a weak, hungry man in rags. One of the onlookers took a roll and violently stuffed it into the victim’s mouth. Everyone laughed. The policemen had beaten the wretched man across the face and blood ran down to his chest turning the yellow star red. I couldn’t stop looking at the star drowning in blood. It was a sign for what would happen to all the yellow stars. Then the police dragged the fierce enemy away by his feet as his head repeatedly hit the sidewalk leaving a trail of blood. The crowd lingered, laughing, savoring what they had just witnessed. Someone picked up the rolls that had spilled and fed pieces to pigeons that flitted above. I stayed

away from that spot in the future, irrationally thinking that the blood from the man had permanently stained the sidewalk.

After that, whenever I saw a crowd surrounding a beating, I rushed away, not wanting to witness the savagery and the upstanding German citizens enjoying the street show. I didn't want anything to undermine my blindly held view that such incidents were infrequent aberrations when they were really constant occurrences on the streets of German cities, towns, and villages."

"I picture such beatings in my head and I see my father or my mother or my sisters being the victims. To you, these people were unknowns. To me, each and every one of them was a loved one. In a way those beatings are more incriminating for the Germans than the existence of the concentration camps. Germans could deny, although not plausibly, that they knew of the camps, but they couldn't deny what they saw on the streets every time they went out to shop or stroll or even open their windows for a bit of fresh air.

During that time, the German people were happy, especially since there was growing prosperity. Food was readily available as were all types of consumer goods. Militant music was heard everywhere and there were lots of parades with bands, soldiers, and Hitler Youth proudly marching down the middle of the streets. The performance of the Germans in the '38 Olympic Games also bolstered German pride. We were unstoppable.

I was swept up by Hitlermania. Everyone adored Hitler. Germany was a church worshipping their Jesus with a moustache. I went to some rallies with Rolfe where Hitler spoke. We sat in the VIP section in the audience of thousands. The cheering from the masses was deafening. He screamed his speeches and we screamed back. After an afternoon of cheering and screaming, I returned home hoarse, but exhilarated by the excitement of being part of this mass orgy of adulation.

Rolfe even took me to two parties with His Royal Highness in attendance. I was like a teenager slobbering over Frank Sinatra. I got to shake his hand. I didn't want to wash my hand for a week after that. What a contradiction I was. I was cynical critic, making fun of Hitler and then I was a rabid fan, worshiping his every word. "

"Did he shake your right hand? If so, I don't ever want to touch it again. You're Lady Macbeth with blood on your hands that will never wash out."

He looked at my hand as if it indeed was soaked with the blood of the six million Jews who had been murdered by Hitler. And that was when I knew I had reached the tipping point. I had lost Leon forever no matter what else I told him.

“Leon, you have to realize that he was this messiah figure who hypnotized the German people. We would follow him anywhere, and we did. We followed him over a cliff into a burning hell.”

“I don’t agree with you Dorothea. Yes, Hitler was a messiah figure, but he was leading a nationalist revolution. He represented the German people. He did what the German people wanted him to do. He did what you wanted him to do. He couldn’t have led unknowing sheep into a world-wide conflagration.”

“We were so mesmerized by him that we didn’t care if we had another war despite the crippling consequences of the first world war. There was constant talk of a new war, a better war, a righteous war, and one that we would definitively win. Another war would be a way for Germany to show her greatness. She had been disgraced, debased, and humiliated after World War I. That would not happen again. This was the time of vindication. No one considered the cost of war in lost lives. Death for the fatherland was heroic.

Maybe Rolfe’s subliminal messages were used to whitewash the cost of the impending war and accompanying atrocities. Messages with pictures of able bodied soldiers entering the pearly gates of heaven as bands played militant marches and maidens with thick blond braids and bared breasts throwing flowers at them. Messages with pictures of dark Jewish men with hooked noses and giant hooked penises raping blond little girls and boys. Messages with pictures of mohels not circumscizing babies, but instead using machetes to castrate handsome German boys. Messages with pictures of families offering their babies to Hitler seated on an ornate throne surrounded by angels. Hitler as God. Deutschland uberalles.”

“You paint a picture of a police state in total control of its people. That’s not how it was. The people weren’t manipulated so easily. They wanted Hitler to do what he was doing. You wanted Hitler to do what he was doing.”

“Maybe you’re right. We wanted to be manipulated. We wanted to be brainwashed.

Anyhow, I didn’t have a job when I returned from Switzerland. There were no jobs available at the university since most students were off to war. After Rolfe left the Institute, it closed. I pestered Rolfe to get me something to do. I was so bored. I didn’t

work slavishly for years to obtain my doctorate to just still idly. Rolfe would have been happy if I did and was just his mistress who would accompany him to the many parties he attended. He bought me beautiful clothes from Paris so that I would be the most gorgeous woman at the parties and everyone would envy him. He even took me on shopping trips to Paris to buy clothes at designers' studios. I met Coco Chanel who fawned over Rolfe as if he was Hitler. Talk about Nazi sympathizers.

Rolfe told me about jobs that didn't interest me, like working on the editorial staff of the magazine of the girls' division of the Hitler Youth or working in Goebbels's office. Then he found a job that did pique my interest. It was to head the Berlin School for the Handicapped, known as the best institution in Germany and one of the best in Europe. This was a school for children with all types of physical and mental disabilities. What they had in common was that they were from wealthy, powerful families. Even such families had children with disabilities, although many wanted to hide this flaw in their family trees. Schools, or institutions, for the poor and the average were often dirty human warehouses, but not the Berlin School. It was the Ritz and the Harvard of schools. It had been headed by a prominent doctor who had been removed from his position because he was Jewish. The Jewish children had also been removed. Now it was a school for Aryan children that needed an Aryan head, someone like me.

I toured the school which was housed in a beautiful, well-appointed, old estate. The grounds were impeccably groomed. The rooms were immaculate and attractively furnished. There were lots of nurses and attendants to meet the children's needs. Although there were extensive medical and physical therapy programs, there was little in the way of education. As I toured the school, I stopped to interact with the children. I responded warmly to them and they reciprocated. My smile was answered with a smile. My patting of a child's head was met with a purr. My greeting, "How are you?" was followed by "Fine. How are you?" from the verbal children, and a smile from the non-verbal children.

Here was my challenge – to take my knowledge of Piaget's theory and Binet's belief in the educability of intelligence and show that even children with disabilities could be educated. I would demonstrate that German psychology and education could change intelligence. They could create supermen, not from these handicapped children, but from average Aryan children. Demonstrating that handicapped children could improve dramatically would be research proof that normal children could become supernormal children.

I made a formal presentation of my views to the school's Board of Directors and also the Director of the Health Ministry. I explained that everyone is born with a range of intelligence. A person who is given a poor education will function at the lower end of that range, while a person who is given a good education will function at the upper end of their range. German children are born with the highest range of intelligence compared to all other ethnic groups so giving them an excellent education would result in their operating at the top of their range, which would be genius.

My views were positively received by the Board and the Director, so I was able to get the financial support I needed to hire teachers to implement the innovative curriculum I planned to design. I was absolutely thrilled with the responses I received. I knew this might be my way to make a name for myself and make an impact on psychology and education in Germany, and then world-wide."

"So your plans for the school were not based on altruistic values, but on your ambitions?"

"Yes, at first, but not later. I changed the children, but the children changed me even more.

First, I had to convince Rolfe of the significance of my views. I arranged to do so after an all day orgy of sex when I knew he couldn't say no to me. He was sold on my ideas and how I could become important in my own right, something that he admired in me. I was so diametrically opposite from his wife: I was beautiful, brilliant, sexually exciting, creative, and goal directed. I was the perfect German woman, and Rolfe couldn't believe his good fortune to have me as his very own.

Rolfe presented my ideas to Goebbels who was impressed. He knew how much Rolfe loved me. He was eager to meet me and to see for himself if I was everything Rolfe said I was. I was in a state of excitement for the week leading up to our meeting, especially over what I should wear. I was personally meeting the great Joseph Goebbels. I was glad I had the latest Chanel suit. Goebbels was a well-known womanizer and had even risked being ostracized by Hitler because of an affair with a Czech actress. So I was prepared to do whatever necessary to get his support for my school, even if I had to sleep with him, which I hoped wouldn't be necessary. I found him so repulsive, and if I had to sleep with him I would have to use the best acting performance of my life. Maybe that's why he picked actresses as girlfriends. They were good at pretending."

"You actually considered sleeping with Goebbels? Would you have slept with Hitler if it would have gotten you what you wanted?"

“Yes. I would have slept with Satan if necessary.”

“Ah that’s a good analogy – Satan. Goebbels and Hitler were personifications of Satan. And Rolfe was just a rung below. One of Satan’s minions.

I like to think of the Nazis existing in Dante’s Nine Circles of Hell for all eternity. Certainly Hitler and the other top Nazis are in the Seventh Circle of Hell for Violence where they are bathed in a river of boiling blood. I suppose Rolfe would be in the Second Circle of Hell for Lust where he is being blown by endless violent winds.”

“Where will I be when I die?”

“I don’t know. I hope not Hell. Maybe the Third Circle with Rolfe or the First Circle of Limbo.”

“Maybe what I did later in my life will save me from going to Hell. Maybe I atoned for what I did. When you find out about the good things I’ve done, maybe you’ll reconsider that.

Getting back to my first meeting with Goebbels. We met in his huge ornate office at the Ministry of Propaganda. I’d prepared a report with a summary of my ideas and plans for the school which I’d submitted to Goebbels’s secretary a week earlier. Goebbels kept us waiting for ten minutes, just to make sure I would be anxious, which I was. I had to cover up my shock at the sight of him. I knew he was short, but he was even shorter than Rolfe. He wasn’t much taller than five feet. I felt like I was in a room of dwarves. Their shortness was more pronounced by the high ceiling in the room. I’d worn high heels so I towered over both Goebbels and Rolfe. I felt like a German Valkyrie. Goebbels was skinny. He had no flesh on his face. He looked like a rodent, a ferret or a rat.

Goebbels responded positively to the presentation of my plans for the school. He said that it was a pleasure to meet a beautiful woman with such a creative mind and that I epitomized the ideal Aryan woman. I glowed at the compliment. I knew he was interested in sleeping with me, but I think he didn’t pursue me because of his close relationship with Rolfe. I would have found it nearly impossible to fake sexual satisfaction with such an ugly, despicable man. As he walked me out of the office, he tried unsuccessfully to hide his limp. For a man who advocated the superiority of Germans, he certainly didn’t have the physical attributes of the idolized master race. Nor did Hitler. Maybe that was another use for Rolfe’s subliminal perception messages – making the Germans believe that Hitler and Goebbels were examples of German manhood and disbelieving the visual images of these motley specimens.”

“Dorothea, your willingness to sleep with anyone necessary to get what you want overwhelms me. I can’t believe someone I know would do such a thing. You’re worse than a whore who sells her body for money.”

“That was Germany then. You had to have a way of getting what you wanted. And my way was my body. You can’t understand it because you weren’t living there then. Don’t judge me yet. Hear me out about the good things in my life. Please Leon. Please hear me out.”

He put his head down so that he could hear me talk without looking at me which he couldn’t do any longer. I think the sight of me disgusted him. I didn’t blame him. Memories of myself at that time disgusted and shamed me.

“After working at the school for two months and researching innovative educational methods, I came across the works of Maria Montessori who’d started a successful school for retarded children in Rome. Montessori had an interesting background in that she was the first female physician in Italy and also the mother of an illegitimate son, Mario. This was unheard of in conservative Italy even though she was part of the upper class. She developed methods for perceptual motor training which were consistent with Gestalt theory and Piaget’s work, and she designed unique instructional materials that children could use to teach themselves. She’d started special schools in Rome, Barcelona, and Amsterdam using her methods and materials. The Montessori Method was sweeping across Europe.

Montessori had a falling out with the Italian government and was living in Amsterdam. I contacted her and asked if I could spend a month working with her to learn about her philosophy and educational methods. Montessori said that she was anti-fascist and that she wouldn’t take me on if I was a fascist. I responded that I was non-political and only interested in educating my children so Montessori agreed that I could spend a month with her.

Of course, I had to get permission from Rolfe to go. He said that he would check with Goebbels who approved my trip. I again worried that I would have to pay him, but fortunately he never contacted me. Do you see how my life was controlled by the Nazis? I couldn’t do what I wanted unless it was approved by the higher-ups. And approval was contingent upon my sexual availability. Sex was the only way a woman could get ahead in Nazi Germany.

I was excited about going to Amsterdam because I was meeting Montessori and because I’d never been there. At first, Montessori was aloof in her dealings with me, but

when she realized how committed I was to instituting the Montessori Method at my school, she warmed to me. I responded to this imposing woman with admiration much like I had felt for Piaget, Kohler, and Wertheimer. Montessori was a brilliant, opinionated braggart, but she was a joy to be with. She had a facile mind, made stimulating conversation, and had a ribald sense of humor. We both chain smoked and laughed constantly. I had not laughed so much in my interactions with my previous mentors. In many ways we were alike – intelligent, creative, dedicated to our cause, and sexually liberated.

There were 50 schools using the Montessori Method throughout Holland. Montessori arranged for her son Mario to take me to tour of some of them. Mario was a handsome 32 year old who showed interest in me as soon as we met. Maria was aware that we were interested in each other and thought our school visits would provide us an opportunity to get to know the Montessori Method and also each other. Obviously, she had no moral reservations about mixing sex and business. Not sex for herself, but for her son.

At the end of every day of school visitations, Mario and I made love. He was my first Italian lover, and he certainly lived up to the stereotype of Italian men being sexy. I didn't have to feign satisfaction with Mario as I did with Rolfe. Mario suggested that I should also see the Montessori schools in Rome and Barcelona so he arranged for visits there. In Amsterdam, we walked the canals followed by love making and Dutch beer. In Rome, we visited schools, the Coliseum, the Forum, and the Vatican. We ended our days of school tours and sightseeing with love making and chianti. In Barcelona, our visits to schools and historic churches were punctuated with love making and Madeira wine.

Mario told me that he and Maria were going to India to start Montessori schools there, and he asked me to join them so that I could see how to set up the Montessori Method from scratch. I knew that Rolfe wouldn't let me go, and I didn't really want to go. I was eager to return to Berlin and start integrating the Montessori Method into my own educational program. I enjoyed the sightseeing and the sex with Mario, but creating my school was my prime objective. I was glad I didn't go to India because when war broke out with England, Maria and Mario were arrested and interned by the British since Italians were viewed as enemies. Had I gone, I, too, would have been arrested. How different my life would have turned out, and of course, I wouldn't have met you."

Leon ignored my flirtation. In fact, he cringed.

"When I got back to Germany, I saw a change even though I'd only been gone for five weeks. Kristalnacht had taken place and overt cruelty to Jews was rampant. I ignored

the burning of the books by the Nazis although some of my colleagues were opposed to such intellectual repression, but quietly. I no longer said that I was non-political. There was a sense of fear that permeated all conversations, fear of being reported as unpatriotic and not completely supportive of the Nazis. So I openly supported everything that was happening in Germany. Rolfe wanted me to join the Nazi party, but I found ways to avoid that. I was intent only on developing my school and I didn't want it labeled as a Nazi school. I had to walk a fine line between being a Nazi sympathizer and being a card-carrying Nazi.

I didn't see much of Rolfe because I got home late from school every night and even spent weekends there. Rolfe was away a lot too. We rarely had sex which was fine with me because it was harder and harder for me to pretend, especially after my experiences with Mario. I was hoping Rolfe was tiring of me or had found a new sex partner. But I also knew that I still needed him. Perhaps I would need him as long as the Nazis were in power, and I saw no end to that. No, it looked like the Nazis would always be in power. Maybe for the thousand year reign they predicted."

"You always seem to find mentors who help you get what you want. First, Wertheimer, then Kohler, Piaget, and Montessori. You were lucky to find Montessori, but your ability to take her ideas and translate them into practice was certainly special. That was your gift.

You also seem to have a special ability to use sex to help you get what you want. Although I'm sure you enjoyed sex with Montessori, he was also helped you get his mother's support. It makes me wonder if there's something you want from me since there's always a hidden agenda behind your relationships."

"Leon, don't even think that. What could I want from you? There's nothing you can give me except yourself. I love you for you and you alone. I've never loved a man before and I never thought I could love a man with no strings attached. Don't you believe me?"

I was begging him; I was imploring him to believe me. I tried to take his hands, but he pulled them away.

"I don't know. I'm having trouble coming to grips with all the men you've slept with. Why did you have to tell me everything? Now when I'm in you, I'll think of all the other men who have been in you and that revolts me. I know this sounds ridiculous, but I think you might also be comparing me to your previous lovers, especially Mario. And you might find that I'm not as good. I'm also repulsed that you slept with a hard-core

Nazi like Rolfe, someone so close to Goebbels and the very heart of the Nazi party. When I touch your hand and I think that your hand actually touched Goebbels's hand and Hitler's hand, I feel contaminated.

And Dorothea, there's no doubt that you were a Nazi even though you didn't officially join the party. You supported them in so many ways, and that is why Hitler and his monsters were able to get away with everything they did. People like you did nothing. In fact, you encouraged them. I think you're making yourself look less innocent than you are. I think you want to paint yourself as not being a true Nazi when in fact you were. You were one of them."

"You're wrong Leon. How could we everyday people stop those powerful men? We would have been killed. You're wrong. We were helpless."

"You weren't helpless. You could have asked for asylum in Switzerland or Amsterdam or you could have gone off to India. You had chances to get away, and you didn't take them"

"I couldn't. My life was in Germany."

"Dorothea, I think you want to have sex with me to atone for your sins. You think that by making me love you, you'll be forgiven for your part in killing the Jews. To you, I represent the six million dead Jews."

"How can you think I had anything to do with the murder of the Jews? I knew bad things were happening to them, but I didn't know they were being exterminated."

"Everyone said that. You didn't want to know. You didn't want to face what was happening to you, to Germany, and to the world.

Dorothea, I have to leave. I have to think all this over. My brain is about to burst open. I can't be with you."

"Please, it's more important than ever for us to make love now. I need to show you it's just us that matters. My past is past. It's over. I don't compare you to anyone else. I never loved anyone else. My love for you makes our sex special, unlike anything I've experienced before."

"I can't do it tonight. I don't feel any sexual desire for you. Stop. Don't touch me. You can't arouse me. I know it's hard for you to be rejected. You never have before, have you?"

“No, but it wouldn’t have mattered. Only you matter. I need you more than anything else in life.”

“I’m sorry. I can’t.”

“Please don’t leave. I should never have told you about my past. I should have lied.”

“I would have found out somehow. You can’t cover up all those years no matter how you try to repaint them. I think in a way you wanted me to know everything so I would forgive you for what you did. But I can’t forgive you. I don’t know if or how you can be cleansed of your past.”

“I have to tell you about the beautiful, good things I did when I created the Berlin School for the Handicapped. You’ll see that there was good in me even then. Please, please don’t go.”

Chapter 5

Berlin School for the Handicapped

And Leon didn’t go. Thankfully, he stayed to hear about my creation, the one thing in my life I was proudest of, the thing that made me feel that I had some good in me, the thing that made me feel that there was a reason for my need to survive.

“I was more excited about the Berlin School for the Handicapped than anything else in my life. It was all I could think about. I was creating the Schmidt Approach - something unique and something that was all mine. I would show the world that through research-based pedagogy, it was possible to expand the mind, even the minds of those with limited potential. I would breathe life into Binet’s thesis of the educability of intelligence. I involved myself in every aspect of the school – designing the classrooms, writing the curriculum, buying the materials, and most importantly, hiring the staff that would make the Schmidt Approach a reality.

I felt it was critical to create a positive ambience like the one I had experienced when I worked with Piaget. This was essential for connecting with children, especially children who were away from family and needed physical and emotional nurturing. I kissed the children and even the staff on both cheeks whenever I greeted them and parted

from them. There was a lot of touching and hugging. This was unfamiliar to me, but I knew that this had to be part of the Schmidt Approach. I was doing everything I could to make Wertheimer's and Kohler's predictions about me come true. But I was to discover that there was another reason for what I was doing, one that wasn't professional, it was personal. I found that I wanted to do something to better the lives of the children I came to care for. For the first time in my life, I wanted to do good for others. So you're wrong. My motivation may have started selfishly, but became altruistic. In the five years I ran the Berlin School, I changed as much as the children changed. With each improvement in a child, I improved too. Each time a child read a new word or counted to a new number or spoke a longer sentence or took a first step, I became a better person.

It was not difficult to find intelligent, dedicated teachers since there were few jobs for such people even though the economy was booming. Most of the available jobs were in factories producing war goods. I would have preferred to hire some male teachers, but I could only find females. Men were off to war. I didn't want to hire members of the Nazi party because I wanted the school to be as apolitical as possible. There was no way I was going to have someone standing over me telling me that what I was doing wasn't approved by the Party. I didn't want to fear saying something that might be reported to the police or the SS. I wanted to create a safe zone within the walls of the school. In my interviews with potential teachers, I carefully explored their political views to make sure they were compatible with mine. I also didn't want to hire anyone who was anti-government because I knew that would eventually get out and damage the school. I wanted people like myself - neutral."

"You really think you were neutral?"

"As far as my school went, yes. Definitely.

I hired 14 marvelous, dedicated teachers and an assistant director, Heidi Klemperer, who was to become my first and only friend in my entire life. In the past, I'd never met a woman who I wanted to befriend. There was either competition, or philosophical or political differences between me and the women at the university or the women on Piaget's staff. I perceived women as being jealous of my looks and attractiveness to men, and I also knew that some women disliked me for how I manipulated men as well as my driving ambition.

Heidi and I were as different as night and day. She was older, married to Fritz, a doctor serving in the army, and the mother of nineteen year old Otto who was a medic on a U boat. He had been a pre-med student who planned on following in his father's footsteps, but his plans were put on hold when he was drafted. Heidi was alone for the

first time in her 21 years of marriage. Her personal life had revolved around these two men whom she adored, while her professional life revolved around being the principal of a high school for the arts. She began her career as an art teacher at the school and had progressed through the ranks to become the principal. But the school closed since budding artists, actors, and musicians were not prized in the new Germany. Her life was suddenly empty – no family and no all-consuming job. So the job at my school filled a void in Heidi’s professional life. And our friendship came to partly fill the void in her personal life.

We were so different in age, marital background, professional interests, and even in looks. She was a red head with freckles and crinkly, smiling eyes. She was pudgy and didn’t care about her appearance. Despite these differences, we connected the first time we met. I’m not sure why. Maybe it was her acceptance of others. She took me into her personal sphere making me feel good when I was with her. Her sense of humor made everything and everyone laughable, even the Nazis I was to eventually learn. And I was intrigued by her ideas for including a strong music and art program in the curriculum. She saw no reason why people with disabilities couldn’t be trained in the arts. Why couldn’t a physically handicapped child sing? Why couldn’t a mentally handicapped child paint? Why couldn’t a blind child sculpt?

We worked long hours designing the curriculum, training the teachers, and supervising them. After work, we often went to my apartment for a late dinner. Heidi never asked how I was able to afford such a glamorous apartment. She probably suspected, but was too tactful to ask. She knew the tricks of surviving in Germany, and one of the most important was knowing what to talk about, when, and with whom. Gradually I told her about Rolfe. Fritz was the only man who Heidi had slept with so she found it difficult to understand our relationship. Because she never judged me, I felt free to tell her everything, even about the baby I’d incubated. Heidi urged me to find out how the baby was doing, but I told her I had no desire to see him or know anything about him. I never asked Rolfe about the baby. It was his baby alone, not mine.

After I told Heidi everything about me, I felt relieved. It was as if I had made confession to a priest, but in this case there was no penance. There was only relief that another person knew my secrets and still accepted me, despite the things I did and the person I was.”

“Are you hoping that I will accept you and what you’ve done like Heidi did?”

“Yes. That’s why I’m baring my soul to you.”

“Heidi wasn’t your lover. Heidi wasn’t Jewish. There can be no comparison between Heidi and me.”

“I know, but maybe you can find something other than acceptance in your heart. Maybe recognition that I was a weak human being bent only on my survival until the day I walked into the Berlin School for the Handicapped.

