

Inspirational true story of amazing triumph over many extreme traumas.

Heroes from the Attic: A Gripping True Story of Triumph

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/2892.html?s=pdf>

Heroes from the Attic

A Gripping True Story of Triumph

by

Herman I Neuman

Published by HeroBooks
For information, please contact:
HeroBooks
POB 393
Hagerman, ID 83332
hero@herobooks.com

This is a true story and all of the people are real. However, I have changed the names of most of them to protect the innocent and, very reluctantly, also some of the guilty, for reasons that can be learned herein. The sarcasm and satirical humor reflect solely on the characters and are definitely not intended to be a reproof or criticism of any particular group, faith or dogma.

The Author

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping or by any information storage or retrieval system, without the permission in writing from the publisher.

Copyright 2007, All rights reserved by Herman Neuman

Produced in the United States of America

CONTENTS

Preface
The Visit
The Big War
It Gets Better
And Still Better
There Is No End To This Life
The Liberation
Freedom At Last
Epilogue

I never did give anybody hell. I just told the truth and they thought it was hell.

Harry S. Truman

PREFACE

If I tell the truth, will others suffer hell?

* * *

Although I have overcome many incredible adversities, I never wanted to write this memoir, mainly because I felt that I would not have the emotional stamina to think about our past. I thought I'd short out the keyboard with my tears. But it was not that way because something changed in me. I could do it now because I have learned a lot about other people and myself, have banished most of the ghosts from my soul, and, together with my wife, have built a fantastic life.

Inadvertently my friend, my horse, encouraged me to write. His girlfriend was neighing for him from a distant corral, while I stood before him, restraining him with a halter rope. Frustrated, with the saddle hanging under his belly, he reared up, jumped forward and bounced me off his chest, crashing me to the ground. I cannot blame him, because I would have done the same had my wife called me. Then he bucked, kicked and bounced over the top of me lengthwise, yeehaaa, but never touched me.

However, my impact with the ground tore loose one of my collarbones. With my right arm tied to my chest, I had a lot of spare time to peck out a short personal history with my left and eventually expanded it into this book. So far I had suppressed many memories of our early years and had to search for them like pieces of a puzzle in one of the holes in my head. The more I searched, the more questions I raised; there were so many riddles to be solved. Because my early experiences had been traumatic, I began to research my family's enigma only in brief sessions. But as time went by my agony changed to self-respect, and I became obsessed with completing my story as quickly as possible.

My brother Siggi and I existed, at times, at a subhuman level for about two decades before we managed to claw ourselves out from under our sweet relatives and to the starting line of life. We kept up the momentum of our rise from the abyss to soar into high orbit. Ironically we are remaining there, while sadly, seemingly ever more people are destroying their own lives and those of others, wittingly or out of ignorance.

While reflecting on our existence, I wondered how had we survived? How many people could endure such exciting turmoil for so many years without reacting violently? Why were we not killed? Why did we not kill? Why did we not wither into drunken wastrels? We are the opposite; we're full of zest and very much alive. I delight in the smallest to the biggest, from the ants and flowers to the sun and stars in the sky.

I did not embellish our story, except for balancing the intensity of our drama with satire and corrosive humor. My kind of humor. Embellishment would detract from the experience that had been so unusual and overwhelming by itself. Even though no words can adequately describe it, I did not want to distort the truth because it might trivialize our sufferings.

I learned much of our early history from hundreds of letters which our parents had written over the years. Ma had saved them and I had saved the ones she had written to me, some of which I have quoted herein. These also confirmed some of my recollections from early childhood. She was not schooled and wrote in very long sentences, in the “old style,” as she called it, but I edited them to make them easier to read and tried not to change her ideas and feelings.

My musings in this memoir, concurrent and belated, are written in *italics*. Too often I did not have many useful thoughts during my early years because they hid from my consciousness. They vanished like cockroaches when exposed to the bright light of our grim reality, allowing me to be mostly only an elementary creature that did not want to be destroyed or driven insane by people and the ghosts that they had created.

If it had not been for some events before Siggie and I were born, our lives might have been quite different. Without them this book might not have been written, because there might not have been much to report. Our grandfather spanked our mother and “bounced her off the furniture when she was a baby.” He dented our mother’s head, literally, but I only learned this in my late fifties. Such experiences may have customized her personality. Her dented personality and the “I need fun immediately” attitude of our father greatly contributed to the protracted destruction of our family.

Or did Ma become lazy, domineering and eccentric because so many other people had also mistreated her when she was a child? From personal experiences I know that it is as Pat Conroy wrote in *The Prince of Tides*, “There is no fixing a damaged childhood. The best you can hope for is to make the sucker float.” Was this true for our mother as it was for my brother and me?