When I finished confessing to Heidi, I sobbed. She held me like a mother as she comforted me, saying that she understood what I did and why. I never felt closer to another human being. Heidi made me feel like I was not a bad person, that I had some good in me. She said that only a person with a good heart would do what I was doing at my school. I told her that it was not my school; it was our school. At first, I wasn’t sure if I was doing this to make a name for myself or if there was really some altruism in me. Maybe I did want to do good for others. Heidi thought so. When a person sees good in you, you try to live up to that belief. Maybe that’s why I’m telling you all this so that you’ll see that there is some good in me and that I can be a good person if you believe in me.”

Leon was silent. He didn’t want to discuss this. Not now. The ever-changing picture I was painting of myself was overwhelming him.

“I liked observing the teachers, not only to see my methods come alive, but to see the children’s progress. I responded strongly to some of the children, especially the higher functioning ones. There was this beautiful five year old girl named Eva, who had cerebral palsy and was confined to a wheel chair. She was making great progress in perceptual motor areas, language, and even reading. Eva’s eyes lit up whenever I came into the room. Like all the children, she called me Fraulein D. After Eva showed me what she had learned since my last visit, I gave her a tight hug and a kiss on each cheek. She burst with happiness every time I touched her. As I observed Eva’s progress, it became apparent that Eva was not retarded despite her severe physical impairment. In fact, she was very bright. I was determined to see how far I could take her so I made time to work with her individually every day. At the end of our lesson together, I read passages from the *Babar the Elephant* series. Eva studied each picture as I read the words. When I reached the end of a book, she begged me to read more. ‘More, please more,more.’ I can still hear her speaking these words. I would succumb to her pleas and read more. After a while, Eva started reading along with me. It soon became apparent to me that Eva hadn’t just memorized the words; she could actually read. Eventually she read ten Babar books by herself.

Eva's father was Franz Schiller, head of the Deutsche National Bank. He never came to visit her, but her mother, Elisabeth, came every Sunday afternoon. It was apparent that she loved Eva. She brought her presents and pushed her wheelchair on walks through the gardens. She fed Eva even though she could readily feed herself. She also sang her lullabies. She reacted to Eva's disability by babying her which was very different from how I treated her. I felt that if you had high expectations for a child, the child would try to live up to them, and that was certainly true in Eva's case.

About three months after I took over as director, Elisabeth sought me out after her visit with Eva. She told me how amazed she was that Eva had learned to read. She thought she was retarded, but now she could see that she wasn't. She was just physically handicapped, not mentally handicapped. After that, she stopped babying Eva, allowing her to feed herself and even push herself on their wheelchair walks. She tried to get Eva's father to visit so he could see the change in her, but he refused. He was only interested in his normal son, Peter, who was 18 years older than Eva and following in his father's footsteps as a banker. Eva's birth had been an unwelcomed surprise to Elisabeth and Franz coming so late in their marriage. Her disability was even more unwelcomed. Franz was ashamed of Eva, and wanted her out of sight so she would be out of mind. She didn't fit in with his image as a child of a captain of German business, of the man who would lead Germany to economic supremacy in the world.

Heidi and I reviewed the progress of the children weekly and were encouraged at how much most were learning. However, there were some who were unreachable either because they were too handicapped or had other problems, often emotional. I kept records on all the children's progress so I could eventually publish my findings. My article would mark the introduction of the Schmidt Approach to the world. Heidi also made a film of the arts curriculum she had created. She filmed a concert in which the children sang and played instruments, and she filmed an art exhibition of the pictures and sculpture some children had created. We hoped to release this film to the public someday so people could see the talents that could be nurtured in handicapped people. By this time, Elisabeth had become one of the major supporters of our school. She promised to do all she could to distribute the film, especially because the film included footage of Eva painting with a paintbrush in her teeth since she couldn't hold a brush steady with her hand. She is shown seriously studying a red rose in a blue vase and then selecting red paint to dab on paper and blue paint below it. The resulting picture took some imagination to match to the actual vase and flower, but the colors were right. The resulting painting looked a lot like the modern art that was banned because it was

considered degenerate by the Nazis. Considering an eight-year old's painting as degenerate is quite laughable. Considering any art as degenerate is even more laughable.

Rolfe and I saw each other less frequently because he was busy doing Goebbels's bidding and I was totally involved with the school. There was a period of five weeks when I didn't hear from him at all. I was hopeful that this might be the end of our relationship, but finally he called and said he needed to see me. I cleared my calendar for the next Saturday. I prepared lunch, but when he arrived, he said that he was only hungry for me, not food. We had sex all afternoon. He was making up for lost time. I tried to concentrate on what he was doing, but I kept thinking about school matters. It was getting harder to pretend that I was not repelled by Rolfe's touch. When I looked at his almost nailless fingers touching me, I wanted to puke. To show me how much he'd missed me, he gave me a gold bracelet encrusted with emeralds and sapphires. It was gaudy and certainly not something I would ever wear. I wondered what Jewish wrist it had graced before. Although the words tasted foul in my mouth, I told Rolfe that I missed him. Then he told me that he had another reason for seeing me. I should have known. Rolfe always had an ulterior motive. The last time we had an all-day sex orgy, he asked me to have his baby. Now he was about to make another outrageous request of me.

'Dorothea, you need to know about our son Wilhelm. When I brought him back from Geneva, I was so proud. He was a beautiful baby. Blond and blue eyed like us. There was a miraculous change in Gertrud. She came out of her depression and with Hilda's help took care of him. After about six months, Hilda suggested that we might want to get him checked out by a doctor. He didn't smile or respond to people. When she held him, it was like holding a board. He didn't mold his body to hers. He didn't sit up. We took him to a baby specialist who said that he was just late in developing. He didn't sit up until after he was a year old, and he still didn't respond to people. He didn't say words and didn't even respond to his name. He moaned a lot, like he was in pain. We took him to all kinds of doctors and tried special diets and medicines and therapies. Nothing worked. Three weeks ago, one of the top pediatricians in the country said that Wilhelm was hopelessly retarded and that we should put him in an institution and forget that he had ever been born. That was the last straw for Gertrud. She had a complete mental breakdown and is now hospitalized. I don't think she'll ever leave the hospital. That's why I haven't come to see you. I've been overwhelmed with my problems at home.

I wish I'd never made you have a baby. Look at all the problems he's caused. But maybe one of the good things to come out of this is that I'll be rid of Gertrud for good and I can get a divorce and marry you.'

When I heard the words, ‘marry you,’ I cringed. I would rather eat rat poison than marry Rolfe, but I couldn’t let him know my feelings, not now when I needed him to help me keep the school going.

‘Dorothea, I want to put Wilhelm in your school, but I don’t want people to know he’s my child. I want to give him another name. He’ll be called Johann Linz. You are never to tell anyone who he is. I will tell the world that he died. Everyone will believe this because everyone knows that there’s something wrong with him.

I told Goebbels about Wilhelm being our baby. He told me to keep that a secret. No one could ever know that two perfect examples of the Aryan race could produce a defective child. That would be great propoganda for our enemies. He even suggested that I should have Wilhelm sent away to be killed, but I can’t do that. Even though I wish he hadn’t been born, I can’t kill my own child. I’ve never loved him or even cared for him. I always felt sorry for him. And whenever I look at him, I feel great conflict. How could I produce such an abomination? How could you produce such an abomination?’

I didn’t answer him. I didn’t say that he wasn’t a product of love, but of blind ambition, and that is why he turned out the way he did. I didn’t believe in God, but I thought that if He existed, Wilhelm was retribution for what I had become – a whore – and for what Germany had become – an evil empire.

I spoke the words Rolfe wanted to hear. ‘Don’t worry. I’ll handle this and no one will ever find out about Wilhelm and you.’

The next week Hilda brought Johann Linz, formerly Wilhelm Neumann, to the Berlin School for the Handicapped. She handled all the paperwork with Heidi. I didn’t want to see her. I hated her because she knew my secret. When Hilda left, I met with Heidi. We reviewed the paperwork and concluded that Johann should be placed with the most severely handicapped children and be given two hours of school every day and an hour of physical therapy and an hour of speech therapy three times weekly. We would bombard him with stimulation to see if we could reach him, to see if there was anything inside Johann Linz.

At the end of the day, I saw my son for the first time since the day he was born. He was a beautiful three-year old. He looked like Rolfe and me, with white blonde hair, vivid blue eyes, and soft white skin. He didn’t respond to my presence and didn’t look at me when I spoke. He rocked back and forth as he moaned. I tried to pick him up, but he recoiled and moaned louder. He didn’t want to be touched. He wanted to be left in his cocoon. There was no one like Johann at the school. The staff who had worked at the

institution for years had never seen a child like him. I stared at him in wonder. This was what Rolfe and I produced. Johann was moaning for the way he was created, for who his parents were, and the cruel ideology that spawned him.

Heidi joined me and said, 'He's so severely handicapped. I'm not sure there's much we can do for him.'

'Heidi, you're not going to believe this, but Johann is my son.'

The look on her face was one of total shock and disbelief. I told her about Rolfe's visit to me.

'How do you feel about him?'

'I feel nothing for him. I don't even feel pity. Nothing. Nothing. I'm a vacuum when I look at that child.'

We both stared at him as if he were an exotic animal in a zoo.

Despite the intensive educational and therapeutic program Johann was given, he made no progress. I visited him regularly hoping that somehow a crack could be made in his shell, but he was impenetrable. When I tried to touch him, he recoiled as if he'd been shocked.

Although the world knows what the Nazis did to the Jews and others they viewed as undeserving of life, most people don't really know what they did to the handicapped. In 1939, Action T4, a program to euthanize the handicapped and the mentally ill was instituted. The disabled were viewed as a burden to society, unworthy of living, so killing centers for them were established. These were the precursors to the killing centers in the concentration camps. You could say that the handicapped were the guinea pigs to test the methods for exterminating the Jews. Karl Brandt was the head of the Action T4 program and a friend of Rolfe's. I even met him at some of the parties for the Nazi higher-ups. Although Rolfe was not actually guilty of murdering anyone himself, he took pride in associating with the masterminds of murder, like Brandt. He frequently talked about how the brains of the Nazi Party were being used to find creative ways to exterminate the vermin that had to be wiped from the face of the Earth. He hated everyone he was ordered to hate. The official Action T4 program was halted by Hitler in 1941 because of public objections from the Catholic Church, but killing of the disabled continued unabated on a less publicized scale. Maybe getting people, including Catholics, to believe that it was right to wipe out the handicapped was another task for Rolfe's subliminal perception messages.

At first, I thought my school would be protected because many of the parents of the children were military officers, bankers, industrialists, and even Nazi party officials. But on April 12, 1943, I got a call from Karl Brandt. He told me that he was calling me personally because of my relationship with Rolfe. He told me that in seven days, April 19, the children in my school were going to be included in the Action T4 Program. He wanted me to make the children's removal as smooth as possible. I pleaded with him not to do this, but he cut me off saying this was not negotiable. All undesirables had to be removed from the Third Reich and my children were undesirables. He hung up leaving my pleas suspended in air.

Although I knew about the Action T4 program, I naively thought my children would be protected because of their parents' status. How wrong I was. I was desperate. I racked my brain for someone who might help me. I called Franz Schiller hoping he might intervene. Surely, one of the most powerful financial figures in Germany could have some influence. His secretary said he was out of the office and didn't know when he would be back. Franz Schiller would be guilty of infanticide if he did nothing to stop the killing of his daughter. In Nazi Germany, all manner of killing, including infanticide, was now acceptable, even desirable. When I think of infanticide, I think of primitive people and indeed the Nazis were primitive people living in modern times.

I called Elisabeth to try to have her husband to intervene. She knew nothing of the impending murder of the children in the school. She cried hysterically and told me that she would get Franz to stop this. She called back a few hours later. He told her that there was nothing he could do, and there was nothing he SHOULD do to stop this. She told me that she would come the next day to say good-bye to Eva.

In desperation, I called Rolfe even though I knew he would do nothing. He would never go against any Nazi edict. He already knew what Brandt had decided. As I expected, he said there was nothing we could do. Once this decision had been made, it was impossible to rescind. I told him his own son would be murdered. He said that it would be best for him and for us. I no longer could delude myself - Rolfe was a rabid Nazi hell-bent on killing anyone deemed to be less than perfect, even his own son. He, too, viewed infanticide as acceptable. He was as bad as Himmler, Mengele, Eichman, and all the other murderous devils. I hung up holding back the vitriol that I would hurl at him later. And if I didn't stop Johann's murder, I, too, would be guilty of infanticide. He was my child, my flesh and blood. I could not deny him.

Everything I had worked so hard to build was crumbling around me. The children I had grown to care for were to be murdered. All the connections to the Nazis I had

carefully built were of no use. There was nothing I could do to prevent the destruction of the Schmidt Approach and the murder of my children. All my maneuvering to save my school hit a brick wall. I was frantic.”

“Do you think Rolfe would have stood by if the Nazis planned to murder you? It seems he didn’t really care about anyone enough to stand up to Nazism, even you, the love of his life.”

“Rolfe did save me later, but he didn’t have to pick me over Nazism. There was no choice so I don’t know what he would have done if he was faced with such a choice.

I told Heidi what was going to happen to our children. We discussed possible options, but there were none. There was no one we could appeal to. The situation was hopeless. I also realized that if I kept objecting, I would be putting myself in peril. I didn’t want to see my creation, my school, my educational approach, and my children murdered, but I also didn’t want to be murdered or more likely sent off to one of the camps. I was still dominated by the need to survive at all costs, even the cost of everything and everyone dear to me. Anyone who spoke up against the Third Reich was doomed, no matter what their background or ties to the inner circle of Nazis. First and foremost, I had to survive. Nothing was as important as Dorothea Schmidt even though Dorothea Schmidt was not a human being worth saving if she allowed her children to be sacrificed.

Elisabeth visited Eva the next day. She didn’t look like the same woman I had known over the last few years. She had been an elegant woman who carried herself with pride. Now she looked as if she had aged 20 years, and the pride had given way to docile submission. She hugged Eva tightly as they sang a song. She tried to appear calm, courageously fighting off an ocean of tears. She didn’t want to leave even though it was Eva’s bedtime. After Eva fell asleep, Elisabeth snipped some of her beautiful blond curls and put them in an envelope to be the only surviving part of Eva. Elisabeth said that the day Eva died would be the day her marriage to Franz died even though she would stay with him. She had to stay with him for her son’s sake and for her own sake. She couldn’t give up her position in society so she had to ensure that Franz was untouched by any scandal.”

“Didn’t you or Elisabeth think of taking Eva away and hiding her? I can’t believe that either of you couldn’t arrange for her to be hidden and saved.”

“Leon, that thought never occurred to either of us. Where would we have taken her? I would have to explain her absence when I gave the SS the papers for the children in the school. They would know that she was missing.”

“So Elisabeth is as much to blame as every other German for the killing of the innocent. With the power the Schillers had, there would have been a way for them to get Eva out if they had just looked.”

“I had all this work I had to do before the children were taken away so I couldn’t think of something like that.”

“You didn’t want to think of something like that.”

“April 19th, 1943 is a date that is branded into my mind with hot irons. Heidi and I had spent every minute of the prior six days at the school. We even slept there. I squeezed in precious minutes to spend with my beloved Eva, holding her tightly knowing that I couldn’t protect her. I stroked her as I hummed songs. We read *Babar* books over and over. On my last visit to Eva, I gave her the book, *Babar the Magician*. I wished *Babar the Magician* could perform his magic and whisk Eva away to safety. Magic was the only way out of Germany. Eva fell asleep cradling the book in her arms. She had an angelic smile on her face. That was how I wanted to remember her forever, but it’s not.”

“I noticed that you have the book *Baba the Magician* on your bookshelf. I meant to ask you why, and now I know.”

”On that last night I also visited Johann. I stroked his face and tried to get a response, any response, but nothing was forthcoming. I had no feeling for him other than pity, but I certainly didn’t want him to die. He did nothing to deserve a death sentence. He was a complete innocent. Maybe he was the real enemy of the Nazis because he epitomized the deviant that Germany had become. He was Germany – oblivious to the world, with no sense of right and wrong. I gently kissed him on the forehead and said good-bye. Miraculously, he didn’t pull away. Maybe even this child locked in his own internal prison sensed what was about to happen.

On the Monday morning of April 19, 1943, the nurses had the children dressed and fed by 9:00 A.M. We dressed them in their finest clothes so they would look their best to face death. Ten buses pulled up to the front entrance to take the 148 children of the Berlin School for the Handicapped to their executions. Heidi and I went to the door where we were met by soldiers wearing white coats over their uniforms so as not to scare the children. They told us to bring all the children to the buses. Heidi screamed, “No,

you can't do this. Stop in the name of God. You cannot murder these innocent children. God, oh God, please stop these animals." An officer slapped her hard across the face and told a soldier to take her away. She was hysterical and out of control as they carried her inside to be tied to a chair in my office."

"It's interesting that Heidi invoked the name of God. God wasn't at the entrance to the Berlin School for the Handicapped. He also wasn't at Auschwitz or Dachau. Oh, but maybe He was there. He was watching man destroy himself, heartbroken, knowing that having given man free will, man chose evil over good. Or He was deaf; or He was blind. Or God **IS** dead. I'll never understand how an all-powerful God could let mass murders happen. I've thought about this every day since my family was murdered, and I'll think about it every day until I die.

I also don't know how so many Jews went to their deaths believing in Him. I've questioned His existence since my family was killed. How could He stand by and let the good people of the Ackerman family and every other good family be slaughtered? How could He witness the murder of 148 innocents?"

"It's interesting that Heidi invoked the name of God since she was an agnostic. We had often talked about where God was in Nazi Germany. But after the murder of our children and the deaths of her family, she became an atheist. She said that she could believe in the devil because of Hitler, but she couldn't believe in God because of Hitler.

My children's death march began. At that moment in time, I felt like the mother of 148 beautiful angels. Those who could walk were led out first. I tenderly kissed each child on the forehead, and told them that they were going to the park to play. Despite their mental retardation, some of them were astute enough to suspect that this was a ruse. The look on my face did not match the words I was saying. I tried to smile, but I'm sure I looked like the figure in Munch's painting *The Scream*. I wore a mask of terror. I was seeing the red sky behind that screaming figure as the red sky over the crematorium where my children were to be burned. Some children whimpered and others screamed which eventually set off a chain reaction until all the children were crying. Then those in wheel chairs were taken out and carried onto the buses. When Eva was brought out, I hugged her and told her to have a good time at the park. Eva hugged me and said, 'I love you.' She was clutching her Babar book. She had a look of pure terror on her face. That's the look I will remember for the rest of my life. Whatever fate she feared was nothing compared to the fate she faced. Babar the Magician couldn't save Eva. Nothing could. I said, 'I love you,' as a piece of my heart broke off. I realized that I did have a heart that could break; that I was human."

Leon's face was awash in tears as he envisioned the tableau I was drawing.

"One of the last to be taken away was Johann. His moaning was loud, as loud as I'd ever heard it. As I looked at him, I realized I couldn't see him clearly. My tears were blurring him and the world. It was getting harder to see the world, but I didn't want to see it. It was a place where death ruled. It was truly Hell on Earth. I wanted to escape, but I had no place to go. Just as I had no place for Eva to go.

When the last child was placed on the last bus, the officer in charge said, 'Thank you for facilitating the removal of the children. We need more patriots like you who make our jobs easier. We have been to some schools where the children ran away and the soldiers had to catch them and beat them to get them on the buses. Some children even tried to bite and kick the soldiers. I know it was because the school staff told them to resist. I'm so glad that you made sure that didn't happen here.'

I had never even thought of having the children resist when I myself wouldn't and couldn't resist. No, I viewed them and myself as sheep docilely going to slaughter.

He said that he would be returning later for all the records from the school. He parted after loudly saying, 'Heil Hitler.' For the first time after hearing this, I didn't respond. My hand was paralyzed, unable and unwilling to be lifted. My voice was muted refusing to utter these words of abomination. The staff and I watched the buses drive off. It was like watching a funeral procession. Most were crying. Many hugged each other. No one looked at me. No one approached me. They knew I was in mourning, that I was inconsolable. No one wanted to go back inside the empty building. Without the children, it was no longer a school. It was a mausoleum of spirits.

I went to my office and untied Heidi. I cleaned the dried blood from her nose. We cried until our tear ducts dried up. We held hands looking into each other's eyes, unable to speak. There were no words that could describe our feelings. Words of sadness and despair were too hollow.

After a while, a soldier returned for the school records. The night before, Heidi and I had gone without sleep so we could make a list of each child's name, disability, treatment program, and progress. I had to have proof that these children had benefited from the Schmidt Approach. But most importantly, I had to have proof that they had existed, that they had been human beings who had been sacrificed. Someday, I hoped to publish this information to show the world that my method was successful, that children could learn no matter what their disability. Someday, I hoped to distribute Heidi's film to show the world the creativity that exists in everyone, even people with disabilities. But no

one would really know if my method had worked because the children wouldn't be around to verify its effectiveness.

A few days before the children were taken away, I had taken pictures of each child. Heidi stood behind me, holding a puppet and making funny faces to make the children laugh. I wanted to remember them when they were happy, and they had been happy. There was a time in their lives when they were given affection, respect, and education, where they were treated humanely and with respect. I wrote each child's name on the back of the pictures. Their images would live on. I kissed the picture of Eva, and said, 'I love you my Babar.' I gently stroked the picture of Johann. By 4:00 o'clock, I'd packed everything that I wanted to take with me to remember the happiest days of my life."

"Now I understand you Dorothea. You found goodness in the world and in your heart and it was murdered, just like my family was murdered. You witnessed the holocaust personally. It was like a tidal wave coming at you and you couldn't escape."

"I knew I had to safeguard these records and Heidi's films. I took them back to my apartment and put everything in a suitcase. I've carried that suitcase with me wherever I've gone since then. I still have it in my closet. I will have it until the day I die. I can never part with my 148 children."

"Can I see them?"

"Maybe someday, but I can't share them right now. Believe it or not, I haven't looked at them since the day I packed them in the suitcase. I'm not ready to face my children and tell them why I couldn't save them, why no one in the world could save them."

"No, you couldn't save them then, but maybe before you could have done what Heidi did. You could have done something small even if you risked your own well-being. Maybe you should have had the children run away or try to resist the soldiers even though you knew that it was impossible. Maybe Jews shouldn't have gone quietly to the gas chambers. Maybe they should have tried to drag their killers in with them. They should have scratched at their faces; they should have torn their uniforms; they should have kicked them. They should have made some statement, however ineffective. Each person has to throw the first stone, no matter how small, to destroy a 1,000 foot brick wall of evil. When enough people throw enough stones, the wall will crumble.

There's a poem that Dylan Thomas wrote when his father was dying that says, 'Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light.' That's what

you should have done. You should have raged against the dying of the light for your 148 children. That's what every Jew should have done before he was shot by a firing squad or gassed or thrown into an open lime pit."

"Please. Please. Don't tell me that. I have raged in my heart since that day especially when I learned how the children died. They were taken from the school to a mental institution outside of Berlin. There, they were put on special buses that were portable gas chambers. When the engines were turned on, the children were gassed. Then their bodies were taken to a crematorium where they were burned. Only ashes remained as physical evidence that the children of the Berlin School for the Handicapped ever existed. I wonder where those ashes were taken. Were they placed in compost heaps to mingle with soil that eventually grew grass? Did my children become part of the eternal cycle of life on earth?

I try not to think of what happened when the gas was turned on the bus, but I can't block out the vision of the children screaming hysterically as they realized they were being murdered. Even these young children who previously had no conception of death knew death first hand when they faced it. I picture my Eva clutching her Babar book calling, 'Fraulein D, where are you? Help me. Take me away.' I have nightmares where I picture the limp bodies of my children being carried to the crematorium. I see their neatly stacked bodies set ablaze. The fire never burns out; it just goes on and on. I see the pages of *Babar the Magician* blacken and crumple. Magic couldn't save my children; I couldn't save my children; nothing could. For a while, I lived with these nightmares constantly. Even now – 17 years later- I sometimes still have them.

After that, Heidi moved in with me. We were both numb. We didn't know what to do with ourselves. Rolfe didn't contact me during that time. He knew I was grieving for my school and my children. He also knew that I blamed him for not stopping their murder. He kept tabs on me through a woman he hired to clean the apartment. Heidi and I mindlessly read and took long walks. We wanted to listen to music, but we dared not enter the haunted music room to play Himmel's records. We rarely talked. We were afraid of what we would say if sounds escaped our lips. Everyday brought us closer together as we shared our grief which we felt was bottomless.

But grief would not be bottomless for Heidi. Two months later, she learned that Fritz had been injured when his field hospital was bombed. He was being returned to Berlin. He had lost his feet, but gangrene had set in progressively eating more and more of his legs. She left me to care for him. I tried to help, but Heidi wouldn't let me. She spent every waking minute by Fritz's side. Just two months later, tragedy struck again.

Otto's U boat was sunk and all aboard perished. I tried to be with Heidi, but she wouldn't see me. She didn't want to be comforted. She wanted to be with Fritz as she helplessly watched him die. I wanted to help her as she had helped me, but she refused. She just wanted to drown in her grief.

I had no one to share my pain at the loss of Eva, Johann, my school, Heidi, and her family. I lapsed into a depression. I stopped eating and washing. Rolfe came to see me and tried to pull me out of it. He said that now that his wife was permanently in an institution, he could divorce her and we could marry. He told me that he loved me, that I was the most important thing in his life and that he would do anything to make me happy. After that, I stopped speaking. Rolfe had Hilda stay with me. She fed and cleaned me. I became like my son Johann. I moaned. Rolfe didn't know what to do. Whenever bombs fell, I became hysterical. I wouldn't stop screaming until the all-clear siren was sounded. I refused to go to a bomb shelter and said that I wanted to die.

Rolfe knew he had to get me out of Berlin so he called my mother and asked her if she could take me. Marta had not seen me since 1936 when Kurt and I had last spent Christmas with her. We exchanged occasional phone calls since then, but it had been seven years since we had seen each other. Marta didn't hesitate to have me come to her. Here was the mother who I disliked and shunned who took me in and literally and figuratively saved my life."

"I'm at a loss for words. You've told me about another you and now I don't know who the real Dorothea is. There is goodness and love in you, but when you found it, it was destroyed. The Nazis killed the good Dorothea just like they killed your children. No, maybe the Nazis didn't kill the good Dorothea. Maybe she's still alive."

Chapter 6

Escape to Ansbach

I looked at Leon with unfounded hope. Maybe the good Dorothea would overpower the bad, and he could still love me. His face was a mass of contradictions, but anguish held dominance.

"No matter how terrible a person Rolfe was, he did save my life. He knew he had to get me out of Berlin, and that I would be safe in Ansbach. For some reason,

Ansbach was spared much bombing even though an air base was there. He also knew that the Americans would take Ansbach so I would be saved from the savagery of the Russians invading Berlin. Although he wouldn't admit it, he knew how the war would end. He presented a façade of optimism that Germany would overcome all obstacles in their march toward world domination, but he worked in the factory where the lies were manufactured. He knew the truth.

The trains were running sporadically, and anyhow I was in no shape for train travel so he arranged to have Hilda's husband drive me to Ansbach. Who knew Hilda had a husband? Hilda packed all my belongings as I sat and stared into space. I didn't care if I remained in Berlin because I didn't care about anything. I was in a miasma of depression. My mind had stopped working. I was just existing and not doing a good job of that. Rolfe was especially worried because I refused to go to a bomb shelter whenever there was an air raid, and there were more and more raids. Maybe that was my way of trying to commit suicide. I would have been successful had I not left Berlin because my building was destroyed the year after I left. All of Himmel's beautiful books and records were incinerated.

On the day I left, Rolfe came to say good-bye. He knew he would never see me again. He sat me down and held my hands as he looked into my hooded eyes.

'My Dorothea, I've loved you more than anything or anyone in the world. I know you never loved me. It didn't matter. It was enough just to share your life. Now we won't ever be together again. I know I'll die, but I don't want you to die. I want you to survive and the only way to keep you alive is to get you out of Berlin.'

He held my wooden body tightly. He didn't know if I understood what he'd said. When he pulled back, he saw tears in my eyes.

'Tell me you love me. I need to believe that you love me even if you lie.'

I spat in his face. Can you believe that after all Rolfe had done for me and now he was saving my life, I actually spat in his face? He cried. He just stood there with stooped shoulders, sobbing. Did he deserve it? Did I owe him anything? I spat on him because he killed my children; he killed my dream. I blamed him, and at last I blamed the Nazis. I could no longer rationalize away what had been done to my country and to the world. I needed to blame something or someone so I honed in on Rolfe. He became the personification of the evil of the Third Reich. And even in my jumbled mind, I knew I had to bear blame too, but I couldn't face that yet. That would have to come later. I knew there would be a day of reckoning, but not while I was in this state.

That was the last time I saw Rolfe. Later, I learned that he died along with Goebbels, his wife, children, and other aides. They all took poison. You know Rolfe could have kept me in Berlin and either let me die in the bombings or have me commit suicide with him. But no, he chose to save me. I didn't understand Rolfe then, and I don't understand him now after all these years. Here was this rabid Nazi who had love in his heart for a woman he knew hated him. I don't know if I'll ever really understand my feelings for Rolfe. I know there's hatred mingled with gratitude. Sometimes I like to paint myself in a positive way and think of myself as a victim of Rolfe who was my Svengali. But then I realize that I wasn't ever his captive. I could have escaped his clutches. I never tried. Maybe my relationship with Rolfe reflected the demented relationship the German people had with Nazism. They couldn't and wouldn't escape its clutches. And maybe that explains my relationship with Nazism too. I couldn't and wouldn't do anything to stop it.

I don't recall much about the ride from Berlin to Ansbach. It was 250 miles, but because of the road conditions and heavy traffic, it took nine hours. I slept, or just kept my eyes closed all the way. We made two bathroom stops. Hilda had packed food for us, but I refused to eat. I never spoke to Hilda's husband. I don't even know what his name was.

When we reached Ansbach, my mother was waiting at the door of the house. The look on her face was difficult to decode. Did she really want me to stay with her or was she doing this because she couldn't refuse, because it was her maternal duty? After all, she was a mother and leaving me to stay in Berlin meant a likely death sentence. Unlike Franz Schiller, she would not be responsible for her child's death. She took me in despite knowing how I felt about her, how I had always looked down on her. And she, too, disliked me. She abhorred my life style as a kept woman of a Nazi fanatic. She didn't care that I was being kept; she hated who was keeping me. She also detested my blind ambition, although when she learned of my work at the school, she found something more in me. And Marta Schmidt despised my involvement with the Nazis. She was quietly anti-Nazi, never openly expressing her feelings. She was comfortable in Ansbach because there were others who shared her views, but also quietly so as not to draw attention to themselves. In Ansbach, as in all parts of the German empire, there were rabid Nazis who would destroy you if you expressed any negative comments about Hitler and the Third Reich, but there were also good people who didn't know how to fight the Nazis other than through patience. Marta and others wanted to survive the war so they could rebuild Germany into the good nation they knew it could be. Some of Marta's distant relatives, the royals, were openly anti-Nazi, and had even fled Germany in protest.

When they left, some fanatical Nazis in town confronted Marta and asked her why she didn't follow her cowardly cousins out of the country. She answered them by turning her back and walking away."

"It's hard for me to believe that there were any good Germans. I know you want to be counted as a good German and maybe you were in the end."

After he spoke these words, I felt a glimmer of hope. Perhaps there was a future for us. Perhaps.

"Marta greeted me much like an innkeeper would greet a guest.

'Hello Dorothea. You've had a long trip. I'm sure you're tired. Eric will take your bags to your room. You can unpack later. We'll dine at 7:00 every night, but because it's 5:00, we'll dine at 7:30 tonight.'

That was the start of the strict routine that Marta laid out. She knew the structure of a schedule would help me heal, and it did.

Marta led me upstairs to the bedroom where I'd stayed whenever I'd visited in the past. The room was as I remembered it. There was a high bed with a stool that I had to climb up on to get into the deep, soft bed. There were three fluffy down blankets that warmed me on freezing nights despite the raging fire in the fireplace. There was a dressing table with a three sided mirror. I recalled vainly looking at the three angles of my face when I was young. I'd make different faces – happy, sexy, sad, surprised – for my three-way screen test. There were combs and brushes with my blond hairs in them and still-fragrant perfumes, untouched since I last used them. The room had patiently waited for my return. If rooms could talk, this room would say: find comfort and safety and heal.

We walked to the doors of the balcony. Marta pulled the shutters back and opened the doors to the fields and dark forests surrounding the back side of the Von Steuben house. It was a bucolic scene that Marta had painted in different seasons and from different angles. The trees were barren or had brown dead leaves trembling in anticipation of the impending winter. The green grass had aged to a shade of gray. I was to spend countless hours in the changing seasons on that balcony letting the fields and forests envelope me with their serenity.

I had always been an urban person, stimulated by the sight of crowds of people ever on the move in their seasonal garb. I loved observing women's changing costumes with flimsy, flowery frocks of summer to snugly furs in winter. I was used to the

constant sounds of voices, music, cars, and trains, audible even in the middle of the night. Silence was nowhere to be found in the city. Berlin was a potpourri of tantalizing smells from restaurants and gagging smells from cars and buses and sewers. I loved sitting in outdoor cafes absorbing these sights, sounds, and smells. For years, I studied in cafes. I can't believe I was able to digest what I was reading while sitting in a café having my senses bombarded. Other than visits to city parks, occasional trips to country lakes, and ski trips, there was no nature in my life, and I liked it that way. But now was different, I was being tranquilized by nature. No people other than those living on the Von Steuben estate; no noises other than from dogs barking, cows mooing, and tractors tilling the crops; and no smells other than flowers from the garden and manure from the fields.

We returned to the room and I became aware of one change from my earlier visits. The walls were covered with Marta's oil paintings. Most were of the scenery around the estate, but there were also some of the dogs, cats, horses, chickens, and cows on the estate. I observed that the painting style was different. The ones from her Berlin days were like photographs, very realistic. The ones she painted in Ansbach were more stylized, with heavy brush strokes laden with clumps of paint. And the colors were more vibrant reflecting the brilliance of rural colors. Her most recent pictures somehow mirrored the change in Marta. Still, there were no paintings of people.

'There's a bathroom next door. You're the only one who'll be using it so it's your private bath. I'll see you at dinner.'

With that, Marta abruptly left. She didn't know what else to say to me. She'd never seen me look so disheveled, so lost. I was not the person she remembered. Now I was totally unkempt, while in my previous life I primed so I would look perfect with every hair in place, make-up impeccably applied, and clothes and accessories carefully coordinated. Now I was confused and dazed, while in my previous life I was organized and in control of myself and my surroundings.

After Marta left, I sat on the bed unsure of what to do next. I knew I had to unpack, but I had forever to do that. I felt like I would probably be there until I died. I saw no other future. I opened the balcony door and went out again to immerse myself in the isolation of the fields and the mysterious forests beyond. As a child, I had been frightened of the forests. There were these myths about werewolves coming out of the forest at night and a tall man who kidnapped children and took them into the forest, never to be seen again. The Grimm brothers used these myths as the basis of their fairy tales. And would you believe that Rolfe worked with Goebbels on a project to re-write the fairy tales to make the Nazis the heroes. A man looking like Hitler saves Little Red Riding

Hood in a Nazi-made movie. And you wonder why the people didn't rise up? The Nazis were the heroes of everything, even folklore.

At 7:15, there was a knock at the door. It was Helga, the housekeeper, telling me that dinner would be served in 15 minutes. I looked at myself in the mirror. I felt like I was looking at a ghost. My face was ashen and fleshless reflecting all the weight I'd lost. Ironically, I looked like the photos of liberated concentration camp victims that I saw after the war. I was grimy and greasy from the trip and not bathing for a while.

I became aware of a smell emanating from me. I couldn't recall any other time in my life when I smelled, even when I perspired after exercising. I knew I had to wash up if I was to have dinner with Marta. I went to the bathroom and immersed my face in scalding hot water followed by icy cold water. I wiped a soapy washcloth up and down my armpits until I no longer detected any odor. I returned to my room and used the brush on the dressing table to untangle my hair. I found an old lipstick in a dressing table drawer and applied it to my lips hoping to brighten up my face, but when I looked in the mirror I saw that my deep red lips only accentuated the pallor of my skin. I looked like a ghoul with lips dripping blood.

I didn't really want to dine with my mother, but I was hungry. I couldn't remember when I had last eaten. I went to the formal dining room downstairs. The table was set with two places at one corner. The other 10 chairs at the table were vacant. There were candles and flowers on a lace tablecloth. Pleasant. Nice. Dignified. These were the words that came to my mind. These were words I hadn't thought of in many years. Not much about my previous life had been nice, and certainly nothing was dignified.

Helga and Eric Brandt came into the dining room to be re-introduced. I had met them on my previous visits, but didn't remember them. They were part of the background of the estate. I had never been the type of person to take an interest in servants or the lower class. I was a snob. They had worked at the house for 30 years. Before that, Helga's mother had worked at the house for Marta's grandparents. Helga cooked and did some light cleaning. Most of the cleaning was done by Anna, the daughter of one of the tenant farmers on the estate. She seemed to work every day, all day. Although she was always around, she made sure to clean my room when I was out. She was a shadow.

Eric was not conscripted into the military even though at 51 he was eligible. Fortunately, for his long-term survival, he was blind in one eye. He oversaw the house and the 200 acres of grounds. He supervised two farm workers who tended the animals and crops and he also worked with the three tenant farmers on the estate. The estate was a thriving business despite the war.

‘Dorothea, was everything okay in your room?’

‘Yes, thank you.’ I answered in a low monotone.

‘Is there anything I can get you?’

‘No, thank you.’

And that was our entire conversation.

I ate ravenously. I gnawed the meat off a duck breast until the bones glistened. At the end of the meal, Marta asked me if I wanted to join her in the living room to read. I declined, and left with a barely audible good-night.

When I got to my room, I didn’t undress or get under the covers. I climbed up on the stool and lay down on the bed letting sleep capture me. At about 2:00 A.M., I started my nightly ritual of wailing as dreams of my children being burned appeared before my eyes. Every pore of my body sweated as I felt the heat from the flames. Marta, who was in her bedroom down the hall, was startled awake. She laid in bed listening, unsure what to do. She knew it would be wrong to come to my room. I didn’t want to be comforted. I just wanted my tears to wash away my feelings of guilt at not having saved my children and the sorrow over their tragic deaths. My nightly wailing went on for 15 months.

Before breakfast on that first full day at Ansbach, I took the longest bath of my life. I washed my hair three times and refilled the hot water in the tub four times. I was surprised there was enough hot water. The bath water wasn’t clear until the fourth filling. The water washed away more than grime. It washed away my defenses. That was the start of my return to the living.

At breakfast, Marta told me that I needed to follow a daily schedule. She wanted me to set my alarm clock for 7:00, take a bath, eat breakfast, take a morning walk, read, have lunch at noon, take another walk, read some more, and then dinner at 7:00 with her. I didn’t resist. I couldn’t resist. I knew the only other option was to sit in my room, staring into space, and I didn’t want that because that would open the doors to memories I wanted to block out. Also, I was surrendering to the role of a child following her mother’s instructions. I was allowing myself to be taken under my mother’s wing. What new roles for Marta and me.

Every day I took another step out of my depression as I reached out into my slowly expanding world. I walked farther and farther each day. I always took one of Marta’s dogs on a leash because the tenant farmers’ dogs chased me. They were

intimidated by Marta's three German shepherds, although they were quite affectionate while still being fiercely protective of Marta and very soon after my arrival, me. I stayed away from the forests reverting to my childhood fears of werewolves and ogres, but after the third week, I approached the edge of the forest where there was a footpath. I decided to venture into the forest, perhaps as a symbol of my venturing into analysis of my life. But I always made sure I had a dog with me since I was still a bit fearful of the dark unknown. I was also tempted to take bread crumbs so I would be sure to find my way back.

After five weeks of following the schedule Marta had laid out for me, I found the need to explore the area beyond the estate. I didn't recall much of the town of Ansbach from my earlier visits. I asked Marta if there was a car I could borrow to drive into town. There was a luxurious Maybach that Eric used to chauffeur Marta. That was obviously not what I wanted. There was also a truck Eric used to drive around the estate. I felt more comfortable with that. Although I knew how to drive, I had never driven a truck before so Eric gave me some lessons, making me feel like a teenager again.

On my first trip to town, I parked on the outskirts so I could explore the streets on foot. I headed for the square in the center of town where I found the eighteenth century castle as regal as I recalled it from my childhood visits. I sat on a stone wall and stared at it as I imagined the people who had lived there centuries ago. I visualized women with long satin gowns and hoops extending sideways, and men with knee length satin pants, white silk stockings, and powdered wigs. I must have seen pictures like this in my school books as a child, but now the people were resurrected as they jumped out of the pages of books that had probably been burned in Nazi bonfires.

I admired the spires of the churches towering over the picturesque houses. None of these had been bombed. The stone bridges over the river were bombed toward the end of the war to prevent movement of troops from the German garrison outside of town. Ansbach was lucky to have survived fairly in-tact.

On one of my daily walks through town, I discovered a burnt down synagogue and vandalized Jewish cemetery. I hadn't realized that there had been Jews in Ansbach. I was sure they met the same fate as all the other Jews of Germany. Another day, I found a deserted building with a sign reading Bavarian School for Idiots etched into the stone above the entrance. I stood frozen, fighting back memories of a similar sign over the door to the Berlin School for the Handicapped. I learned that the 50 children who resided there had been murdered by a poison drug. They weren't taken away on buses like my children. No, they were murdered behind the very walls I was looking at. I imagined

soldiers injecting children with the poison, and the children crying because of their fear of the pain of a needle, not realizing a much greater pain awaited them. What did the director do while they were being murdered? Did she actually see the children murdered? Did she speak up or was she mute like me? What did the staff do? Did they help the soldiers? On my future walks, I avoided that building. In my five years of living in Ansbach, I never met anyone who said they worked there or knew of anyone who worked there. Not only did the children disappear, their caretakers disappeared.

Outside of town I passed a small concentration camp with Russian soldiers. I think almost every town had its camp. The only things that varied from town to town were who the inmates were and what eventually happened to them. I knew the who of this camp, but I never found out what happened to them. Also on the outskirts of town there was a large airbase, famous, or infamous, for being one of the bases from which the attack on Poland was launched in September, 1939. World War II officially started in this quaint Bavarian town.

With time, I came to believe, rightly or wrongly, that Ansbach was more of a microcosm of Germany than Berlin. It had its fanatical Nazis, apolitical people, and people like my mother who were quietly anti-Nazi. The town itself did not have the militant feel of Berlin or Nuremberg, which was only 25 miles away. Of course, there were Nazi flags hanging from all the public buildings and people greeted each other with Nazi salutes, often half-heartedly. But the people looked different from the people in Berlin. Their faces weren't set into fierce expressions. No one looked like they were part of an evil empire trying to take over the world. It was just a small town carrying on business as usual even though it was 1943, and a world-wide conflagration was waging just beyond the surrounding forests.

On one trip into town, I found a quaint book store. I was glad there were still some book stores in Germany since books were becoming relics. The shopkeeper at the counter welcomed me and told me to wander the aisles. I didn't know what I was looking for until I found it - a book on the Danube School of landscape painters. Some of the paintings looked like they had been created by Marta. I bought it as a present for my mother. I felt a need to thank her with something tangible for all she was doing for me, and I couldn't think of a more fitting gift. When I spoke to the shopkeeper, I was surprised that she knew who I was. As I went from store to store, I found that everyone knew me. Of course, everyone knew me because everyone knew Marta Von Steuben Schmidt. This was a small town where everyone knew everyone's business, especially the business of the wealthy landowners. I didn't know if I preferred being anonymous or part of a community. I also wondered just how much these people knew about me.

That night after dinner, I joined Marta in the sitting room. I didn't have any paper to wrap the book so there was no surprise involved. I nervously said how this was a token of my appreciation for all she was doing for me. It sounded like a speech that an employer would give to thank a loyal employee. She took the book and silently leafed through each page. After a few minutes, she looked up and said that it was the best present she'd ever received. She smiled. I realized that I hadn't seen her smile since I'd arrived. In fact, I couldn't recall ever having seen her smile in all the times I'd known her. Even at the few happy occasions in our earlier lives, like Kurt and my graduations from high school and university, she didn't smile. We didn't look at each other. We weren't used to expressing emotion and didn't trust ourselves to start doing so now. She put the book on the coffee table in front of the fire place. She looked through it every evening.

The truck became part of my daily routine. I took a long morning walk even if it was raining or snowing, had lunch alone in the kitchen, and then drove into town or around the surrounding areas. When I drove in the direction of Nuremberg, I sometimes heard distant bombing so I stayed close to the protection of the Bavarian woods. After a month, Marta asked me if I would mind if she gave me a car since Eric needed the truck. I said okay, but that I had plenty of money to buy a car for myself and she didn't have to buy one for me. Marta said that she had already bought one. It wasn't lack of money that made it hard to buy a car; it was lack of availability because of the war. She had found one for sale by a widow who couldn't drive and desperately needed money. We went out to the driveway to find a small black 1933 two-door Opel that had seen its better days. Marta said that it was hard to find usable cars because parts and gasoline were needed for the war, but that Eric had fixed it up so it would be okay for short trips. It was love at first sight. That ugly little car would be part of me for the next five years.

Marta and I talked more and more at dinner. Gradually our conversation turned to the war and the destruction of the country. I was shocked to learn of Marta's hatred for the Nazis. I remained silent and listened as she described her antipathy for the people who were destroying her beloved country. She talked about her optimistic vision of a post-war Germany. She predicted an ignominious defeat followed by a time when Germany would become a democracy and a world power. I think her dream is going to come true. I wish she could have lived to see it happen.

After six months, I told my mother that I wanted to get a job. The daily schedule and quiet life I was leading had started to heal me, but I needed something more to fill my days. Marta told me that she had already talked to the town's mayor about the possibility of me getting some sort of job in town. She was always one step ahead of me.

He told her that in September there would a position available teaching 10 year olds at the local school. The male teachers in the school had all left to fight in the war so the schools had skeleton staffs of women, many untrained in pedagogy. The woman who had taught the class I was to take over was 63 years old and had cancer. Although I was not trained to teach, I was certain that I could handle the subject matter and probably relate to the children better than their present teacher. I was interviewed by the principal and hired on the spot. It was obvious that I was being given preferential treatment because of my mother, but I didn't mind. Anyhow the salary was so small that most people couldn't take the job and support themselves or a family so I didn't think that I was taking the job away from anyone who was qualified and needy.

The school was small with a total of some 200 students. It was old and badly in need of repairs, unlike my school in Berlin. There was no money available for something as unimportant as education, at least unimportant compared to military needs. I had 20 students, 12 girls and 8 boys. Although the boys were only 10, some were already working or being prepared for battle if they were needed so they only came to school part time. You could tell the true state of the war when you consider that 10 year olds were being trained as soldiers. If you believed Rolfe's propaganda, you would think that victory was just days away. I spent the summer studying the curriculum and textbooks so I could teach the lessons come September. Once school started, I poured over the textbooks the night before I was to teach lessons so that I would be prepared. School and children were again coming to my rescue and helping me find myself.

I tried to relate to the students, but at first they were distant, perhaps because they knew my family status and my background in Berlin. But gradually, I began establishing relationships with them. The girls admired me because of my looks and my stylish clothes. To them, I was like a movie star compared to the plain women of Ansbach. By that time, I had returned to my old ways of being well groomed, although I didn't dress as stylishly as I had in Berlin. Some of the boys stared at me like love-sick puppies. I had no trouble with discipline. In fact, the children couldn't do enough to support me in any way they could.