Regardless of what might have caused those tribulations, they would not have lasted nearly so long, nor would have been so severe, if our lawyers, judges and others had embraced justice. But because they had not, humans attacked us like jackals, and our parents murdered our family by tearing chunks from our souls. Fortunately, after many years of unrelenting steadfastness, we grew strong enough to gain freedom and independence.

We finally triumphed, Siggie and I. We earned our ways through college and traveled the world. Some of my globetrotting adventures with my wife are also recounted herein.

* * *

Honor your father and your mother, that you may live long in the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

Exodus 20:12

1

THE VISIT

Which home is He giving **us**?

* * *

Ma wrote me from Switzerland that she wanted me to visit her before she died. She also wanted me to feel her skull. She said that three men had whacked it, and it felt like corrugated metal. *Why had she never told this to Siggi and me?* Of course not one of these *heroes* was ever officially pampered, counseled or rehabilitated for their deeds. Or sent to trial or to jail. Ma had also taped her will to a wall requesting that her cadaver be sent to the medical school in Basel, with the instructions to photograph her skull before the students cut up her corpse.

She wrote me:

“For one year I will remain in a basin filled with formaldehyde, together with people who come from the penitentiary, who have no next of kin to take care of their graves. My skeleton will then be sent to a school in Switzerland. I will ask the Department of Anatomy to take pictures of my skull or send you the address where it will be displayed.”

Naked, stiff and shriveled mother floating with stinky criminals in a stinky chemical pool? Mother’s lonely rippled skull resting on a pedestal?

Enticing attractions for Siggi and me to visit her **before** we would have to find her in a more gruesome state of being. If she died before we saw her again, she wanted us to study her in her advanced state, and after she would be wasted, her pictures. *Does she think that her skull configuration would be a testimony to her life and help justify how she had dealt with it?*

For many years Ma had lived with Franz in the village of Moehlin, Switzerland. Since she talked incessantly, we concluded that he must be deaf or nearly so. They were not married and were now in their mid-eighties. She also wrote that she was living in “hell” because one of his children was pushing to evict them both from his old house so he could remodel and rent it.

She also wrote that Franz had lost control over his body. Therefore she did not have time to answer the many questions about our family in writing that I had asked her recently. She had to change his bag several times a day and wash him as well. If we visited her, she would be able to tell me our family history. She still had an excellent memory and had always wanted to write a memoir to tell the world about what men had done to her. I thought that her memory was another lure to catch me so I’d come back to Europe. She had even more time than she had junk and she tried to reel me in. She said that she would

answer my questions in person and invited Siggi and me to stay upstairs in Franz' house. I was sure that even if she literally removed one ton of her stuff to make room for us in her apartment in Rheinfelden, we could not reside there. No one dwells in hell voluntarily, even if it were polished, and I didn't know if Franz had allowed her hellish décor in his house.

I read Ma's many letters to me again only to write this memoir, and much of their content was new to me, because I had forgotten, or repressed, so much of the heroic counter-cheerful advice and admonitions that interfered with my objective thinking. But now that I was writing, I was eager to learn what she would have to tell me about our past, and especially about her personal experiences in the horrible world that she had lived in before, during and after the infamous Nazi era. I decided that if I wanted this information from her, I would have to talk to her face-to-face, because judging from her letters, she could not stay focused on any one subject long enough to elaborate about it in a meaningful manner.

Ma was extremely gregarious, but because of a quirk in her personality she had few friends, and her nearest relatives lived hundreds of kilometers away. Over the years Ma had lured us with the material things that she had accumulated since our father had evicted us over forty years ago. She had offered us used furs, violins, accordions and tons of clothes. She was still very poor, and I wondered how she acquired some of these seemingly expensive items. But I was not interested in her material bribes, because they would only be unpleasant reminders cluttering up our home and minds.

Ma threw me a morsel of what I could learn from her in a letter to my wife Linda:

"...My dear grandfather had a sister who was a widow and had a beautiful farm near the railroad in Loppersum, two villages from Emden. She asked an attorney to visit her to draw up her last will and testament. When the good aunt died it was discovered that she was very much taken in. She probably did not understand what she signed. Her beautiful villa and the farm suddenly belonged to this abominable (Ma's emphasis) attorney. He moved into the villa right away and my dear grandfather got the short end of the deal."

Already so long ago?

"...Dear Ami should quit his job, because what is in my memory will earn him more. It would be very interesting for a movie firm to film the attic with the bats where we lived, and the jail in Saeckingen where I had to stay because of my homelessness. This is unique in the world.

"Don't wait until I can be viewed in the Anatomy Department of the university, dear Ami. Franz isn't going to live much longer, he breathes heavily every time he moves, and then we will lose our domicile in Moehlin. One can say dark clouds are on the horizon. Another thing, I can help a little with the money. So prepare for the trip. It will be very interesting with your Ma, who has loved you more than any other person."