I liked teaching, but of course, I didn't feel challenged as I did at my school. Teaching filled my days with something meaningful and involved me in my students' lives which were difficult. Most had no fathers because they had been killed in the war or were away fighting. Money was tight for most families so the children wore ragged clothes and some were hungry, but they still came to school every day eager to learn. I tried to make my classroom a place where they were successful and free of worry for a few hours a day. I also brought food. We had morning snacks of apples from the Von

Steuben orchard or carrots from the vegetable garden or milk or eggs from our animals. The children were elated whenever I baked pfeffernuesse cookies. I always made extras so they could take some home to their families. Whenever a child had a birthday, I had Helga bake two cakes, one for the classroom and the other for the child to take home.

I wasn't the only refugee to find safe haven in Ansbach. There were more and more refugees fleeing as the cities were decimated by bombing. There was no room in town for them so shanty towns were set up outside the city limits. Some people slept in tents and some even slept in the open before the freezing weather set in. There were always refugees on the roads, traveling west, away from the Russians who were making deeper inroads from the east. Frequently, beggars came to the door of the Von Steuben estate. Marta always gave them bread and water, and sometimes potatoes.

A totally unexpected refugee found her way to the Von Steuben estate in December, 1944. One day a woman knocked at the door and told Helga that she was a friend of mine. I was at work so she went to find Marta who immediately knew who she was because she had helped me try to find her, and now she had found us. She warmly welcomed Heidi into our lives.

After living in Ansbach for three months, I started to think about Heidi and what had happened to her and Fritz. I wrote to her at her old address and tried calling her, but to no avail. I wouldn't reach out to Rolfe for help in finding her. I wanted no contact with him no matter the urgency of the matter. I had no way of locating her because life in Berlin was disintegrating. It was almost impossible to find anyone since buildings were bombed out and people were on the move. I even asked our local mayor for help. He contacted some officials he knew in Berlin, but with no result. I thought about Heidi every day, hoping she had survived the bombing. She had survived, but Fritz and Otto had not. Despite Heidi's loving care, Fritz had slowly and painfully died of his wounds. She helplessly tried to nurse him, but with little food and medicine, Fritz died. Heidi's parents had died in the fire bombings of Dresden, Otto had died at sea, and she had no idea of the whereabouts of her brother who she last knew was fighting in North Africa. She was alone. She thought of staying in Berlin and dying, but she came to the realization that she wanted to live, and the only way that was possible was to get out of Berlin. I was her only means of escape, just as Marta had been my only means of escape.

When she arrived in Ansbach, she was hungry and dirty. Marta gave her food which she wolfed down and then let her take a bath which she had not done for a while. She gave her some of my clean clothes to wear. When I got home from work, I heard voices in the kitchen. I immediately recognized Heidi's voice. I ran into the kitchen and

hugged her tightly, never wanting to let her go. The Heidi in my arms was so different from the Heidi I'd last seen 18 months earlier. She'd always been a solidly-built woman, but now she was emaciated. Her thick red hair had thinned and whitened. But the biggest change was in her face. It was haunted by ghosts. Her green eyes had lost their sparkle because of the horrors she'd witnessed. Even her manner of speech had changed, from being loud and authoritative to soft and halting. This was another woman, a woman I had to change back to the Heidi I loved so dearly.

After Fritz's death, Heidi was unsure if she wanted to live. She stayed in their apartment and subsisted by selling off her jewelry and furniture. When her money was almost gone, she knew she had to decide if she wanted to live or die. She chose to live. She knew that we had done good in the world, and she wanted to find me to see if someday we could do good again. I became Heidi's reason for living. She knew I had returned to Ansbach so she took a train part way, and walked the remaining distance. She only had one suitcase because that was all she could carry. It was filled with pictures of Fritz, Otto, her family, and the children of the Berlin School for the Handicapped, and of course, a copy of the film.

Heidi became a member of our family - my sister and Marta's older daughter. We all needed each other. With time, Heidi put on weight and became more of the Heidi I'd known in Berlin, but she would never completely be that Heidi. That Heidi had died with the deaths of our children, Fritz, Otto, and her parents. Eventually, I was able to get Heidi a job at the school where I taught. She took the job from the first grade teacher who left to care for her father who had returned from the war suffering from shell shock. Her 25 six year olds became her children. They healed her by infusing her with hope as only children can do.

Marta also helped Heidi heal through our after dinner discussions of art. Heidi had studied art at the university and then became an art teacher before she became principal of the arts high school. She and Marta lost me in their discussions of Durer, Holbein, and other names I'd never before heard. It was deliciously stimulating hearing the expression of intellectual ideas which I hadn't heard for many years. Like spies sharing secrets, they discussed the art work of banned German artists - Klee, Kandinsky, Ernst. During these discussions, they talked in hushed tones even though there was no one for miles who would report them for traitorous talk. Those conspiratorial discussions bound us even closer together."

"So maybe there was some good that came out of the war for you. You had a family at last.

I didn't really know how the average German lived during the war. I had visions of life in Berlin, but not in the rest of Germany. It's hard to believe that life went on without Hitler and the Nazis dictating every action and every decision."

"Yes, Ansbach showed me that there was some good worth saving in Germany when peace came, and peace did come soon."

Chapter 7

Peace

My story was coming to a close. I had to do everything possible to win Leon back. To make him want the new world Dorothea who was not the same as the old world Dorothea.

"Thanks to Heidi and Marta I found peace at last on January 23, 1945. The night that I stopped wailing was the night when I told my mother the story of my life - everything. I held nothing back. Just like I'm holding nothing back from you. It was after dinner and we heard the first of American planes flying over on their way to bomb the bridges of Ansbach. I wasn't afraid like I'd been in Berlin because I knew they weren't bombing isolated houses, only strategic targets. No, that's not true. The Americans did more than bomb strategic targets. The firebombing of Dresden wasn't aimed at strategic targets. It was punishment. It was revenge. I couldn't fall asleep. I went to Marta's room and told her I needed to talk. The time was right. Because of the frigid weather, there was a fire blazing in the fireplace. We sat in two wing chairs nestled in blankets, our faces eerily lit with shimmering red, yellow, and orange streaks from the fire.

I spoke without interruption for over two hours. My voice was steady and unemotional. It was as if I was outside my body describing someone else's life. When I finished, she asked me to sit on the floor and put my head on her lap. I did so, and cried as I never cried before. My crying made it hard to catch my breath so I wheezed like an asthmatic. My crying made my nose run so I had twin tracks of mucous running over my lips and onto my chin where they dripped onto my nightgown. My crying clogged my ears so I couldn't hear the sounds I was making. I was crying for my lost children, for my lost goodness, and for my lost country. Gradually my crying subsided as Marta stroked my hair. I didn't know Marta could be a comforting mother, and I didn't know I wanted to be a comforted child. It was four in the morning when I uttered the words I'd never

spoken to my mother before. 'I love you mother.' She replied with words that were also new to her. 'I love you my child.'

The next night at midnight, Marta came to my room. It was her turn to share long-buried, previously unspoken memories. I'd never asked about her childhood or her marriage, and she'd never volunteered any information. I really didn't know my mother at all. Now was the time for her autobiography. My mother wanted me to know the woman she'd been before I entered her life two years earlier.

Marta had grown up as an only child of wealthy parents who were emotionally detached, only interested in status, culture, and money. She couldn't recall ever being kissed by them. Maybe that was why it was so hard for her to mother Kurt and me. She was well-educated and well-traveled, but lonely. She had no friends, having been educated by private tutors so she didn't have a chance to meet other children. Her parents thought it would be demeaning for a person of her social standing to mingle with the lowly masses at the local school.

Her father had financial difficulties because of foolish investments he'd made. He needed money to keep the estate so he found a way to get money by selling his most valuable asset - Marta. He married her off to Henrik Schmidt, a wealthy distant cousin. Henrik lived in Berlin and was on the upward track at Siemens. He wanted a socially-connected wife, a role Marta fit perfectly. Henrik also liked the idea of someday owning the estate after Marta's parents died. Whenever he visited, he hungrily eyed every inch of the house and the grounds taking stock of the mini-empire that he would someday rule.

Despite past hard financial times and in anticipation of good future times, Marta's parents threw a lavish wedding, inviting hundreds of people. The house was beautifully decorated with flowers of every color; tables were laden with delicious foods, including a huge browned pig with an apple in its mouth; liveried servants balanced trays of bubbly champagne; and musicians roamed the house playing joyous tunes. Wedding pictures show Marta wearing an elegant lace dress with a ten foot train. Her face is partially obscured by a veil, but some close-ups show her with a confused expression. She was a plain, shy, sheltered girl thrust into the center of attention. What the pictures didn't show was her eagerness to leave the boredom of Ansbach and start a different life in the big exciting city. Had she known what the new life would be like, she wouldn't have been so eager to make the move. In fact, she might have hid in a closet refusing to leave.

The move to Berlin was culture shock in many ways. First, she had never lived in a city nor had she run a household with a maid and a cook. But most importantly, she had never experienced sex. She hadn't even kissed a man before she married Henrik at age

18. Any romantic ideas she might have had about marriage were instantly replaced with horror and terror. Sex with Henrik was violent and ugly. He took her savagely whenever he felt the urge which could be any time of the day or night. She lived in constant fear of him and only relaxed when he was out of the house. She had two children in quick succession – Kurt when she was 20 and me when she was 21. She would have had more had she not had complications with my birth. She felt that the complications were due to the damage from the constant rapes she was subjected to so at 21, she had a hysterectomy.

Henrik - I can't call him my father – was a sadist. After he forced Marta to have sex, he beat her. It was as if he didn't get enough release from sex; he needed to see her in pain to be satisfied. She realized he wanted her to cry so she cried as much as possible even though she was past the point of feeling pain. He also talked to her as if she were a dog. He called her his puppy dog, his *hundchen*. This was not a term of endearment, it was a term of debasement. There were times at dinner when he made her bark before he let her eat. Kurt and I did nothing. We ate quickly and left the table. Although we knew of the abuse from her visible wounds and the sounds from their bedroom, we did nothing to defend my mother. Maybe that is why I never thought of standing up to the Nazis. This was something I was used to. From childhood, I never fought violence and cruelty.

Marta was chained to Henrik because she couldn't tell her parents about the abuse. They would blame her, not him. They didn't want to stop the pipeline of money he supplied. Understandably, she hated him and sex. They were synonymous

She didn't really know how to be a mother to Kurt and me since she herself had never been properly parented. She was also afraid of Kurt and me because we were smart, socially adept, and sexual. We were everything she perceived herself as not being. We were rich enough to have nannies so we were well taken care of physically, and we were sent to the finest schools in Berlin so we were well educated. We had everything except parental love. That brought Kurt and me together. Neither of us had close friends for fear that someone would find out about our parents' private lives. We became each other's best friends; we told each other everything. To this day we are best friends and tell each other everything. That is how I found out that at age 12 Kurt had his first homosexual experience. He made me promise never to tell anyone because he was afraid it would affect his plans to become a famous scientist. Both Kurt and I have always been ambitious. Maybe that was the one good thing we inherited that from our father.

Marta had no friends and no responsibilities at home since she had servants. Henrik insisted that she do something productive with her time so she took art lessons.

She had always loved art and whenever she traveled, visited art museums - the Louvre in Paris, the Prado in Madrid , the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. From her art teachers, she learned that painting was something she could do and could do well. She had a natural talent for painting. This was the first time in her life she found success. At home, she found only degradation. And most importantly, when she painted, she escaped the reality of her ugly life. She was living in the scene she painted, and of course the scenes were all of her home in Ansbach, the place she wanted to escape to. Before she married, she wanted to leave Ansbach, and now she viewed it as a haven. Even living with her parents would be better than living with Henrik.

Marta felt happiness for the first time in her life when the police came to our apartment to tell her that Henrik had died in a car crash. She had wished him dead every time he raped her, and now her wish had come true. She pretended to feel grief when inside she was jubilant. His death was a godsend - saving Marta from physical, mental, and sexual abuse and opening opportunities for her to actively pursue her passion for art. Her social life had expanded since she started taking art lessons. She didn't have friends, but she did have acquaintances. She found that acting like a young grieving widow helped her socially. Remember, she was only 35 when Henrik died. He left her a great deal of money so there were suitors at her door wanting to marry a young, rich widow. She wasn't interested, especially since men wanted sex and that was something she never wanted to experience again.

Marta studied with various art teachers who recognized her talent. In 1933, she realized an impossible dream when she was admitted to the Bauhaus, the most prestigious art school in Berlin. Unfortunately, the school was closed by the Nazis just months after she enrolled. Art, especially modern art was viewed as subversive and something to be suppressed. I was surprised to learn that her first love was modern art, especially the cubism of Klee who she studied with for a brief period. She never displayed her modern art for fear that she would be arrested for subversion. To be safe, she destroyed it all before she moved to Ansbach. She only displayed her conventional, apolitical pictures.

Marta's mother, my grandmother, died in 1931, and then in 1934 her father died. With the Bauhaus closed and art becoming a subversive activity, she returned to Ansbach to run the estate. When her parents were alive, it was their estate. Now it was hers, and hers alone. It provided the security and safety she needed, much like it provided me when I went there nine years later. She learned how to financially manage the estate with its tenant farmers, crops, and animals. In fact, she became a better financial manager than her father had been. Her days were spent working on financial matters, touring the estate,

and painting. Every day she toured another part of the estate, usually on horseback. Eventually, she knew every inch of it.

As Marta changed, her paintings changed, becoming more abstract and stylized. She didn't have to fear the Nazis in Ansbach. Within the confines of her home, she was free to paint whatever and however she wanted. When Heidi and I lived with her, she started painting people. She painted me, Heidi, the tenant farmers, and Heidi and my students. There were eight portraits of me hanging on the walls of the house. In some, I looked sad, some evil, and some serene. She captured the many "mes" that existed side by side within my body and mind. Her portraits always captured something special about the person she was painting. Most of her pictures of Heidi showed her endless sorrow at the loss of her husband and son, but some showed a kindness and a reaching out to others. Marta saw things beyond a painter. She saw into people. It was uncanny. When I told her this, she said that she never really looked at people before she started painting them. She was focused on herself and her unhappiness, but since Heidi and I came to live with her, she was no longer unhappy. At times, she was even happy, thanks to me. I looked at her and realized that she had brought me happiness too. When I lived in Ansbach, a mother and daughter were born. Before that we were two genetically related people who were emotionally damaged, but fortunately not beyond repair. Now we were spiritually and emotionally related. I always thought that my time at the Berlin School was the happiest of my life, but my time in Ansbach was equally happy because it brought me love and peace. Leon, I know you loved your family, but it was a different sort of love because it evolved from the day you were born. Mine was born when I moved to Ansbach.

Leon, have you ever felt peace?"

"I don't know. I've been happy, certainly with you and my work, but there's always something lacking in me so no, I don't think I've ever felt peace. What's lacking in me is my family and that is what you found in your mother. I don't think I'll ever find peace."

"Maybe you will. I'm hoping you'll see me as a way of finding peace.

Over time, Marta's painting style changed dramatically, becoming like that of Lucien Freud. When people knowledgeable about art visit my apartment and see her paintings, they point out the similarity in styles. She used an impasto style where she laid the paint on thickly so that the brush strokes are accentuated. Her people reach out beyond the canvas and ask to be touched. You may not know this, but Lucien Freud is Sigmund Freud's grandson. It's ironic that one of the greatest enemies of the Nazi state –

Sigmund Freud – should play a part in my mother’s role as an artist. The influence of the degenerates the Nazis so detested lives on through the progeny of geniuses, like the Freuds.

After my mother told me about the facts of her life, she shared her feelings. This was totally alien to her; she had never told another human being how she felt. She regretted that she had never loved a man and that she never had good sex. For her, sex meant violation of one’s body and spirit. She knew that it didn’t have to be this way, but she also knew she would never experience sex again. She felt that she was too old, but more importantly she could never share her body with a man. She could never trust a man. She had only just learned to trust a person, and that person was me.

She talked about how she didn’t love Kurt and me when we were young. Maybe it was because of the inescapable hate that permeated our so-called family. Inhaling the oxygen in that apartment filled us with hatred that was impossible to dispel when we exhaled. It lingered in our lungs and traveled throughout our bodies as our cells were oxygenated. Marta viewed us as products of Henrik’s sexual attacks so we were tainted. She especially feared me because of my sexuality. She was glad to be rid of us when we went off to the university.

She adjusted to life in Ansbach until I came. When Rolfe called asking her to take me in, her first reaction was to say no. But she knew she would be sentencing me to death if she didn’t get me out of Berlin. She was nervous about how I would disrupt her life until she saw me and realized how damaged I was. I was nothing like the Dorothea she had last seen in 1937. This was her chance to be a mother. And that was what happened – she became my mother. By sharing our lives, we grew to love each other. Like me finding goodness in my heart when I worked with my children, she found love in her heart and realized that she was not a stone. That change in her is reflected in her painting. Not only did she paint people, she painted people with emotions that sprang from the oils.

Eventually, Marta and I talked about responsibility. She was honest in her belief that in my small way I bore responsibility for the Nazis. She frankly told me that I was more than an enabler as I’d claimed. Because of my relationship with Rolfe, I was a Nazi. I was a Nazi because I never spoke up to stop the removal of my children. I didn’t even murmur a subvocal ‘No. Don’t take my children.’

My reaction to this accusation was to deny it. How could I be a Nazi? I never repressed anyone. I never hurt anyone. I could do nothing to stop the murder of my children. Saying something wouldn’t have made a difference. But she firmly said that I was a Nazi. I know you agree with that, don’t you?”

“Yes. Absolutely. But what did your mother do to fight the Nazis?”

“At first, nothing. But throughout the war, she gave secret financial support to families that were destroyed by the Nazis. There was a teacher in town who spoke up against the Nazis in his classroom and was sent to a concentration camp where he died. There was no one to support his five children. Secretly, Marta channeled money to the family so they wouldn’t starve. She did the same with soldiers who came back to Ansbach with terrible injuries which made it impossible for them to work and they didn’t receive enough governmental benefits to live on. Although some people in town, like the mayor, knew what she did, she kept her philanthropy secret until after the war when the people who benefited from her generosity asked that she be given some recognition. She refused to cooperate. She didn’t want certificates of recognition of any kind. That wasn’t Marta. She also knew that if she got any recognition, there would be retaliation from the local die-hard Nazis of which there were many. Even after the war the Nazis continued to instill fear. She didn’t actively fight the Nazis, but she showed that kindness wasn’t dead and there was hope for a time when helping one’s neighbor would be the rule, not the exception.”

“I suppose in a way she did the best she could, but she didn’t really fight Nazism either. There’s no real risk in giving money.”

“I don’t agree with you. You don’t fight Nazism with just bombs. I think in the end good defeats evil, not guns. And that’s what she tried to do.”

“Dorothea, I don’t agree with you. Without American and English guns and sacrificed lives, the Nazis would have won. Maybe there’s not enough goodness in the world to defeat evil.”

“You’re wrong. People like Marta won in the end. She was a true patriot. She mourned at how the Nazis had destroyed the country she so loved. She was optimistic that good would triumph over evil. And in the end it did. She knew it would be difficult to rebuild Germany because of the total annihilation of the infrastructure of society. But the good people of the world, especially the Americans, have helped Germany rebuild. Marta’s vision is coming true, but unfortunately she didn’t live long enough to see it happen.

Our conversations were like therapy sessions for me. Marta helped me explore the why’s underlying my decisions. She helped me to find that there was some good in me that had to be nurtured. The mother I had when I was growing up in Berlin was not the mother I had in Ansbach. She found herself when she left Berlin and was rid of my

father. She was a woman who was at peace with who she was. And she brought me to a point where I, too, found peace.

Not only did she help me, she helped Heidi. She revived her; she brought her back to life. Our after-dinner conversations now included Heidi. We tried to help her cope with a personal tragedy we couldn't begin to comprehend. Neither Marta nor I had ever loved a man so we couldn't grasp the completeness of her love for Fritz. Neither of us had ever loved a child from birth so we couldn't fathom the depth of her feelings for Otto. We listened as Heidi returned to her life in Berlin. She sounded like a young girl as she joyously described her romance with Fritz, their love-making, their delight in their son, their mutual respect for their professions, their pride when Fritz was made the youngest chief surgeon at the Berlin Hospital, and their fear when he was drafted to repair the irreparable damage done by war to young bodies. Her eyes glowed as she described watching Otto take his first steps, play the piano off-key at his first recital, receive the award for the highest grades when he graduated from high school, and go off to war not knowing if he would ever return. As she described the happy memories of her life with Fritz and Otto, her face shed years. The lines and grayness disappeared. But they returned when she described her helplessness trying to nurse Fritz as he succumbed to the unrelenting gangrene eating away at his body. She saw herself lying next to Fritz after he died, refusing to call an ambulance to forever take him away from her. Only when a neighbor called an ambulance 24 hours later did she rise from his death bed. Her voice was unrecognizable as she described Fritz's funeral sparsely attended by only three surviving nurses who he had worked with at the hospital and a neighbor who miraculously got food and medical supplies so Heidi could stay at his bedside day and night.

Heidi stared ahead as she recited from memory the telegram informing her that Otto had been killed at sea and commending him for his bravery. What bravery? He had no choice but to serve until he was killed. We cringed as she described how she envisioned him drowning as water flooded his submarine. She saw his face gasping for air as he vainly tried to keep his head above water. We listened as she spoke traitorous words, decrying a nation that sacrificed its best and brightest for nothing. The choice for Otto was to be executed at home if he refused to serve or to cruelly die in a foreign place if he served. Fritz and I were cowards. We didn't back Otto when he voiced thoughts about resisting the draft. Fritz knew that his career would be over if Otto resisted. He and I traded Fritz's career for Otto's life.

We saw Heidi transformed as she described her joy in helping create the curriculum at the school and her joy in knowing me and loving our children. Our

listening helped heal Heidi so that she could go out into the world even though she would never again be whole. The parts of her that were Fritz, Otto, and the Berlin School for the Handicapped had been wrenched from her leaving only a shell, but a shell coated with a kindness and even an innocence that was uniquely Heidi's.

Spring brought peace. Well, not really peace, just the stoppage of war. They're not the same. No German was really at peace, not even the ones who hated the Nazis. On May 2nd, Berlin fell. On May 4th the Americans marched into Ansbach. We had to be careful in greeting them. It was dangerous to demonstrate relief at being rescued from the Nazis. An 18 year old boy, Robert Limpert, tried to arrange a surrender to the U.S. troops without a fight, hoping to save lives in an unwinnable situation. He had been a member of Hitler Youth, and the other boys, rabid as ever, felt he was a traitor. They hung him from a lamp post in the center of Ansbach. So maybe the German people were the real enemy, not the Nazi Party.

Robert was the older brother of Ada, one of the girls in my class. Now my mother openly supported the Limpert family. She gave them money and asked that a tribute be paid to Robert, but the published tribute was destroyed with swastikas. The armies had stopped their armed conflict, but some of the people were still fighting the war. In fact, the last handicapped child to be killed was at the Bavarian State Hospital three weeks AFTER the US occupied the town. So the evil wasn't just in the Nazi leaders, it was firmly entrenched in some of the population and won't be eradicated until these people die. And some of them will not die for a long time because remember the Hitler Youth were the ones who killed Limpert. The greatest invention of all time would not be a cure for cancer or polio, it would be a vaccine that would cure the human plague of hatred.

We learned that Hitler and Goebel had killed themselves. Rolfe's death was even mentioned in the news announcement of Goebbels's death. He had achieved fame in death. He was part of the inner circle at last, even though it was an inner circle of suicide. And the others, most notably Goering, were arrested as war criminals, which is what they were. Criminals. They had committed crimes against humanity, all of humanity. I was tempted to attend the Nuremburg war crimes trial since it was so close, but I didn't know how to get admission, and honestly I wasn't ready to handle how I would actually react. Going to the trial would mean I would have to confront my own guilt. And of course, there were lots of war criminals who escaped, like Mengele. They knew what was going to happen at the end of the war, and they were prepared to survive. The deadliest rats escaped the sinking ship.

As the war came to a close, there was chaos. Throngs of people moving from east to west. The roads were clogged with people, carts with furniture, animals, everything imaginable. A large DP camp was set up outside of town to house the constant influx of refugees who didn't move on, but with time people left to return home as long as home was not in the Russian zone. And faster than anyone thought, Germany began to rebuild thanks to the Marshall Plan. But that was only West Germany. East Germany was in Russian hands and was a police state, much like it had been under Nazi rule. Hopefully, East Germany will be liberated one day and all of Germany will be unified.

In 1946, we got a letter from Kurt. We didn't know what had happened to him, but we suspected that he was safe because we hadn't heard anything about Werner Von Braun. We knew Kurt's fate was linked to Von Braun's. The letter had lines blacked out because there was still censorship, but there was enough information to let us know that he was working on rockets in America. We wrote to him telling him that we were safe. He wrote back saying that he wanted to bring us to America. Neither of us had ever considered leaving Germany. Marta felt that I should go, that this would be the way I would start a new life and realize my dreams. She believed that I had a bright future in psychology if I could get to America. She also thought that I might create an American version of the Berlin School for the Handicapped. She had confidence that I could achieve whatever I desired. America was the land of opportunity and I should take advantage of that opportunity now that it was being offered. She wouldn't leave Germany. She wanted to do what little she could to rebuild it. She wanted to be German for eternity by being buried in German soil.

At first I was reluctant to consider immigrating. Although I had been a risk taker in the past, the thought of starting a new life in America was daunting. But as Marta steadily encouraged me, I warmed to the idea. Eventually I realized that I was being given the opportunity to create a new life. I couldn't pass up this opportunity to start with a clean slate, to erase my sins.

I wrote Kurt saying that I wanted to come to America and that set the ball rolling. It took two years of paperwork, but at last I got approval to immigrate. And of course, you played such a big role in getting me here. It felt like I had to get every official in Germany to sign some sort of document for me, and I know that Kurt had to do the same thing on his side. Kurt had to guarantee that I had a job, a place to live, and sponsors to vouch for me. Without your help I would have never made it here. Your friends got me the job at American and you became one of my sponsors swearing to support me so I wouldn't become a burden to the country. And obviously, I haven't.

September 9, 1948. That was the date I left Ansbach. At the age of 38, I was being reborn as an American. I had such mixed feelings. I desperately wanted to go to America and start a new life, but I didn't want to leave Marta and Heidi. I knew that I was wasting any talent I had by teaching 10 year olds. There was more I could do and more I wanted to do, but I couldn't do it in Germany. I couldn't wait 20 or 30 years for the new Germany.

My last day with them was painfully sad knowing that I would never see Marta again. She would never come to America and I probably would never return to Germany. Neither of us was particularly demonstrative, but we spent much of the morning hugging and holding hands. We had photos taken of us and the estate so we could have visible memories of our lives together. I put those photos with my photos and files from the school to be taken to the new world and treasured forever.

Eric drove me to Ansbach to start my train journey to eventually get to Le Havre for my ocean voyage to America. I was lucky enough to be on the second voyage of the Ile de France after it was re-commissioned following the war. It was luxurious. It took me three days on the train and seven days on the ship, but each day heightened my excitement and anticipation at going to the promised land. When I arrived in New York on September 19, Kurt was waiting for me on the dock. From the deck, I could see him waving an American flag. He had changed so since I had last seen him in 1942. His hair thinned and he had gained weight, but he still had his huge smile. When I stepped off the gangplank, he hugged me tightly and presented me with a bunch of red roses and said, 'Welcome to your new homeland.' Leon, I can't describe the depth of feeling I had when I stepped on American soil. I shed my identity as a German like a snake sheds its skin. Immediately, I felt like an American. The comfort of freedom totally enveloped me.

There's not much to tell about the last two years. At first, I lived with Kurt in Baltimore and then when I started teaching at American, I got an apartment in Washington. Through Karl and my colleagues at American, I've developed a large circle of friends. I've had several short affairs, but nothing of any significance until I met you. So here we are at a crossroads.

You haven't said anything for a while. What are you thinking? Will we merge our lives or go our separate ways now that you know all about me? It's your decision. I want us to be together forever. I want us to be together until we die."

Leon's face was as dark as if he were at a funeral, at the funeral of his beloved family. "We need to go home now."

We had talked through the night. It was morning and time to check out. We'd already packed our bags so we got in the car and drove the three hours back to my apartment without saying one word. I don't know how Leon was able to concentrate on driving with no sleep and the emotional turmoil he was experiencing.

When we got to my apartment, Leon carried my suitcase to the door and said, "Dorothea, I can't make a decision now. I'm just too overwhelmed. My head is swirling. I'm not rational. I have to think about you, me, and us. I'll call you."

And with that, Leon abruptly left me stunned and speechless. Would I ever see him again? If not, would I be able to go on with my life? Was this all a dream? Had there actually been a Leon?

Chapter 8

Letters

I could think of nothing except the ring of the phone. As soon as I could leave my office, I rushed home to stare at the phone, willing it to ring. After four nights of silence, I knew Leon would never call. There was no future for us. I couldn't believe he wouldn't say this to me, and that he would just leave me hanging without saying good-bye, without some formal ending. But he didn't call. On the sixth day, I got a letter.

Dearest Dorothea,

I'm a coward. I can't call you or face you. I've picked up the phone hundreds of times, but couldn't find the courage to dial your number. I know if I have any contact with you, I might change my mind and I would regret that for the rest of my life. I've made my decision and I can't change it. I won't change it.

I love you with all my heart. I don't think a man could love a woman more than I love you. But I can't be with you. There is nothing I can do to erase your past. You will always be a Nazi's lover. You will always be a Nazi supporter. You will always be the woman who actually touched Goebbels and Hitler. In my mind, I will always hold you responsible for the murders of my family and for all the Jews. Logic tells me this is not true, but my heart says that it is.

You have done wonderful things with your life – you created a model school that changed children’s lives and you gave Heidi and Marta new lives. You are a brilliant woman with much goodness in you. I know you have a bright future and you will make the world a better place.

But all that is in the future. When I think of you, all I can think of is your past. In our four short months together, you gave me much happiness. Sex with you was something I couldn’t have ever imagined. But life with you was a lot more than sex. Just being with you filled me with a sense of excitement and joy I never felt before, but that’s not enough.

There’s another reason I can’t marry you. I need to have children. I want to carry on the Ackerman line. I can’t let the Nazis wipe my family off the face of the Earth. I need to find a woman who will have my children. That can’t be you. Not only because you can’t have children, but because it is necessary for a child to have a Jewish mother to be considered Jewish, and obviously that’s impossible with you. I have to think of more than me and what I want. I have to think of the Ackerman family.

You might ask why I let our relationship go so far when I felt like this about having children. You swept me off my feet – you were like a tornado whipping me around. I couldn’t believe a sophisticated, gorgeous woman like you could possibly be attracted to a nebbish like me. And sex with you blinded me to every problem in our relationship. I didn’t want it ever to stop. But it had to. I had to be true to myself and my family. My selfishness couldn’t continue.

I would feel like I betrayed my family and my heritage if I married you. Every time I would look at you, I would see the ghosts of my parents and sisters standing behind you accusing me of betraying them. My life will be my work. I, too, have the capacity to do creative work and make a difference in the world. That is what I will do. And God willing, my future will also be filled with a new Ackerman family.

I’m running away from you. I can’t risk seeing you for fear of what I might do, how I might break down. I’m moving to Chicago. Two months ago Fermi offered me a job at the University of Chicago. I didn’t give him an answer because I didn’t know if I could leave you or if you would leave your job to move to Chicago. I just called him and accepted the position. I will be moving next month.

Dorothea, you’re seeking redemption for your sins...for being a Nazi and doing nothing to try to save your children. I can’t give you redemption. I can’t give you

absolution. Redemption and absolution can only come from what you do with your life and from within you.

Love forever,

Leon

I read the last paragraph of his letter over and over. My mother had told me that I had to devote my life to realizing my dreams. Now Leon was saying the same thing. I had to devote my life to finding ways to absolve myself of my past sins. And I had to face my role in the murder of my children. I didn't do anything to stop the soldiers from taking my children to their deaths. But I could have done something beforehand. I had enough notice to spirit a child away. I could have taken Eva out and hidden her. No, Elisabeth had to do this, but I should have asked her to do this. Should I have tried to save my son? I had no one to give him to. And furthermore, I had to consider the quality of his life. I ask myself a politically incorrect question when I ask was he worth saving. When I compare him to the other 147 children, I have to say no.

I returned Leon's letter to the envelope and put it in the box with the pictures of Marta and Heidi in Ansbach. Interestingly, I didn't cry. I didn't cry because I knew I was getting just punishment for what I had done and for who I had been. My punishment was never having the man I loved and never having a complete life. I'm not sure that there's a God, but I do think that there is some cosmic form of retribution, and that was what was being visited upon me. I have to think that even the Nazis who escaped capture, like Mengele, were given retribution, possibly in the form of an excruciatingly painful death. I have to believe that there is justice in this world. I can't believe that there is no accountability for evil. And Leon is rightly holding me accountable for my sins.

I was able to put on a façade so the outside world didn't know the depths of my despair. I worked 12 hour days, teaching my classes, collaborating with a colleague on a textbook on child psychology that eventually became a standard in courses on child psychology throughout the county, and even socialized with friends. My days were filled with hectic activity, but my nights were sleepless and tearless. I didn't awake at 2:00 wailing as I pictured my children being burned in a crematorium. Now I stared straight into the darkness watching Leon's family being burned. And most frighteningly, I pictured Leon being burned. In my dreams, I never died. Only people I loved died. I was the survivor to spend the rest of my days alone.

Kurt was the only one to sense that something terrible had happened to me. We usually had dinner every two weeks to catch up on our lives. Instead of going out to a

restaurant, I asked him to come to my apartment. I cooked the same meal that I had cooked for Leon that fateful night when we started our affair – weiner schnitzel, spatzl, red cabbage, and strudel.

As soon as we sat down at the table, Kurt said, “It’s over with Leon, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

And then I told Kurt everything. I even showed him the letter.

“Do you think there’s any way to get him back?”

“No. And even if I could, we could never be happy together. He would eventually leave. I know this is for the best. I never loved a man before, and probably will never love a man again. I’ll devote myself to my career, just like you have.”

“Is there anything I can do to bring you two together? I never saw two people more in love than you. You should be together. You both deserve happiness after what you’ve been through.”

“No, there’s nothing you can do. And even if you persuaded him to come back to me, our relationship would eventually fall apart. My past is too powerful for Leon to overcome. The ghosts of his family will always haunt him. And he wants something I could never give him – children.”

“I can’t understand why he can’t put this into proper perspective. You could adopt children. They don’t have to be your biological children. You didn’t kill his parents or the Jews. None of us did. Why is he being so irrational?”

“To him, I’m forever tainted by my relationship with Rolfe. That alone made me a Nazi. And my contacts with Goebbels and even being in Hitler’s presence forever damaged me. It’s over.”

And it was over. I appeared fine to the outside world. Only Kurt knew of my pain and grief. He urged me to go to a psychiatrist, but I couldn’t bring myself to share my past with a stranger. It had been hard enough for me to open up to Heidi and my mother. He wanted me to see his psychiatrist who had studied with Freud and had worked with the Harvard psychologist Walter Langer on a psychoanalytic study of Hitler for the OSS in 1943. Kurt had become an avid Freudian and explained everything in Freudian terms. Every slip of the tongue was a Freudian slip. There were no simple accidents. Accidents were products of one’s unconscious. Psychoanalysis enabled Kurt to become more

accepting of his homosexuality when he learned that Freud didn't view it as pathological. He had support for not seeing himself as perverse or abnormal even though the world did.

I resumed contacts with friends I'd socialized with before Leon, my pre-Leon buddies as I thought of them. During the four months of our affair, I cut my ties with everyone except Kurt. Friends knew that I had an intense affair, but didn't ask personal questions knowing that it ended. They weren't the types of friends to pry; they knew I would talk if I ever wanted to. I didn't want to then, and I would never want to.

I had two different groups of friends – my Washington group and my Baltimore group. My Washington group was made up of my colleagues at AU. I was friendly with faculty in psych and most other departments. I knew everyone and everyone knew me. I was Miss Popularity. I was always invited to faculty parties. It was an exciting time in Washington. The economy was booming and America's place as the leader of the free world was unchallenged. America could do no wrong. The conversation at these parties reflected the optimism of the country. Everyone was happy, and everything was possible.

My Baltimore group of friends was made up of people I met through Kurt. Like me, he was popular. He knew everyone at Hopkins and he knew a number of the local German émigrés who had fled Germany for political reasons, many of whom were Jewish. Although some of these people knew Leon, I don't think anyone suspected that we had an affair. Leon didn't socialize much and when he did, he socialized with his JPL colleagues.

The Baltimore parties were quite different than the Washington parties because much of the conversation was focused on politics. Many of these friends were to the left politically, some were even closet Communists. But this was the McCarthy era so people had to be cautious about what they said even at parties with friends. There was a feeling like in Nazi days in Germany when you were afraid to say something that might get you branded as a traitor, and for people with immigrant status hoping for eventual citizenship, this could be lethal. But even so, the conversations were always focused on what was happening in the world and what America (or Russia) should do to solve the world's problems. We found solutions to the problems of Korea, nuclear proliferation, and the cold war, but these solutions never went beyond the rooms where they were aired.

I should mention that I never met any of Kurt's homosexual friends. He kept that part of his life cordoned off from view. I don't think it was because he was ashamed. I think he feared rejection from his straight friends. In those days, gay and straight people did not share friendships.

I had many opportunities for relationships, but I couldn't forget Leon. I couldn't even have one-night stands. I sent mixed messages. When I went to parties, I dressed provocatively and flirted, but I never followed through. I just wasn't interested in men or sex. It was my nun period. Kurt kept me up-to-date on Leon's move to Chicago and his research. I asked him not to tell me if he got married and had children. I didn't want to know about his personal life. That would hurt too much.

For two years, my life went well professionally and socially, although I still spent some nights picturing Leon's family, Leon, and my children burning. And then everything changed with a second letter. Elisabeth Schiller came back into my life. I had last seen her the day before Eva was taken away. We had no contact for nine years, but I kept up with her through international press coverage of Franz. He had been influential in rebuilding Germany's economy after the war. He was viewed as one of the miracle workers of Germany's rebirth. Somehow he escaped any taint of Nazism during his tenure as President of Deutsche Bank. He was also close to Konrad Adenauer, the well-respected, even beloved, chancellor of Germany. Adenauer appointed Franz Ambassador to the United States. It was his job to ensure the continual flow of money into Germany's reconstruction.

Elisabeth tracked me down through people who knew Kurt. She wrote inviting me to lunch. She wanted to establish a network of friends in the states who could help her in her new role as the German ambassador's wife. I was never her friend before, and wasn't sure I wanted to be her friend now. My memories of her in Berlin were filled with pain. I delayed responding. Through my conversations with my mother, I had resolved my role in the deaths of my children, at least when I was rational. I knew I was innocent, and yet I was wary of re-visiting this painful point in my life. Although I was innocent of the deaths of the children of the Berlin School for the Handicapped, Franz Schiller was not. He had done nothing to prevent his child from being murdered. He could have removed Eva from the school. He could have saved her life. How could I face him? How could Elisabeth have stayed with him after what he had done? Did she forgive him? Could I forgive him? Was it my place to forgive him? Despite the disruption this might cause in my continuous attempt to resolve what had happened on April 19, 1943, I finally accepted her invitation. I couldn't run away. With her being in Washington, I knew our paths would cross intentionally or unintentionally. I chose the intentional path.

We met at the Mayflower Hotel restaurant, a common meeting place for the Washington elite. When I entered the restaurant and saw Elisabeth, I was shocked at how much she'd changed. She still had a commanding air of elegance and sophistication, but she looked older than her 53 years. Her hair was white and her skin wrinkled, but she was

impeccably dressed and heavily made up. But what struck me most about seeing her was how much she and Eva resembled each other. Either I hadn't recalled this, or I hadn't noticed this before, probably because I was pre-occupied with more pressing issues. When I looked at her, a montage of images of Eva, Babar books, and a wheel chair appeared. I felt like I was having a hallucination.

Elisabeth was the perfect ambassador's wife. She knew exactly what to say and do. There was a smoothness, a confidence about her. She easily engineered the conversation. We talked about our lives since we'd last seen each other, avoiding mention of Eva or the school. I proudly described my professional achievements. Elisabeth acknowledged my achievements, while tactfully minimizing them in comparison to Franz's achievement in building the new Germany.

When we ended our lunch, Elisabeth looked at me intensely and said, "Dorothea, there are some private issues I need to share with you, that I need you to help me with. I wanted to meet with you first to see if I could trust you, and I think I can. We have a history that we can build a friendship on. Let's meet again, but not for a while. I have to oversee the official opening of the embassy in two weeks so as you can imagine I'm quite occupied with that. I'd love for you to come to the opening. It will be quite an event. I'll send you an invitation and please do bring Kurt. You two represent examples of the types of people we want for the new Germany."

Two days later I received an ornately embossed invitation to meet Franz Schiller, the new German ambassador. I didn't know if I would go. It was one thing to start a relationship with Elisabeth, but going to the embassy would start a relationship with Germany. It would mean an irrevocable return to the past. Looking at Franz would bring back memories of him allowing his child to be murdered. Could I cope with that? Would there be other Germans from my past there? Could I see "reformed" Nazis and treat them with civility? Would going to the opening brand me as one of the ex-Nazis of which there were a number in Washington? Up to that point, the only Germans I had associated with were expatriates in Baltimore who had been anti-Nazi. Would going to the opening affect my relationship with these friends?

I called Kurt and told him about the invitation. He, too, was wary of going. He had stayed away from former associates from his days in Germany. The only Germans he associated now with were a few of the other scientists who had left with Von Braun and his Baltimore émigré friends. After lengthy back-and-forth discussions, we decided to go.

It was a formal event so Kurt rented a tux. This gave me an opportunity to shop for an elegant dress. I was a clothes horse and welcomed any opportunity to buy new clothes. I bought a magenta, silky tight long dress with a slit up the side. I looked a bit like Marilyn Monroe in the movie *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, only thinner.

Kurt was dashing in his tux. Together, we made an elegant couple. Indeed, we looked like an ad for the future Germany – affluent, successful, well dressed, beautiful. But we could have been an ad for the past Germany also – affluent, successful, well dressed, beautiful, completely Aryan, and Nazis.

The embassy was opulent, lavish, and reminiscent of the government buildings in Nazi Germany. Huge German flags hung everywhere. Now the flags had black, red, and yellow stripes. Just fifteen years ago they would have been red with black swastikas. Hovering waiters served flutes of champagne and canapés of all sorts. Musicians quietly played background music by German composers such as Brahms, Strauss, and Bach, not Wagner.

The elite of Washington were everywhere. There was Dean Acheson, the Secretary of State under Truman and John Foster Dulles, the incoming Secretary of State under Eisenhower, William Fulbright, the gracious Southern gentleman with farsighted views of foreign policy, and representing President Eisenhower was Vice President Richard Nixon. Von Braun was there with an entourage of scientists. He regally greeted everyone as if he were the ambassador. When he saw Kurt, he hugged him like a son. We had never met before, and in his suave, oily way he tried to sweep me off my feet as he kissed my hand and told me about all the good things he had heard about me. He was able to fool everyone in that room and in the America that he had never been a Nazi, but of course I knew better. He was leading us to victory in the space race against Russia so everyone believed that he couldn't have been a Nazi, or at least he was a good Nazi and should be forgiven. It was time for a new war against the Soviets, and he was one of our best weapons.

I saw familiar faces from the many parties I had attended in Berlin. I think most were government workers or bankers. I didn't recognize any Nazi higher-ups. When some of these people looked at me, there was a glimmer of recognition followed by eyes quickly darting away sending the message not to approach.

There were hundreds of people there so it was easy for me to avoid Franz. When I was talking with Von Braun and Kurt, he joined us and introduced himself to me as if we had never met. Oozing old world charm, he kissed my hand. But the message he sent me through his eyes told me loud and clear that he remembered me very well. Of course,

he was charming. No, he was more than charming, he was slick. Just like Elisabeth. I knew I had to be cautious dealing with these people. They found that the way to conquer America was not through war, but through charm and power and money.

Elisabeth and I had lunch a second time. This time we met at the embassy where her power was unchallenged. We were served by obsequious waiters in formal attire and white gloves. Now the ambiance was not of two equal women, but of one who was in a superior position, and that was clearly Elisabeth. The conversation was also very different from our first rather superficial contact. Now the conversation was intimate. Elisabeth brought up Eva immediately.

“I think of Eva every day.”

Elisabeth took an envelope that had been next to her plate. I hadn't noticed it until she picked it up. She opened it and removed some curly blond tresses.

“This is Eva's hair. I cut it off the last time I saw her. When I look at it, I can see her beautiful face. When I touch it, I feel her softness as I held her in my arms. There's still her smell nestled in the curls. I loved my daughter with all my heart and I will never get over her death. Franz and I talked about Eva only a few times since she died. Four months after she was killed, we got a bill from the government audaciously requesting payment for her burial. The letter said that she died of natural causes – the flu. Yes, the flu caused by poison gas. There was a bill for her care and a fictitious funeral. They murdered my child, and then they wanted me to pay for the actual execution. I went a bit crazy. As usual, Franz calmed me. After the war, we saw pictures of Jews being marched into gas chambers. That was the only time I've ever seen Franz cry. He said, 'I actually see our little Eva being gassed on the bus and then being carried into an oven. I pray to God that she was at peace. I pray to God He will forgive me.' That was all he said. He never wanted to speak of her again. Knowing that he was human made it easier for me to rebuild my marriage and go on to support him in his rise as savior of the German economy. There were other reasons too. I loved being the savior's wife. I loved being lauded as the woman behind the man. After the war, there were no heroes in Germany, but when there was an opening for one, Franz stepped forward and I was close behind. Also, I'm a patriot and I fervently believe that Franz is saving Germany. He is one of the engineers building a new, great nation. I have to do whatever I can to help him.”

“Elisabeth, I have to ask you a question that has plagued me since 1943. If I could have gotten Eva out of the school before the soldiers came, would you have taken her away?”

There was a long pause as Elisabeth stared at the floor wishing that I had never asked this question.

“No. First Franz wouldn’t have allowed it, and secondly I couldn’t take care of her. That’s why I sent her away. I know it sounds cruel, but no. I would have done nothing to save her, just like you did nothing. We both have her blood on our hands.”

I wanted to object. Eva wasn’t my child. I didn’t have the wherewithal to find someplace safe for her. Elisabeth did.

“Dorothea, I don’t want to talk about this anymore. In fact, I don’t want to ever talk about this again. Don’t ever bring it up.”

This was a command, not to be disobeyed. I have always been a strong woman, but I had met my match in Elisabeth.

“Anyhow, the real reason for my wanting to meet with you is to tell you about my grandson. You know our son Peter lives in Washington with his American wife Jayne. He’s in the family business. He, too, works for Deutsche Bank. Three years ago they had a child named Max. From the start, we knew that Max had problems. He had heart defects and had to be monitored for that. He was slow to develop. At first we thought that was because of his medical problems. Then doctors told us that he had a developmental disorder, but they didn’t know exactly what it was. From the start, he looked different. If you saw him, you wouldn’t think that he was Peter’s and Jayne’s biological child. He has this flat nasal bridge and thick lips. The doctors said he looked elfin. He is just now starting to walk and talk. It’s interesting that disability has hit the Schiller family again. I know that Eva’s disability was caused by difficulties during her delivery. The cord was wrapped around her neck and she was deprived of oxygen for a while. We don’t know the cause of Max’s problems. He had a normal delivery.

Although Peter and Jayne have gotten excellent medical care for Max, there’s really nothing for him educationally that we have been able to find, not only here in the states but anywhere in the world. So I thought of you and the work you did with Eva back in Berlin. You worked magic. You did phenomenal things with those kids. I’m hoping you can do here what you did at your school in Berlin.”

“Elisabeth, I really don’t know anything about education for handicapped children here in the states. I have worked in child psychology and in an academic setting.”

“I know, but you’re the only one I can think of who might help them. Please see them. Please.”

Elisabeth was dropping her mantle of power for a moment to beg.

Chapter 9

The Binet Center

And I did see them. Jayne called me the very next day and invited me to dinner at her townhouse on a quaint, historic street in Georgetown. The house shouted wealth. It was like a museum filled with fragile antiques. This was not a house for a young child or a pet or a klutzy adult. In fact, it didn't seem like a house to be lived in. It was to be occupied.

Peter was short and fat, unlike what I expected. I'd seen him at the embassy opening, but didn't realize he was Elisabeth's son. On the other hand, Jayne was tall and reedy. She looked like a model at a French fashion show. She had this absent look as if she were thinking of a more important matter than the conversation at hand. She told me, and I was to later learn she told everyone as soon as she met them, that she was part of the Carter banking family, one of the richest in the country. That was her way of establishing her credentials and her position in the ubiquitous Washington power game. We made the usual chatter over cocktails served by a butler.

Our dinner conversation was devoted to Max, his problems, and all they had done for him. They had traveled the country getting medical help and unsuccessfully attempting to get educational help. Elisabeth told them about my school in Berlin so they thought that I might be able to help. Peter knew that he had a much younger handicapped sister who had attended the school. He couldn't recall ever meeting her because he was away at school when she was born and she was institutionalized soon afterward. He knew that she had died, but he thought her death was from natural causes, and not the most unnatural of all causes – murder. He asked me no questions about Eva, and I offered no information on her beautiful life or heartbreaking death.

After dinner we went into the sitting room and a nanny brought Max in. He immediately ran to me and hugged me. He wore a huge smile as if he was elated to see me even though he didn't know me. He kept repeating hello over and over again. I held him on my lap, and asked him his name. He didn't respond. Then I pointed to myself and said *D* and then I pointed to him and said *Max*. I took his finger and put it on my chest and repeated *D*, and then I put his finger on his chest and repeated *Max*. After the third

time, I gently touched his lips as I said *D* and *Max*. The tenth time, he repeated *D* and laughed heartily, proud of his mastery of my abbreviated name. I hugged him, and he laughed even more. Then I said *Max* and he pointed to his chest and I said *D* and he banged my chest with his finger. Max was a child who personified innocence and sweetness. And very importantly, he was receptive to learning at this most critical stage of development.

Peter and Jayne were clutching each other's hands tightly and smiling widely, as proud of Max as if he had just recited the periodic table instead of the *d* sound.

"We knew you could get through to him," Jayne said tearfully. No matter what I first thought of her, she was a woman whose heart was filled with love for her child. The absent look she wore when I met her had given way to a look of joy. Even rich snobs can love their children.

I continued playing with him for a while and then the nanny took him to his room to go to bed. I hugged him again and said good night. Peter and Jayne kissed him affectionately.

Peter said, "Dorothea, we've done everything we can for Max medically, but what he needs now is a good education. And we haven't been able to give that to him. We've searched nationwide for a school for Max and we've found nothing. Elisabeth told us you were a miracle worker with handicapped children. We want you to work miracles for Max and other kids like him. We want you to start a school here in DC like the one you ran in Berlin. There are other people we know here who have handicapped kids, and none of us have found a school that does anything more than babysit."

"I need to stop you right now. I didn't work miracles. The children at my school improved, but none became normal. Don't expect me to cure Max. And don't believe anyone who says they can cure your child. There are charlatans out there who can't wait to take your money for the most outrageous promises. I've even heard of people being told that bananas cure mongolism."

"We don't expect a miracle. We only want him to learn. We know he's capable of learning. We just witnessed it. We have Max going to a school three mornings a week that meets in a church basement. It's a waste of time. There's no teaching and no learning going on there. All he does is aimlessly play with toys. He learned more from you in ten minutes than he learned in the past three months at that so-called school. And it has the reputation for being the best school for handicapped preschoolers in DC."

Jayne, the source of great wealth, said: “Dorothea, we will give you a blank check to start a school. Money will be no object. Please Dorothea. Please help us.”

Here were these wealthy, powerful, sophisticated people begging for help for their child. If it would have persuaded me, I think they would have groveled on the floor, begging. Their desperation moved me.

I had never seriously considered the possibility of starting a school again. My mother had mentioned this possibility a number of times, but I just brushed it aside. My dreams had been to make contributions to the field of child psychology on the academic level. I didn’t want to reject their offer outright even though that was my first reaction. I had a satisfying professional life. Why would I want to change?

“Obviously, I have to think about this. My first reaction is to say no because I’m happy with what I’m doing now.”

“Please, just think about it. Think of Max and what you can do for him and so many other needy kids. There is nothing for such children and you can fill that vacuum. You’re the only one who can do this. There is no one else with your background. No one else has ever done this before except you.”

As I was leaving, Jayne hugged me tightly and repeated over and over, “Please Dorothea. Please do this for Max.” I had never changed my opinion of a person as much in three hours as I did that evening. When I first met Jayne, I was convinced that she was a cold, unemotional woman, but now I saw that she was a loving, caring mother.

When I got home, I took out the box of pictures and data from the school. As I read over the data showing each child’s progress, I felt a jolt of electricity charge through my body. I did want to do this again! I needed to do this again! I couldn’t let the Nazis kill my approach and my school. This was my chance to resurrect it. This was my chance to make a real difference in the world. This was my chance to give meaning to my children’s deaths. They will not have died in vain. I felt so energized I could have marched down Constitution Avenue yelling, ‘The Berlin School for Handicapped Children is back. It is being reborn as.....’ I had to think of a name and suddenly it struck me – the Binet School named after my hero Alfred Binet, the man who saw no barriers to increasing intelligence, who believed that everyone could learn...everyone...where the impossible is possible. That would be the philosophy of my school.

Before I talked to Jayne, I needed Kurt’s input. I called him and asked if I could drop by on Saturday. He didn’t ask what I wanted; he knew it was something important.

When I went to his apartment, I was greeted by the aroma of rich perking coffee and music by Eddie Fisher. Kurt was becoming Americanized through music. He knew all the current pop tunes by heart. He would even croon to me and call me his beloved Elizabeth Taylor, who was Eddie's wife at the time. He joked when he played Johnny Mathis music saying that Johnny could be crooning to him because he knew that Mathis was homosexual.

He wasn't surprised to hear of the real reason behind Elisabeth's invitation to the embassy opening. He felt such people always wanted something. He was cynical about the motives of rich, powerful people. He felt that they viewed the non-rich as pawns to do their bidding, even if that bidding was creating a special school for their children.

"Kurt, should I do this? Should I start a school? What do you think?"

"Do it only if you have the same all-consuming passion you had when you started the Schmidt approach. Are you willing to give up everything you're doing now?"

"I'm not sure if I have to give up everything. I think I could get a leave from AU for a year, and then after I see how things have gone, I could decide if I want to give up my teaching job. And yes, I do have the same passion as I had in Berlin. Really more now because of the children's deaths and because of Leon. He told me that I should do something that made a difference in the world, and this will."

"Then go for it. I'm behind you 100 per cent."

I called Jayne back the next day.

"Jayne, this is not a yes, but I will consider the possibility of starting a school. There are so many obstacles that have to be overcome and so many issues that have to be resolved before I can say yes."

"Dorothea, I know you can overcome any obstacles. You're a trailblazer; you're a pioneer. Let's get to work and find those obstacles so we can knock them down."

Two days later we met at my office at AU. Jayne didn't want to waste any time; she was at the starting gate waiting for the bell. I didn't want to meet on Jayne's home ground. This was going to be my baby, and I wanted to make that clear. She was supplying the children and the money. That's all. I wanted no interference. In Berlin, I didn't want the Nazis hovering over my shoulder telling me what to do. In DC, I didn't want rich parents doing this. I needed complete independence.

“Jayne, before we get started, I want to draw up a legal contract giving me the rights to start and run the school. I want 100% control over everything. I don’t want parents overseeing what I do. I don’t want you meddling in the affairs of the school even though you’re the one who gave birth to the school. I know you have the best of intentions, but they have to be limited to only financially supporting the school, not running it. I want your financial obligation to be clearly spelled out. I don’t want us ever to say that we can’t do something because it’s too expensive.”

And everything was spelled out. Jayne had lawyers draw up a contract that included everything I wanted. I hired a contract lawyer to make sure I was getting everything. Jayne made concessions that she wouldn’t have ordinarily made because she trusted me or because she was so desperate to start the school, or more likely a combination of the two.

Next, I met with the president of AU to explain what I was planning to do. When he heard about Peter’s position and Jayne’s family background, he gladly agreed to give me a leave for a year. These were people who could eventually be tapped for support for the university. To sweeten the deal, I offered to take an unpaid leave. I really had no money concerns since I inherited a great deal of money after my mother’s death.

The next year was a whirlwind of activity. Now my 12 hour days were focused on matters having to do with the Binet Developmental Center. I loved saying that – the Binet Developmental Center. I decided not to use the word *school* because of the multi-disciplinary approach necessary to realize each child’s full potential. This was going to be more than a school; this was going to be a center devoted to the development of the whole child so more than traditional education was to be provided. There would be physical therapy to strengthen a child’s body; occupational therapy to improve a child’s fine motor skills; and speech therapy to enhance a child’s language. Programs in the visual arts, music, and physical education were needed to educate every aspect of a child’s development. But the centerpiece of everything would be the Schmidt Approach and its incorporation of the Montessori Method. There had never been anything like the Binet Center before.

To make the Binet Center come to life, I had to have passionate, competent staff with expertise in all these areas. I contacted the University of Maryland for names of graduates from their physical, occupational, and speech therapy programs. I wanted young people who were passionate about applying what they’d learned. I found dedicated, creative art, music, and physical education teachers who had taught in the Maryland and Virginia schools who wanted the challenge of teaching a new population.

And I contacted the Montessori Institute in New York for names of graduates so I could hire individuals who were well trained and committed to this method.

My interviews with prospective staff members were different from my interviews in Berlin. I didn't care about anyone's political beliefs. I just cared about their belief that all children could learn, and how much they could learn was unknowable until we tried everything. They had to be committed to the principle of proving the impossible possible.

Another unique aspect of my approach was my belief that each child's education needed to be individualized and tailored to meet his unique needs so there had to be a comprehensive evaluation of the child. I wanted to hire a psychologist with expertise in intelligence testing using the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale, the American version of the intelligence test Binet developed in France. He created his test in response to France's move toward universal education of all children, including the handicapped. Binet created his test to identify so called *slow* children so they could be placed in special education programs in the public schools, instead of institutions. Ah, I wished then that America would follow France's lead and enact such legislation, but I had to wait until 1966 for Congress to pass the first laws authorizing educational programs for the handicapped. In 1975, I welcomed the landmark legislation educating **all** handicapped children. It has taken us a while, but we have made great progress, but lots more is still needed.

I contacted the psychology department at Stanford University where the American version of the Binet Test was created by Lewis Terman. He had retired, but I was able to get the names of some graduates of their program who lived in the DC area. I found Judy Rothenberg a New York transplant whose only drawback was her thick New York accent. But that was her **ONLY** drawback. She was not only highly competent, she was as passionate as I was about the capabilities of all children. She designed a model with a testing program that was used as the basis for a resulting educational plan. She believed that diagnosis and treatment were inseparable. A child's strengths and weaknesses had to be identified so the strengths could be used to improve the weaknesses. She believed that all children had strengths, and that it was the responsibility of the psychologist to identify them. Judy was to become my most important staff member. In fact, she was really my partner. She became my new Heidi, well almost.

Judy was an observant Jew who didn't work on Saturdays which put a damper on my seven day work week. She was married to Stu who was an architect. They managed to have three children in a six year period. I don't know how she was able to combine

motherhood with her professional role, but there never seemed to be a problem. Her mother-in-law lived with the family and took care of the children and the house. She was a loving nanny and a maid all rolled up into one.

It's funny but I never thought about the fact that Judy and Stu were Jewish. Many of the people I worked with and socialized with were Jewish. My being German didn't seem to matter to them either. Religion was never an issue or even a matter of discussion. I naively thought that there was just **a little bit** of discrimination in America, like in country club membership and some hiring practices and college admissions. I was optimistic that with time these forms of discrimination would die out. But then I was confronted by the ugly face of anti-semitism in my beloved new country. And the source of this anti-semitism was Peter Schiller himself.

Peter called me one day and asked if he could see me in his office. I could tell from his voice that there was something serious about this call so I insisted that we meet in my office. I said that all school matters had to be discussed in my office. We had a conversation that could have been heard in Nazi Germany twenty years earlier.

"Dorothea, a few of the school board members and I have been concerned about a number of the staff you've hired recently."

"What? Are you questioning the competence of the people I'm hiring?"

"No. We're concerned that a number of them are Jewish, and the school might get a reputation as being a Jewish school. In the last two weeks you've hired two Jews - Judy Rothenberg and Jeff Gephart."

"You fool. Gephart isn't Jewish. He's German. I would have thought that your Nazi nose would have smelled that out. I'm going to say this once and only once. I don't want you or these other board members to ever, ever bring up any issue about the school again. If you do, I will not only quit, I will call the Washington Post to tell them why I quit. I'm sure the investors in the new Germany would love hearing that the old Germany is alive and well and involved in the Deutsche Bank.

Get out of my office. I don't want you ever to talk to me unless I talk to you first. And then I want you to address me as Dr. Schmidt, never Dorothea. Do you understand, you Nazi piece of shit?"

He got up to leave looking like this conversation couldn't be happening. No one could talk to him like this, especially a woman and basically a teacher.

I yelled loudly, "Answer me."

"Yes. I just thought that because of your involvement with Neumann and the party, you would have reacted differently."

"You really thought I was one of you – a closet Nazi. Every day of my life I regret having had anything to do with Neumann and Goebbels and the other destroyers of humanity. I will never be able to overcome the shame I feel for what I did and what I was.

Make sure you tell your father about this conversation so he can share another conversation I had with him ten years ago. Tell him that during that conversation I begged and in this conversation I ordered. Ask him about how he was an accomplice to murder.

Give me the names of the other board members so I can have the same conversation with them."

"I never actually talked to any of the other board members about this. I just told you that because I knew if I talked to them, they would agree with me."

"You're telling me that there are other anti-semites on the board. That makes me feel really good.

It is clear in the contract that you signed that you would never interfere with anything involving the running of the school. You have violated the contract so I have legal grounds to just back out. Is that what you want? Is that what you want for Max?"

"No."

"I saw German society destroyed because of anti-semitism. I witnessed what happened at the University of Berlin when Jewish professors were fired. Higher education was destroyed. I have no intention of seeing my school destroyed by your vicious, barbaric hatred. Get out of my sight."

After he left, I sat in my chair fuming with rage, but at the same time bursting with pride that I had spoken up as I should have done twenty years earlier. I had never spoken to anyone like that in my life. It felt good to vent my feelings on someone who deserved to be vilified. I knew I would follow through with my threats if Peter ever did anything like this again. I was saddened to learn that what I had thought was dead, was not. Anti-semitism was still alive and well, simmering under the surface ready to raise its ugly head

when the time was opportune. Why that idiot thought the time was opportune was beyond me.

Clare came into my office after Peter left. With amazement, she asked, “Did I hear you yelling at Peter?”

“Yes. I’ve never yelled at anyone like that before, but he deserved it. He deserved to be publicly flogged.”

“What did he do?”

“I’ll tell you later when I’m more in control of myself.”

But I needed to tell someone, and of course that someone was Kurt. I called him to tell him that I was dropping by after work. He wasn’t surprised about my encounter with Peter because he heard similar views expressed by some of the Von Braun group of scientists he had emigrated with. At a government sponsored meeting, he went out to dinner with four of these men. It was sort of a reunion. The men spewed their venomous hatred of Einstein, Szilard, and Oppenheimer because of their opposition to the military use of nuclear power. They called them Jew cowards who would have been treated the right way had they lived in Germany. When Kurt heard these vicious tirades, he spoke up and threatened to go public. They couldn’t believe he wasn’t one of them when he had faithfully served the Third Reich and had been saved by their leader, Von Braun. After that, he severed all contacts with these men despite knowing that they might retaliate against him in some way. And they did the following year. The editor of one of the most prestigious journals in physics called to ask if Kurt would accept an invitation to serve on the editorial board of the journal if it was offered. He eagerly accepted, and was told that the editorial board had to be polled for their support, but that was routine. Three days later the editor sheepishly called back to withdraw the invitation saying that someone on the board objected to his appointment. When Kurt looked at the list of board members, he saw the name Ernst Huber. He was one of the scientists at that dinner.

That night I received a call from Elisabeth. She and Franz needed to speak with me and asked me to come to the embassy. I told her if she wanted to see me, we could meet in my office. She asked if we could meet at a restaurant. I said no because I didn’t want to talk in a public setting. It was my office or no meeting. We met the next afternoon in my office.

Elisabeth started off what was an icily, tense meeting with no introductory small talk. “Peter was totally out of line. He should never have tried to interfere with the hiring of the teachers. It doesn’t matter what religion people are as long as they do a good job.”

“What fortune cookie did you get that from? I definitely want the school to go forward, but I don’t want the Schiller name associated with the school in any way.”

“That’s outrageous. I’ve always thought that the school should be the Schiller Center, not the Binet Center, named after some obscure French psychologist. Our name would certainly help the school.”

Franz said, “Our money is funding the school. It’s our school.”

“Oh no, it’s not. Your name would give the school the Nazi seal of approval which I don’t want. I’m going to ask that Peter resign from the board. I also don’t want Jayne on the board because I don’t know if she’ll just be Peter’s puppet.

If you want the school, you have to do it without any public recognition. What’s more important – Max or your name?”

Franz glared back at me. “We can create another school. We’ll find someone else to do this. You think you’re some prima donna just because you were the darling of Rolfe Neumann. You don’t have him and Goebbels to protect you anymore.”

“I’ll ignore what you said. Find someone else. I would love for you to find another person who can do what I do so there would be lots of good schools for the handicapped.”

“With enough money, we can hire away your staff and have someone to do the same thing you’re doing.”

“Go ahead. Be my guest, but I don’t really think you’ll be successful in luring away my staff no matter how much you paid them.”

Franz and I had a staring contest. At last he said, “It would take too long to start a new school, and Max would lose out in the end.”

“That’s right.

Franz, ten years ago we had a phone conversation which I’m sure you recall. I remember every word we exchanged. I begged you not to have your daughter murdered. You did nothing. You have Eva’s blood on your hands. You do too Elisabeth. I acknowledge my part in not even trying to get the animals to stop the murder of my children, but you don’t acknowledge your part in the holocaust.”

Elisabeth said, “Dorothea, we’ve been over this. There was nothing we could do. It’s not important. It’s in the past.”

“Oh, it’s not important. It’s not important that you let your child die. You didn’t try. That’s all you had to do was try. And that was all I had to do. I just needed to say *no* to the soldiers.”

Franz said, “Dorothea, let’s put this behind us and get on with the school.”

“I’ll get on with the school as long as there is no relationship with the Schiller family other than financial. You are going to fully fund the school, but have no other involvement. Is that agreed?”

There was a long silence and finally Franz said, “Yes.”

“I will treat Max like I treated Eva. I will love him and do all I can to make him a fully functioning, happy member of the human race. He may be the first true member of the human race in the Schiller family. Oh no, there was one other. That was Eva, but she’s gone.”

When I got home, Kurt was at my apartment. I told him about the conversation. I was happy that I was going to continue building the school, but I was heartbroken to learn that some things hadn’t changed, that there was still hatred in people’s hearts. And the people with the most hatred were the ones with the most influence.

“Dorothea, I’m surprised at your naivety. You of all people should know. I would have thought that years of living with Rolfe would have made you an expert on spotting it. Evil is alive and well, even here in the greatest democracy of all time. And it’s harder to fight here because it’s overshadowed by the goodness, but it’s still here. It’s insidious.”

I should mention that discrimination against the Jews was nothing compared to discrimination against the blacks in America. When I first got to the states, black issues didn’t receive much public attention, but that changed in the 60’s. In Washington, blacks were in the background. They were the servant class and lived in segregated neighborhoods that whites avoided. In the 60’s, everything changed with the civil rights movement, thanks to Martin Luther King, Kennedy, and Johnson. Great strides were made in public access, employment, and education, but the doors of full access to equal participation in American life have just been partly opened. When we started the Binet Center, we had only one black employee – Charlie, the janitor. Now we have two black teachers and a black accountant. I have no black friends and just a few acquaintances I’ve made through my contacts with the DC public schools. Both the Binet Center and I have a long way to go to help blacks in America realize the American dream for everyone – Jews, blacks, and someday maybe even homosexuals.

After my confrontations with the Schillers, I was filled with renewed vigor to make the school a success. My adrenaline level must have been off the top of the charts. I was aiming to open a trial program in September, 1953 so I had eight months to put everything and everyone in place. I had hired as my assistant a person who was a miracle worker in handling details that were absolutely critical for making the center come alive. And the person I found was the most unlikely candidate - Clare Mason, the fat pimply girl in my child psych class who asked me the question about what I did during the war. After that class interchange, Clare came to see me frequently. She told me that she was haunted by the image of the children in my school being murdered and the question of what she would have done if she were me. After graduation, she took coursework at George Washington University, but felt directionless. So when I asked her if she wanted to be my assistant in building the Binet Center, she jumped at the chance. I can honestly say that without Clare I would never have been able to accomplish what I did. The word *no* was not in Clare's vocabulary. If I worked 12 hours a day, she worked 13. She was the first of many people who helped make the Binet Center successful. The Binet Center was more than me. It was a joint venture of dedicated professionals devoted to realizing a dream to make all children learn to their maximum.

I was occupied with mundane, but critical, tasks like finding a building to house the school, getting furniture and materials, insurance for the school and staff, hiring a secretary, a janitor, and a finance person. I couldn't believe the number of people I needed before I could open the doors of the Binet Center to 25 handicapped children from ages four to seven. I was starting small to identify obstacles before going big. Some obstacles turned out to be minor, like the parent who insisted (in vain) that swimming be taught to all the children because her son liked swimming, and some major, like a student going into shock after an allergic reaction and no one on the staff with the appropriate training to help the student. Fortunately, the student got help in time after we called the police.

We opened September 14, 1953. Of course, Max Schiller was among the first students. Others were the children of a senator, a department store owner, and other rich and powerful people living in the DC area. After the first year, I was given another leave from American. I was using AU students as teaching assistants so the president felt that the school was a great field-based approach to education which he touted to his contributors and potential students. The affiliation between AU and the Binet Center has proven mutually advantageous. Over the years, I've continued my relationship with AU, serving as an adjunct professor, usually teaching one course a semester. I still love college teaching. And I always have a fresh crop of new teachers from my AU students.

The next year we expanded to 40 children and raised the top age to 10. Every year we added more children until today we have 300 children from 3 to 18 in our DC school. We expanded our population to include poor, minority children by providing scholarships. I worked with the DC public schools to identify handicapped children who needed more than the public schools could provide. We've expanded to other cities. We now have Binet Centers in Boston and Miami. We have a school in San Francisco which is affiliated with Stanford's Psychology Department. I even had a request to start a school abroad, in London, but I refused to go international. Maybe I was afraid that I'd get a request from Berlin.

In 1968, we built our DC building. It had everything. The specially designed rooms for therapy, art, music, and physical education were unique. The walls in the art wing were lined with my mother's paintings, not the portraits. Those were at my home. So Marta Schmidt lived on as part of the Binet Center. She would be so proud to have her paintings appreciated by the eager eyes of the students of the Center.

In 1958, I invited Heidi to visit the school. She was reluctant to leave Ansbach. She had made a life for herself teaching there, and had many friends who were like family to her. Somehow, she found the strength to resume living without Fritz, Otto, Marta, and me. I marvel at the resilience of humans. I arranged for her to fly into New York where I met her at the airport. I welcomed her with a bunch of flowers as Kurt had welcomed me ten years earlier. Kurt hosted a dinner for her and invited our German expatriate friends. She spent a week at the school and enjoyed it even though she didn't understand a lot of what was going on. But she did understand the art program and loved seeing her ideas given a renewed life. When she looked at Marta's pictures in the school corridors, she described exactly where on the estate the scene was based.

We resumed our friendship as if we had last seen each other the previous week. We spent nights talking much like we had with Marta in Ansbach. She made me realize how much I missed having a friend. I had a world of people working for me, I had people I knew from AU and from Baltimore, but I didn't have a friend like Heidi. No one could ever be a friend like Heidi. Our shared experiences of overcoming the depths of despair cemented our friendship. I asked her to stay in America with me. I knew that she could help with the arts program despite the language barriers. But Heidi wanted to go home to Ansbach and Germany. America was not for her and a return to a school for children with disabilities was not for her. So after two weeks, she returned to Germany. My heart ached because I knew I would never see her again. She died eight years later. I will always treasure her for what she taught me and how she molded me into the person I am today.

The Binet Center was a success beyond my wildest dreams. Like my Berlin School, we were successful to varying degrees with different children. We helped Max speak and even read functional words. We trained him for a job at a supermarket where he stocked shelves. He needed lots of structure, but he was part of the working world and he loved being with people. Shoppers would be amazed to learn that the boy meticulously lining up soup cans was heir to the Carter banking fortune.

Chapter 10

The Good Life, Mostly

The years building the school flew by. For the most part they were happy. In fact, there were some days when I couldn't wait to get out of bed and go to the school. I had so much energy I could have fueled the lights of Washington. I would never have believed I could have been as happy when Leon left me. I could never have built the school if Leon and I had married. The Binet Center was my whole life. I couldn't have broken off a piece of myself to devote to Leon and another piece to the school. It was all or nothing.

And the Binet Center was successful beyond my wildest dreams. One of the things that showed the strength of our school was our staff retention rate. Most years no one quit unless someone was moving away or staying home with kids or going to grad school. The staff had the same burning passion for the school as I had. Another measure of our success was the success of our graduates. Thanks to our pre-vocational program, most graduates were employed at jobs that matched their skill levels, and a few went on to college. Hank, one of our former dyslexic students returned as an art teacher. Hank's reading may have been limited, but his creativity wasn't. He exemplified the positive result of our philosophy to identify each individual's unique strengths and talents and use them to compensate for their weaknesses, and ultimately achieve success.

Judy proved not only an outstanding psychologist, but a close collaborator on publicizing our results. We published articles in refereed professional journals which gave us credibility in academic circles. We wrote a book for parents and another for educators, both of which had wide readership. We funneled the royalties from our books and professional fees into scholarships for needy kids. We made presentations at professional meetings and consulted with school systems.

The most challenging thing we had to do was set up other Binet Centers throughout the country. That meant going through all the steps we had to go through originally – hiring staff, finding an appropriate building, and working with parents. But the most important thing was hiring a passionate, committed executive director to lead each center. In Miami, we fired three people before we found a good match.

The Schiller family continued to honor their financial obligation to the school until Max left at the age of 21. By that time, I no longer needed their money. I was successful in securing substantial funding from corporations and several family foundations. I never spoke to the Schillers again. Elisabeth and Franz returned to Germany a few years after our confrontation. Both died soon after Franz stepped down from public life. They sustained themselves on power, and when it ended, so did they. I'm sorry to say I felt no sorrow at their passing. I avoided Peter and Jayne when we found ourselves at the same social gatherings.

Our biggest fund raiser was our annual gala banquet at the DC Hilton. We filled the grand ballroom with 1,200 generous donors. I looked forward to hosting these galas every year because I could publicly highlight our achievements and accomplishments. I shamelessly bragged about the teachers, the students, and the over-all success of the school. Of course, every year I wore a new gown so I would look glamorous in the next day's photos in the Washington Post showing the elite of Washington society. Just before I die, I'll probably shop for the perfect dress to be buried in, and it won't be black, unless it's a strapless Oleg Cassini.

Despite all the time I spent working, I was able to squeeze in a social life, although much of it revolved around the school. I was invited to lots of parties hosted by Binet Center parents or sponsors. Occasionally, I saw my old AU and Baltimore friends.

I had a few affairs, but nothing lasting. I liked dating and being taken to the opera, the ballet, Washington parties, and elegant restaurants. I dated a prominent Jewish lawyer for a while. I don't know what it is about me and Jewish men. We never discussed my being German, my past in Germany, or his being Jewish. These were unimportant to him. I liked having sex and having someone accompany me to my social engagements, but I never wanted to marry or have a permanent relationship. Fortunately, I had no trouble finding men who felt the same way.

In 1958, I bought a house because I needed more space for the parties I hosted, but most importantly I wanted to be physically rooted to my new country. This would be the first and only house I ever owned. I'd inherited a considerable amount of money from my mother after the sale of the estate so cost was no object.

Years ago, I loved the excitement of Berlin, and now I loved the excitement of Washington. But they were dramatically different cities. Berlin symbolized superiority and hatred, with a tantalizing coating of evil. Washington symbolized freedom and diversity, with a sweet coating of optimism. The diversity was readily apparent whenever I saw the gawking, gaudily dressed tourists from every state and country; the government workers looking self-important as they sweated through their suits on torrid summer days; the black workers toiling on the streets and in the restaurants keeping the city running smoothly; and the protesters with anti-war signs marching in front of the White House. If anti-war protesters ever appeared on the streets of Berlin, they would have been executed on the spot. DC streets were clogged with bumper-to-bumper cars oozing putrid smells and befogging the air. Scaffolding latticed the sidewalks because new buildings were being built or old ones remodeled, reflecting the booming economy sweeping the country. I was overwhelmed by the city's intensity whenever I carefully trod the streets.

When I had free time, which was not often, I visited the museums and memorials. I had a personal tour of the White House when Johnson was in office, and an aide to Sam Rayburn, Speaker of the House, gave me a tour of the Capitol. I even trudged up the 897 steps to the top of the Washington Monument. I toured the art collections at the National Gallery and the Corcoran so often that I knew the locations of my favorite paintings. Whenever there was an exhibit of decadent artists, I was sure to attend because I liked the art and because it was a form of protest I couldn't exercise in the past.

After touring almost every house for sale in DC, I settled on a big house in the Cleveland Park neighborhood where some of my friends lived. It had a view of the spires of the Washington Cathedral so whenever I walked out the front door or sat on the front porch, I knew I was in the capitol of the US and the center of the world.

I gutted the interior and hired an interior designer to redesign the house in a modern style. I created a long living room extending the length of the house with the front windows looking out on the street and the rear ones on the back yard. I filled the room with groupings of leather furniture in black, white, and red centered around the two marble fireplaces, one near the front of the house and one near the back. The house was on a narrow, long lot so I could see into my neighbors' houses, but the back yard was bordered by tall, thick trees creating privacy. In summer with the trees in full bloom, it was hard to believe that I lived in the middle of a bustling city.

My mother's paintings covered the walls in some rooms, starkly contrasting with the modern motif. They were there as a constant reminder of the woman I fell in love

with at the age of 33. I kept the paintings of myself in my bedroom. They were too personal to show visitors. I often studied them to gauge the changes in me since I left Germany. I wondered what my portrait would look like now if Marta had lived to paint the American me. Would traces of the sadness that filled my face in Germany still be evident? Would she portray the optimism, the excitement, and happiness I felt?

I thrived on entertaining and used any reason for a party: the tenth anniversary of the school; the first anniversary of my giving up smoking (which was one of the hardest things I've ever done); Kurt's promotion to assistant director of APL; the marriage of teachers from my school; the celebration of babies born to my teachers; my getting citizenship. Ah - a word about that. One of the highlights of my second life was when I took the oath of allegiance at my naturalization ceremony in a DC courtroom on July 4, 1960. I invited friends and teachers from the school. There must have been 25 people there to see me become an American. I clearly and loudly articulated the words as I repeated the oath...

"I hereby declare, an oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or a citizen..."

That I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.

I proudly waved my little American flag and immediately registered to vote. Unfortunately, I lived in DC so I couldn't vote for president. I regretted not being able to vote for John Kennedy who was one of my idols. When I watched him deliver his famous *Ichbeinein Berliner* speech at the Berlin Wall, I was filled with pride at what America was doing in its fight against communism and its efforts at rebuilding Germany. Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963 filled me with a sorrow I never imagined I could feel for a public figure. Like everyone alive at that time, I remember that day vividly. I was at school when Clare came into my office looking like her mother had died. Unable to speak, she turned on the portable T.V. in my office. I saw Walter Cronkite lower his glasses as he emotionally said that the president had died at 1:00 P.M. I was glued to the T.V. for most of the day. People came and went, but I didn't notice them. I was living in Dallas. I pulled myself away from the T.V. to drive home where I continued watching T.V. until the late hours. I watched more T.V. that week than I had in my whole life before.

Along with thousands of others, I stood in line at the Capitol to pay tribute to Kennedy as his coffin lay in state. Clare came with me because she, too, adored Kennedy

and was crushed by his assassination. We went at 2:00 A.M. hoping that the wait would be shorter, but it wasn't. We stood in the freezing cold for four hours. As I walked by the coffin, I couldn't cry. The cold had frozen my tears, but not my heart. It was breaking over the death of this great man who might never be replaced. He meant a lot to me, not only because of what he did for Germany, but more importantly for his dreams for the greatness America and Americans could attain. He embodied values not found in public figures; he embodied hope and belief in the goodness of man. I visited his grave at Arlington National Cemetery every few months so I could keep his dreams alive in me.

After the naturalization ceremony, I had a cookout in my yard. Kurt was in charge of grilling the hot dogs which were obligatory if you were becoming an American. He said he grilled almost 150 hot dogs so you can imagine how many people we had. We consumed 12 apple pies. That was the ultimate gourmet American meal – hot dogs and apple pie. I led everyone in singing “God Bless America” as we waved little American flags. I know some people thought that I was overly emotional and even goofy. I didn't care. Only an immigrant, especially from a totalitarian country, can truly appreciate what being an American means – FREEDOM.

In 1962, I had a scare that my life would collapse. I feared that my past might be exposed when I got a call from a man named Marty Weiss. He said that he worked for the Simon Weisenthal Center in Vienna. I knew a little about the Center because it had been involved in the capture of Adolph Eichmann by the Israelis in 1960. How elated I was when he was captured. I remember Neumann saying that Eichmann was a perfect example of German efficiency because of how he arranged the transport of Jews to concentration camps. He personified the desk murderer. He may have killed only a few people with a weapon, but he was more dangerous than the animals who pulled the triggers. I watched his trial on T.V., and thought how appropriate it was for him to be caged in a glass box, just like a rat. In 1962, Kurt and I toasted his execution with German wine.

Weiss wanted to talk to me about something personal that he didn't want to discuss on the phone. My heart froze under an avalanche of fears and apprehensions about exposure of my Nazi past. What would happen to me if my past became known? Would my citizenship be revoked? What would happen to my beloved school and my children? I told him to come to my house that night. I immediately left work saying I was sick, and I was sick. When I got home I threw up until there wasn't a morsel of food in my digestive system. I sweated as I endlessly paced the length of my living room.

At precisely 8:00 the door bell rang. There stood Marty Weiss - a bald, unassuming 40ish year old man who would be lost in any crowd. He asked if I wanted to see any ID, and I said yes although I knew he wasn't lying about his identity. He showed me his Israeli passport and asked if I wanted to converse in English or German. He was fluent in German because his family had emigrated from Vienna to Israel before the war. I told him that I never spoke German anymore. I preferred the language of my new homeland.

"There are reports that Rolfe Neumann is alive and living in Argentina. We want to know if he has contacted you. We know about your relationship with him."

That sentence, '*We know about your relationship with him,*' was like a dagger. My past was open to those who knew how to access it, and Mossad knew how.

"Neumann is dead. He committed suicide along with Goebbels."

"His body was never definitively identified so we're not sure about that. Some of the bodies found with Goebbels were burned beyond recognition so it was assumed that one of them was probably Neumann's. As you know, there are many ex-Nazis living in South America, especially Argentina and Brazil. Eichmann and Mengele aren't the only ones there. The fascist South American governments have welcomed fleeing Nazis with open arms. We've kept tabs on Eichmann and others for years. Recently we have found a man who looks remarkably like Neumann. He's been helping the secret police make people the government doesn't like disappear. This method attracts less attention than outright murder and in its own way is more effective.

I'm going to show you some pictures and I want you to tell me if there's the remotest chance this person is Neumann."

He lined up a series of photos: the man walking down the street; the man sitting in an outdoor café; the man having his hair cut as he sits in a barber's chair; the man kissing a woman on the doorstep of a house; and the man dancing the tango with a different woman in a cafe. The man had brown hair, but was built like Rolfe - short and thin. I analyzed the close-up photo of the man's face in the barber's chair. The man's features were definitely similar to Rolfe's. His eyes were that same light blue color. His nose and angular cheekbones were remarkably like Rolfe's.

"He does resemble him, but it's hard to tell because of the hair color. Obviously, you know he was blond."

"We know this man dyes his hair. We know that he has very light blond hair."

“Ah, I assume you got some of his hair from the barber. Do you have any pictures of his hands?”

“Why?”

“For as long as I knew him, Neumann bit his nails to the quick. I doubt whether this would be a habit he could break especially if he were on the run.”

Weiss looked through his briefcase until he found a close-up photo of the man holding a glass up to his lips. His nails were clearly visible. It was obvious that this man did not bite his nails.

“That’s good information to have.”

“There’s another reason I know it’s not him. I know it sounds silly, but I don’t get an emotional reaction when I look at this man. If it were Neumann, bile would well up in my throat from the hatred I feel for him. I would know him no matter how he disguised himself.”

Weiss ignored my comment, probably thinking that I didn’t feel hatred for him over the ten years of our affair. “Has Neumann ever tried to contact you since the war?”

“No. If you know about my relationship with him, you know I never wanted to see him after he did nothing to try to stop the killing of the children in my school.”

“Yes, we know, but we also know that he never stopped loving you. And if he were alive, he would want to be with you again. We know because we’ve talked to Heidi Klemperer.”

That was a shock. I wished that Heidi had written or called me to tell me so that I could have been prepared for Weiss’s visit.

“I’m sure she told you how much I hated him. I was overjoyed when I found out he committed suicide. And I have no doubt that he did. He was a follower and would do whatever Goebbels ordered him to do. He wouldn’t have wanted to live without Goebbels. What makes you think this is him?”

“Someone identified this man as Neumann.”

“I think someone is trying to trick you and cover up who this man really is.”

“Look carefully again at this man and tell me if you think he might be anyone you knew or saw back in Germany.”

I studied all the photos for a long time, and then said, “No. I can’t really say he reminds me of anyone from the past.”

“Contact me if you ever do hear from anyone from Germany.”

“I doubt whether I will if I haven’t already been contacted. It’s been so many years. No one has ever tried to contact me since I came here. Anyhow, how can I reach you? I can’t just call Vienna or Israel and ask for Marty Weiss.”

“Talk to Stu Rothenberg. He’ll know how to contact me.”

“Stu Rothenberg. Judy’s husband?”

I was shocked. My closest collaborator’s husband had ties to this man, whoever he was.

“He’s a strong supporter of Israel and would know how to contact me if it was ever necessary. Thank you for seeing me. I’m sure I don’t have to tell you to keep my visit confidential for both our sakes.”

I felt enormous relief as the door closed behind him. Every muscle in my body untensed. I laughed aloud at the the release of the pressure that had strangled me since Weiss walked into my home. I felt like skipping around the backyard, shouting. *I’m safe. My life can continue. I can be Dorothea Schmidt, American and Director of the Binet Center. My school is saved.*

This visit by Weiss was like a scene from a spy novel. Had Ian Fleming or Graham Greene written what had happened to me? I couldn’t decide whether to bring this up with Stu or not. If I did, I’d have to tell Judy and him about my relationship with Neumann. I couldn’t do that. I never learned if Stu knew about Weiss’s visit and kept it secret, or if he never knew. And that was the last time anything from my Nazi past came into my life. It’s dead now, and I hope it stays that way even after I’m dead. I’ve had two separate lives – one in Germany and one in America, and I don’t want the first to spill over onto the second. I consider my birthday as September 19, 1948, the day I first stepped foot in the United States. But the Binet Center would never have been possible without the Berlin School for the Handicapped so there has been some spill-over and that has been good.

The only other significant event in my life during that period was in 1973 when Kurt, my beloved Kurt, had a stroke. He was at work when it happened so he was taken to nearby Johns Hopkins Hospital where he got excellent treatment. For two months, he

had intensive physical therapy at a rehab hospital. Fortunately, the stroke didn't affect his speech or cognitive abilities. It did impair the movement of his left hand, arm, and leg. He walked haltingly and his left hand was curled up at his side. Reluctantly, he retired from APL. When I asked him to come live with me, he surprised me by readily agreeing. Our relationship that started so many years ago in the Schmidt apartment in Berlin had grown stronger with time. Now we were the most important people in each other's lives. Brother and sister. But more. Kurt had become like a father figure to me and I had become like a mother figure to him so we were parental siblings. When Kurt moved in with me, we became even closer. We shared all our secrets, everything. I've often wondered why we grew so close. Maybe it's because everyone desperately needs a significant other, where the relationship is based on sex, or not. Our relationship is based on blood kinship, shared childhood experiences, respect for what we have achieved professionally, and most importantly, a true liking of each other.

I hosted a retirement party for Kurt. Because Kurt and Leon had kept in contact despite living miles apart, he included Leon's name to the guest list. Over the years I'd been curious about Leon, but never asked Kurt about him. Now I was ready to know about his life over the past 20 years. Kurt told me that when Leon moved to Chicago, he was as broken up as I was. He had trouble adjusting to his new job. He told Fermi about me, and Fermi insisted that he get psychological help. So he saw a psychiatrist that his father had trained back in Berlin. The psychiatrist was Jewish which helped him resolve issues he had with me. The psychiatrist introduced him to his niece, Louise. They married and had three sons. So Leon achieved his dream of perpetuating the Ackerman line as well as the Ackerman name. Kurt said that Louise was being treated for breast cancer so Leon wouldn't be able to come to the party. I was glad. I wasn't ready to face Leon, but I knew the time for facing him would come someday in the future.

I decided that this was a good time to answer Leon's letter of 20 years ago. It was a lengthy, newsy letter in which I updated him about my life, detailing all the success of the school. I invited him to the party, but said that I knew about his wife's illness, and that he wouldn't be able to attend. I told him how happy I was that he had children and that I hoped to see him again one day. When I re-read the letter, it was apparent that I had healed. I had loved Leon, but it was completely over. Leon had taught me that I could love a man passionately. After our affair, I had moved on with my life and realized my dream of creating the second Berlin School for the Handicapped. Writing that letter was my way of closing off the chapter about Leon in my life story. I hadn't realized how resilient I was until I re-read the letter for the third time.

I invited the APL staff as well as Kurt's friends, some of whom were obviously homosexual. Kurt no longer feared being exposed as gay, and any resulting repercussions to APL or to him personally. I asked that his friends write testimonials that I collected in an album and presented to Kurt. I invited Von Braun who, as I expected, couldn't come. He wrote a testimonial about Kurt's brilliance and contribution to science, but there was nothing personal in his statement.

There were endless toasts and roasts. I learned things that I didn't know about my brother: he was a prankster, especially when he surprised people with a rubber fart cushion; he had secret stashes of chocolates in his bottom desk drawer; he handwrote notes of encouragement to staff members when they were in need of support; and he was the first to visit people when they were in distress. For two years, he drove one of the APL secretaries to her cancer treatment whenever her husband was unavailable. When a colleague died, he helped pay for the college education for the man's son for three years until he graduated. He never talked about his good deeds. He was a truly modest man. I also learned that he was an active member of the Democratic Party, the ACLU, and a group of scientists opposed to the use of nuclear weapons. I realized that I didn't know the man I loved more than anyone in the world as much as I thought I did, but that was soon to change.

What a joyous evening for all. Kurt was celebrated for the outstanding scientist and kind, caring human being he was. I raised my champagne glass and said, "To the greatest, most loving brother in the world." Then I gave him the juiciest kiss on both cheeks leaving perfect lipstick imprints. Someone took a picture of me kissing him. I blew it up and it hangs in the kitchen where we see it every time we sit down to eat.

Although he retired from APL, Kurt wanted to continue being productive despite his physical disability so he got a part-time job teaching physics courses at the University of Maryland. He taught two graduate courses every Tuesday and Thursday and stayed all day to meet with students. He couldn't drive so I arranged to have a driver pick him up at 7:30 and return him at 6:00. He did such a good job that he was offered a full-time position, but he felt that was more than he could handle. Instead, he took on supervising a few doctoral students in their research and ended up spending two more days a week at the office. So, in fact, he did end up working full time.

I encouraged Kurt to invite his friends to the house since it was now his home so he had his gay friends over. This was a new social group for me, and I found that I enjoyed the charming company of these men. Kurt had his own bedroom and bath that I had fixed up at the back of the first floor so I didn't know if he had any relations. I would

have been happy if he did. In a way it would have been like our teen-age years, only I wouldn't be bringing anyone home, only Kurt would.

Kurt and I became like an old married couple. Every evening when I didn't have any obligations, we'd have a late dinner and share our day's experiences and discuss the news of the day. Gradually, Kurt opened up about his past. Over the years I'd told him all about my life in Germany and my experiences with Leon, but I didn't know that he had experiences that paralleled mine. One night after we had watched a T.V. program on the rebuilding of Germany, Kurt said,

"You've never really asked me about my life during the war. I know you didn't want to meddle, and you knew that I would tell you when I was ready, and now I'm ready. In a way I had experiences like you had because I witnessed atrocities first hand and never spoke up for fear of being shot. I, too, consider myself a coward.

Of course, you know that I worked for Von Braun on the V-2 rocket program at a research facility at Peenemunde. I worked 16 hours a day. I would have worked 24 if Von Braun had asked me to. I did whatever he wanted. I loved the creativity behind what we were doing. I tried not to think of the results of what we were doing, and how the V-2 could have changed the course of the war. If it had been successful, Hitler would have won. What do you think the world would have been like?"

"I can't even begin to conceive of a world dominated by the Nazis. I like to think I would have committed suicide rather than live in a totalitarian world, but I know I'm a survivor. I would do anything to survive even adjust to a world under Hitler."

"I probably would have continued working as an unthinking robot which I was when I worked for Von Braun. Anyhow, the rockets we designed were built at a factory in Mittelwerk staffed by slave laborers from a nearby concentration camp. I went to the factory regularly to monitor how the progress of the rocket construction. I witnessed conditions that were beyond horrific. Filthy, emaciated, dehumanized men were doing work fit only for animals in conditions one would expect in hell. After the war, I learned that 20,000 Mittelwerk laborers died there from exhaustion, starvation, hanging, and being shot. Once when I was there, I saw a man hanging by chains around his wrists from a crane. This was a modern-day, mechanical form of crucifixion. This was his punishment for trying to sabotage the production line. Try to picture this scene in this vast cave where these giant rockets were being assembled. The grease and filth were everywhere. The thunderous noise made it impossible to have a conversation. After that, I tried to avoid going to Mittelwerk, but there were times when I had no choice. I preferred the safety of my lab trying, unsuccessfully, to erase the images I'd witnessed. Once when

I said something to Von Braun about the conditions there, he told me to keep my mouth shut or I'd be shot. He said he once said something about some particularly cruel treatment he witnessed and a soldier pointed a gun at him and threatened to shoot him for traitorous talk. Here was the creator of the rockets Hitler desperately needed for victory who would be shot by a lowly soldier if he did not show blind obedience. So, like you and Von Braun, I chose not to say anything. Silence was my form of complicity in the murder of thousands of slave laborers.”

“Your situation was a lot worse because you actually knew you would be shot. I didn't think I would be shot if I had said no to the soldiers who took my children. You were an eye witness who could swear to the atrocities that happened when they were denied years later. You and everyone in Von Braun's group were dangerous.”

“I know you have dreams about your children being burned. I have dreams about that man being crucified. Sometimes a face that looks like Christ is superimposed on him. I suppose that is appropriate since Christ was Jewish like the slaves at Mittelwerk.

Of course I was a member of the Nazi Party. We all had to join and pay our dues regularly. I never went to meetings and I destroyed my membership card before I left. There couldn't be any evidence of my membership if I wanted to get out of Germany. Interesting story about how I actually did get out. I was part of Operation Paper Clip which was a US program to get top German scientists to work on the American rocket program. We were valuable war booty in the upcoming arms and space race against the Russians. But way before that we had to get to America. Von Braun wanted us to surrender to the Americans, knowing that if we surrendered to the Russians we would be working like the slaves at Mittelwerk. By chance, Von Braun's brother found some American soldiers and told them about Von Braun and the rest of us. He led the soldiers to us and they smuggled us behind American lines. I hate to think of what my life would have been like if we had been taken by the Russians. I probably would have been raped like the women. We were taken to the states and had our pasts bleached. To be part of Operation Paper Clip, we had to prove that we weren't members of the Nazi party or supporters of Nazi militarism so we were given false employment records and biographies. When I arrived here, I spent a year at a base at Ft. Bliss, Texas before I was sent to APL. If you think you don't want people to know about your past, you must realize that covering my past is the most important thing in my life. But no one has ever asked me about my past, and I certainly haven't voluntarily told anyone but you and that has taken over 25 years.”

“I can’t believe I was unaware of what went on with the V-2 program. I knew there was slave labor, but it was like the situation with the concentration camps. I knew these existed, but I refused to think about them. When I thought of slavery, I thought of the blacks in America, not Europeans. The slaves in Germany kept the war machine humming, just like the slaves in America kept the South’s economy booming.

I’ve noticed that you’ve been distant from Von Braun since you came to the states and yet you were his devoted acolyte when you were in Germany. What changed?”

“I think it was because I saw him in a different light. I saw him as an opportunist. He became Americanized, not because of his beliefs in American ideals but because it was expedient. He was the center of attention here and got the adoration he craved. I gave him that in Germany, but I lost it here in the states.”

“How do you feel about America?”

“Like you. I’m so appreciative of the freedoms. I can say what I believe even if it got me bumped from the editorial board of a great journal, and I can do what I want. I won’t be executed for being gay although I could be arrested in certain circumstances. And I have been discriminated against because of my homosexuality. No, like you, I’m glad to be an American. I didn’t celebrate getting my citizenship like you did, but I was equally happy.”

“How have you been discriminated against because you’re gay?”

“Years ago when the directorship of the lab came open, I applied and was interviewed. Most of my co-workers thought I would get the job because I was the most qualified. Right before the announcement was to be made, I got a call from the president of Hopkins who was overseeing the search. When I got the call, I naively thought he was going to offer me the job and wanted to tell me in person first. When I walked into his office, I knew this was not going to be the case. The whole search committee was present, looking like they were at a funeral. No one made eye contact with me. I will always remember the president’s words:

‘Kurt, we’ve done a thorough analysis of the credentials of all the candidates and there’s no doubt that you’re the most qualified for the position. We know you could lead the lab to new heights in research and development, but we can’t offer you the job. You have not hidden the fact that you’re homosexual so it’s common knowledge. Because of this, we cannot jeopardize the future of the lab. We know there are many people in positions of power who would use your sexual orientation against funding for the lab.

There would be conspiracy theories about you being blackmailed by the Russians into giving them secrets so as not to be exposed.

What we'd like to do is give you the position as assistant director so we can benefit from your expertise. We'll promote Barry Kantor from Assistant Director to Director. He doesn't have your scientific expertise, but he's good at public relations and fund raising. I think the two of you can be a great team.

Is this agreeable to you?'

I should have told them that I needed time to think about my answer, but I was overwhelmed. I had never expected my homosexuality to be an impediment to my career, especially here in the U.S. I was naïve enough to think that people didn't even know I was gay because I thought I was discreet. How wrong I was. Anyhow, I accepted the position on the spot. When I left and re-considered what I'd done, I knew I couldn't back down so I took the Assistant Director job which I've loved because I really have been in charge of all research and development without the title of Director. There was no way I could have fought against their decision, and if I had, I would have been out.

We talked about discrimination against Jews and Blacks, but the discrimination against homosexuals is more insidious. It will be a hundred years, if ever, before gays can overcome discrimination.

After our conversation, I held Kurt in my arms and stroked his hair like a mother. I wanted to ease the pain of his nightmarish memories. I was amazed at his ability to forgive and go on with his life. I don't know if I would have had that forgiveness in me. I think I would have been bitter, very bitter.

It would take another two years before I would learn of Kurt's other secret, one that shocked me even more than the others he had shared with me. Joan, one of my teachers who was white, married Lester, a black man who taught at Howard University. I hosted a dinner party for them as I always did when my teachers married. I felt it was especially important to show my support of her because intermarriage in DC, like the rest of the country, was still taboo as Joan and Lester would experience every time they went into a restaurant or checked into a motel or walked down the street holding hands. Although Martin Luther King had led the country in making strides to overcome discrimination in many areas, intermarriage was not one. It wasn't until 1967 that the Supreme Court invalidated laws prohibiting interracial marriages.

After the party, Kurt said, "I know what they're going through because the only man I ever loved was black."

When he spoke these words, I felt like an atomic bomb had exploded in front of me.

“What? I can’t believe what you’re saying. Who was this person? When did this happen? Why didn’t you tell me before?”

“It was ten years ago. I never told you because of the pain I feel whenever I think of it. Even now, so many years later, I hurt just thinking about what happened. I’m not ashamed of the affair. It’s just something that I couldn’t share until now. It was a part of me that was private and off-limits to the world.

I always had breakfast in this restaurant next to the lab where a lot of the staff hung out. It was called The Atomic Café and a black guy named Oliver Harley worked there. Every morning for a year, we’d joke back and forth. Then one day, our hands touched as he cleared the dish I’d eaten from. We looked in each other’s eyes and knew there was something between us. After that, we were stand-offish. But one stormy morning, I waited over several cups of coffee for the rain to lighten. He came over and looked in my eyes and talked about how he loved the rain, especially if he could stay in bed under the covers. I knew this was it. I took out my card and wrote my home address and phone number and passed it to him, making sure no one noticed.

That night he called and asked if he could drop by to see me. That was the start of our year-long love affair. I think our relationship started because of the attraction of opposites. He was as dark black as I was snow white. He had a wide nose compared to my straight nose. His hair was as kinky as mine was straight. And most of all there was the excitement and danger of a black and a white man having passionate sex. A black man and a white woman or a black woman and a white man would be okay, MAYBE, but never a black man and a white man. That’s two evils – interracial relations and homosexuality. No, there was another one. He was married so there was also adultery. But there was more than sex and excitement and danger...we fell in love. The first two months all we did was have sex. It was like nothing I’d ever experienced. It was overpowering. But gradually we started talking about ourselves and our lives. Sometimes we didn’t even have sex. We just held hands and talked. The more we talked, the more we bonded. We loved each other for who we were, not what we were.

I knew that Oliver was married and had three kids because he had their school pictures on the wall by the cash register. He talked about how much he loved them and his fear of ever losing them. They were more important to him than I was, maybe because he didn’t have a father. I accepted that. He even loved his wife. We tried to understand how he could love a woman and me too. And I tried to understand how I

could love him. We shared no interests. He was uneducated and lower middle class and came from a culture that I couldn't begin to understand. His family was all important. I didn't have a family other than you. We never found answers to any of the questions we asked.

We usually met four or five times a week for a hurried hour after he closed the café at 9:00. His wife worked as a nurse's aide at a hospital and wasn't home until midnight. His sister who lived next door kept the kids until he got home. Oliver had been a cook on a destroyer in the navy during the Korean War and he used this experience to work as a cook at the restaurant which was owned by his wife's uncle. All the people who worked there were relatives. Oliver asked me to stop coming into the restaurant because he was afraid someone would sense what was going on between us.

That year of our affair was the happiest of my life. It was more than just the great sex. It was a feeling of completeness when we were together. We might have gone on meeting secretly for years had I not made a fatal mistake. For our first anniversary I gave Oliver a turquoise ring. I warned him not to wear it because people would wonder where he got such an expensive ring so he only wore it when he came to my apartment. The first thing he did when he came in the door was to take the ring out of a drawer and put it on. It was like a wedding ring. But one day, he forgot to take it off. I realized it soon after he left. There was nothing I could do. I couldn't call his house. When he got home, he hid it in one of his drawers. The next morning his wife who never went through his things was looking for his wallet to get some money for the kids' school pictures, when she found the ring.

She confronted him with it. She suspected that he was having an affair because they rarely had sex over the last year. She thought he was having an affair with a woman. She was sickened to learn it was a man. She told him that the affair had to stop and he must never have another affair with a man or she would expose him and he would be ostracized from the family and would never see his children again. He made a choice that I could understand; he chose his children over me. He never came to see me again. I found the ring in my mail box a week later. I cried as I kissed the ring over and over. Then I threw it out. I couldn't look at it ever again. I grieved like you did after Leon left you. I never went near the Atomic Café again. And I never loved another man again. I've had relations with guys, but nothing serious."

"There must be something genetic in all this. Both of us have loved people who are taboo, who we could never have a permanent relationship with. And we picked

people who were the most despised by the Nazis – Blacks and Jews. Maybe that was our way of protesting Nazism, of rejecting our heritage.”

So despite Kurt’s stroke and a scare about my past being exposed, life was good until 1978 when it went from being good to being great.

Chapter 11

Redemption

On May 11, 1978, Clare came into my office with a strange look on her face. It was a *mélange* of excitement, anticipation, jubilation. She announced that I had a call from a Barbara McKee of the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation. This was a foundation established by the Kennedy family in honor of their eldest son, Joseph, who was killed while flying a mission against a German V-2 base in World War II. It’s interesting to think of the ironic link between Kurt’s research into rocketry and Kennedy’s death. Annually, the foundation awarded prizes to leaders and innovators in the field of mental retardation. This was the Kennedy family’s way of also honoring the Kennedy sister, Rosemary, who had mental retardation. The past prizes had been awarded to physicians and scientists, some of whom had pioneered understanding of the genetics underlying some forms of mental retardation. Up to that point no psychologist or educator had received the prize.

Mrs. McKee, as she introduced herself, asked if I could arrange to visit her at her office in Boston sometime early the next week. She said that, of course, my expenses would be taken care of. She did not volunteer what the meeting would be about, and I didn’t ask. We both knew. I looked at my calendar, and said that I could see her the next Monday. Although my Monday was booked solid with appointments, I knew they could be cancelled to make room for this number one priority. I told her that I would fly up late Sunday night so I could meet with her at 10:00 A.M.

As soon as I got off the phone, Clare rushed into my office bursting to know what Mrs. McKee had called about. I told her that she wanted to see me at the Kennedy Foundation headquarters in Boston, but not why. Clare was sure I would be given the award. I told her that was a strong possibility, but not to discuss this with anyone. She hugged me as her eyes welled up with tears of happiness. I told her to put the celebrating on hold. I spent the rest of the day unsuccessfully trying not to think about Mrs.

McKee's call. When I got home from work, I told Kurt about the call and he, too, was sure I was going to be honored for my work. I knew too, but I wasn't ready to formally acknowledge this. I needed official confirmation of a dream I never dreamed of.

I arrived in Boston at 9:00 Sunday night so I didn't have a chance to do anything other than go to bed and try not to think of what would happen the next morning. I couldn't eat breakfast because of the sommersaults in my stomach. At 9:50 I arrived at the sumptuous office of the Kennedy Foundation. The walls were adorned with mission statements and photos of past award recipients as well as photos of Joseph Kennedy, Jr, Joseph Kennedy, Sr, Rose Kennedy, John Kennedy, and the many other family members. What a fertile family the Kennedys were.

Mrs. McKee was a middle aged, plump, white haired woman who exuded warmth. Her smile lightened the room like a 1,000 watt bulb. She reminded me of a prim school teacher who loved all her students. After some small talk about my trip, she got to the purpose of our meeting. Her eyes bore deeply into my eyes as she said:

“Dr. Schmidt, we at the Kennedy Foundation are well aware of the outstanding work you have done in educating children with disabilities. Your work has been a model for educators throughout the country. You have dramatically changed the lives of thousands of retarded children directly through your school and indirectly through other schools that have instituted your method. But most importantly, you have changed public perception of the capabilities of the mentally retarded. No longer are the mentally retarded viewed as incapable of learning and doomed to a life of nothingness and isolation. Because of your work, they are now viewed as capable of learning and capable of becoming contributing members of society. We have traditionally honored scientists for their work in understanding and treating mental retardation, but this year the selection committee decided to honor you for your work in the psychological and educational treatment of persons with mental retardation. You have applied research to practice to create innovative educational programs to change the course of mental retardation.

On November 13 in Chicago, we will host an awards dinner where we will officially present you with the 1978 Kennedy Foundation Award. You will be given a glass figure depicting the seraph Raphael, the angel of science, healing, and compassion. Raphael was chosen to symbolize the award to honor those who have through science, healing, and compassion served the mentally retarded. The award will be presented by Eunice Kennedy, President Kennedy's sister. In addition to the figure, there will be a cash award of \$25,000 to further your research. Congratulations.”

She came around the desk and hugged me warmly. For one of the few times in my life, I was speechless. Finally, I discovered words.

“I can’t tell you how honored I am. I never imagined anything like this. But I’m glad someone like me with a background in psychology and education is being honored because this recognizes that the lives of people with disabilities are in our hands.”

“We would like you to make a few remarks at the evening banquet. We will also show a short movie of your school. On the day of the ceremony we’d like you to host an all-day conference on your approach with staff from your school providing hands-on workshops so that therapists, educators, and psychologists can come away with the foundation of knowledge and skills to eventually put your approach into action.

We chatted for a while, but I didn’t pay much attention to what we actually said because I was planning ahead – laying out the workshop sessions and mentally writing my remarks. She gave me her assistant’s name and phone so that I could have Clare work with her to set up all the specifics.

On the plane back to DC, I shut my eyes and let the feeling of elation wash over me. This was the pinnacle of everything I’d ever strived for. Not recognition of me, but recognition of what I had achieved. No, it was recognition of me because I am my Schmidt Approach. This was the reason I fought to stay alive. Wertheimer’s prediction of my future was coming true, but not in the way he thought it would.

As soon as I entered my front door, Kurt greeted me with a bouquet of red roses. He hugged me and wouldn’t let go of me. I think he cried more than I did. I decided not to call anyone that night. Kurt and I talked over glasses of wine, basking in the glory of my honor.

He kept saying, “You deserve it. You are a pioneer. You’ve improved the lives of so many children and their families. You’re an angel. Just think of how you transformed yourself from the German Dorothea to the American Dorothea. You took the good that you found in yourself in Germany and you magnified it here.”

The next day I got a similar greeting when I entered the Binet Center. The staff was crowded in the entry hall and Clare was holding an even bigger bouquet of flowers than Kurt had given me. I was smothered with hugs. I spent the day with Judy and Clare laying out plans for the three-minute movie on the school and the workshops. Clare would work with the professional film maker that the Kennedy Foundation was sending to film me and the school while Judy would work with Mrs. McKee’s assistant on the specifics of the workshops.

But I, alone, would plan my remarks. Mrs. McKee told me that they should be limited to two minutes. How could I condense all I had to say in such a short time frame? There were three other awardees so time had to be limited. Each of us would have a three-minute movie of our work shown before our two minute presentation so about five to six minutes was scheduled per recipient.

In June, Clare told me that the Foundation wanted a list of 100 guests I would like to invite to the ceremony which would be held in the ballroom of the Conrad Hilton Hotel. First and foremost to be invited was Kurt; then Clare, Judy and Stu, the leadership of the school, staff who would be involved in running the workshops, members of the parent board and the professional advisory board, and the biggest donors and sponsors. Soon I had a list of almost 200 names. Crossing out each person to pare the list down to 100 was like rejecting one child over another. I decided to invite Leon and his wife since he was still at the University of Chicago. In a way he was responsible for the existence of the school.

I worked with Judy and Clare on the film. It would start with short excerpts from the movie of the Berlin School. Then it would show the diagnostic process followed by the various treatment programs available. We decided to make a longer movie that would be shown at the workshop session describing the overall approach. In that movie we followed a specific child through the intake process, psychoeducational evaluation, and treatment plan. We would also highlight a few graduates of our school who had achieved success. We designed three specific workshop sessions on the overall method, diagnostic procedures, and the Schmidt Approach.

Two months before the event, I began shopping for just the right clothes. I needed a suit for my presentation at the conference and a gown for the awards ceremony. I found both at Saks. The suit was navy and tight fitting to show off my still slim figure. I didn't want a gown that detracted from the words I was speaking. For a change, I didn't want people to concentrate on my dress, but on the words emanating from my mouth. I got a black lace, boat neck, long sleeved dress. I would wear my hair pulled back in a bun and big diamond earrings that Kurt had given me to celebrate my receiving the award.

A short article about the upcoming award appeared in the Post the week before the conference. That set the phones ringing with congratulations. The fund raisers adeptly used the publicity to solicit for always needed contributions. A week after the conference, the Post published a lengthy article on my work and me. The impact of the Binet Center on the lives of three children was highlighted. One child was the son of a congressman, another the son of a prominent DC physician, and the third a scholarship student who was

the daughter of a single black mother. All parents lauded the work of the school and their children's eventual success. This was the best possible publicity the Center ever received.

The night before the conference I made plans to have dinner with Kurt, Leon, and his wife Louise. It was time to meet Leon face to face. Leon had aged considerably since I had last seen him 28 years earlier. He was chubby and his black curly hair was completely gone. Louise, who had made a complete recovery from her breast cancer, was chubby too. The first thing Leon did when we sat down was show photos of his three sons who all looked like the Leon I knew in 1950. Two of his sons were in graduate school in the sciences, following in their father's footsteps, and one was at a conservatory studying to become a concert violinist, like his deceased Aunt Greta.

Kurt and Leon had kept in touch over the years so I knew that Leon had told Louise about his affair with me. I was glad because I wanted to talk openly about how much I owed Leon for what he had done for me.

"Leon, I owe much of my success to you. In our short four months together, you taught me to love and respect myself. You brought out the good in me, and helped me to channel it into doing good in the world. For this, I thank you with all my heart."

"Oh Dorothea, you would have done these same things without me."

"No, you taught me to forgive myself."

We didn't talk about our affair or how I had changed Leon. Somehow it didn't seem right with Louise there. We ended our dinner with lots of hugs. Leon and Louise made plans to visit the Binet Center and tour DC. I insisted that they stay at my home and offered Kurt and my services as tour guides.

When I got back to my hotel room, I thought about Leon. He had done so much for me, but the best thing he did was reject me. Had we married, we would have been unhappy and eventually divorced. We weren't meant to be. We were meant to impact each other's lives for the good and then move on.

The conference on the Schmidt Approach was a huge success. Enrollment had to be capped and hundreds who wanted to register were turned away with the promise that there would be future conferences in different parts of the country. Before the awards banquet, there was a private cocktail party where I met members of the Kennedy family, congressmen, entertainers, philanthropists and other awardees. I spent some time talking to Rose Kennedy who knew all about my work. She was so complimentary of me. John Kennedy's mother complimenting me – what an honor.

The dinner was elegant with Count Basie's band playing soft background music. The tables were beautifully set with huge centerpieces. After everyone was seated, the other awardees and I were escorted to the head table where I sat between Sargeant Shriver, Eunice's husband and head of the Peace Corps, and a congressman from Iowa who had a retarded son and was a huge supporter of federal legislation for educating the handicapped. I don't recall what I said to either of them. There were speeches by various dignitaries and entertainment by Judy Garland and Count Basie, who was also the father of a retarded child. My mind was recording every detail of what I saw and heard for future analysis. I wanted clear memories that I could treasure for the years to come.

The opening page of the program had photos of the four recipients of the 1978 award. The three others were old bald men who contrasted sharply with the very flattering photo of me that the Foundation had taken. There was also a page devoted to each awardee. My page was headed with a photo of me teaching reading to three Binet Center students followed by a short bio describing my work and why I was chosen to be honored. On the back cover was one of my favorite Kennedy quotes: *We can say with some assurance that, although children may be the victims of fate, they will not be the victims of our neglect.* Years ago when I first saw this quote, I thought that this should be the motto for the Binet Center.

I had worked on my speech for weeks and didn't have to read it. I knew each word by heart so I could converse with each member of the audience.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I am honored to be receiving the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation International Prize for Outstanding Contribution to the Field of Mental Retardation for establishing the Binet Development Center. The Binet Center is the direct descendant of my first school where I originally developed the Schmidt Approach – the Berlin School for the Handicapped. Starting in 1938 I developed the model for educating children with disabilities that is the basis of the model used at the Binet Center. For five years I worked with children with disabilities who had been neglected educationally. They made phenomenal progress. I documented their psychological and educational progress in a report and I made a movie of the arts program so you can see what we accomplished. Copies of this report and the movie are available to you and are at the back of the room. Those five years were the most exciting of my life, but then everything was cut short by the Nazis who as part of the T4 Program murdered my beautiful children. On April 19, 1945 I watched my children being taken away to be murdered. Like the Jews, they were gassed and burned in a crematorium. I said nothing to stop this. I did nothing to stop this. Since that day, I have struggled with at times crippling feelings of

guilt and remorse. But over time, I found that the best way of fighting against such evil is to create good, and that is what I have tried to do with the Binet Center.

I want to recognize the people who helped me create the Schmidt Approach. First there are my mentors – Alfred Binet, the great French psychologist who pioneered educating the mentally retarded and believed in the educability of intelligence, my professors at the University of Berlin - Max Wertheimer and Wolfgang Kohler, the great Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, and the great Italian educator Maria Montessori. And for believing that I could rebuild the Berlin School from its ashes, I thank my beloved mother Marta and my brother Kurt and my friend Heidi Klemperer who designed the original arts program. And to the staff of the Binet School who work miracles every day, thank you, thank you. And to the children at our school who show great courage every time they try to read a new word or pronounce a multisyllabic word or run a few feet farther than yesterday, you are the true heroes. And I dedicate this award to the 148 children of the Berlin School for the Handicapped who live on through the children of the Binet Center, especially my beloved Eva Schiller and Johann Linz.

Since I came to America my hero has been John F. Kennedy. Although professionals and my family inspired me to create the Schmidt Approach, Kennedy made me believe that I could make it succeed. These are a few quotes of his that I say to myself every day. They are my mantras.

All of us do not have equal talents, but all of us should have an equal opportunity to develop our talents. That is what we do at the Binet Center - we give children the opportunity to learn to their maximum.

And maybe his most important quote: *A child miseducated is a child lost.* How many mentally retarded children have been miseducated and lost forever? I say let us never miseducate a child again. Never again.”

When I finished, the audience gave me a standing ovation. As I looked out at the 1,500 people I found the answer to the question **what would you have done?** The answer I think that I would hear from all 1,500 people would be: We would have done the same thing that you did Dorothea. We would have transformed the tragedy of the death of the Berlin School into the glory of the birth of the Binet Center.

I had found redemption. I had been vindicated. The Binet School and its students had absolved me from my sins. As I left Chicago to return home, I felt complete. My life had a purpose that I fulfilled.

A few weeks after the awards ceremony, Kurt talked to me about my future and the future of the Binet School.

“Dorothea, you have to start thinking of a successor. You’re not going to live forever, but hopefully the Binet Center will live forever. You need to find an Executive Director who will continue your work. If you don’t find a replacement, the school may die when you die.”

“I know. I have tried to put this out of my mind. I’ve been acting like Scarlett O’Hara and saying to myself that I’ll think about this tomorrow. But tomorrow is here.”

“You need to find someone to carry on your mission, but in their own way. To survive the Schmidt Approach and the Binet Center have to grow and change with what is new in psychology and education. You also have to recognize that the Schmidt Approach is not you. It is your child and you must send it out into the world to achieve success on its own.”

So that is what I’m doing now...looking for someone to carry on and make the Schmidt Approach and the Binet Center even better. And after I find that person, I’m not sure what I’ll do. I can’t see myself as retired, but I am 68 and I have to think of a new, different life whatever that may be.

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