Now you tell me that you love me.

* * *

Even though our mother was living in Switzerland, she still kept an apartment in Germany. Its rent was probably paid by the German taxpayers, because some official apparently thought that she actually still lived there. She wrote me that she could not access it now because someone had inserted an object into the lock of its only entrance door. *Was it her*

landlord, an official? Or was it yet another one of Ma's lonely cries?

As much as wanting to see our mother again, probably for the last time, I also wanted to find the court documents that she assured me were still in her possession. I was curious about how it had been possible for our parents to shred our family for so long and with such intensity. *Were there no referees to call for a stop of their insane behavior?* I wanted to learn how the laws could be twisted to favor liars and crooks. Siggi and I had learned from outstanding personal experiences that the weaker you are, the more abused you are, and the more exploited you will be. At least this had certainly been true in our case, and I now had a strong desire to inform everyone about our erstwhile plight. I rarely have mentioned anything about our fine background to anyone but my wife. I had learned that if I dropped a tiny hint about it to other people, they did not seem to care or understand and for example would merely say, "When I grew up, we had nothing to eat but beans and potatoes," thereby taking the wind out of the sails of my story.

At one time we would have dug into real doodoo for beans and potatoes. Most people could not fathom anything worse than having to survive on them, such wonderful food. I could never understand their disinterest or lack of sympathy, until I learned that it was a quirk in human nature to avoid or repress unpleasant situations and associated emotions, and I figured that collectively this could get us into big trouble. For many years I had been too ashamed or too troubled to think about the skeletons in our closet, but now that I am wiser, I am proud of all my wheel-spinning accomplishments to stay alive and forge ahead in life.

Without sacrificing our bodies.

Without losing our minds.

Ma's court documents and her tales would be a great help to me. I had counted the names of the many lawyers and judges whom she had referred to in her letters, who had helped dissolve, torment and impoverish our "family" in an unending war filled with schemes, lies and threats of murder. Since Ma had referred to the lawyers only in passing, I was sure that more could be added to this already substantial list, and I wanted to learn especially about the absurdities of the German judicial system. I also wanted to find out if it were our unsettled lifestyle that this system had forced upon us that caused, at least in part, my caustic humor and blunt honesty? Or was it mainly Ma's whip, such an effective and powerful tool? Siggi and I make some people quiver when we confront them with unpleasant truth, and we do this to *win friends and influence people*. Sadly, too often they have seemed to go into denial, even before understanding what we tried to explain to them.

Siggi has published dozens of articles, and his observations on many issues are unique and out of the mainstream. He wrote a twelve-page abstract called *Reflections On Conventional Versus Non-conventional Trade Development* to advise on how to boost the economic performance of his state. Another one of his articles was *To Liberate Women, Depoliticize Men*.

* * *

I wanted to return to the land of my birth, hoping to find the missing pieces in my life. But after returning to my adopted country from previous visits to Europe, weeks would pass before my gloom would lift. I wanted to live in both places, hoping to strengthen my roots by cementing together those that had grown in worlds so far apart.

I weighed the pros and cons of this trip for many months. I wanted to see my mother; I was concerned about her mental and physical health. Would we be able to deal with her aberrant behavior? Would she be able to deal with our foreign behavior? Long ago she had requested me to send her a few toothbrushes, such and such brand and hardness. Recently she wrote that she had ever made only one request of me, to send her toothbrushes. I never did. But later she wrote that she had found a good source of them at the old age home across the street from her. When somebody died in this undertaker's waiting room, his or her useless belongings were thrown out, and she collected these from its garbage.

Now Ma had accumulated a good supply of brushes. I mentioned this to Siggi and he informed me that when he had visited her during the previous summer, he had found bundles of them rubber-banded together under the bumpy blanket covering her sofa. He had said to her:

"I suppose you saved the one I left here in eighty-six."

"Ja, naturally," and she had produced more of them.

"Did you also save the toothpicks that I've used?"

"You know I never throw anything away."

She retrieved the world's finest used-toothpick collection, while saying:

"I have lived through two world wars, hyperinflation, two depressions and a long divorce. I have lost my children. I cannot throw anything away. You can criticize anything about me, but I forbid you to attack me about my stuff. I know *Ich hab' einen Vogel*, I have a bird, I am crazy, and nobody can change that."

Over the years Siggi had attacked Ma about her hoard, verbally and in writing. I understood her emotional craving for her collection of fine garbage and could forgive her. Twice during her lifetime the German currency had been destroyed and survival had depended on bartering. Her subconscious was afraid that this might become necessary again, thereby causing her to accumulate everything. But Siggi could not accept that. He accused her of valuing her junk more than her family. This was very true. This was very untrue. Whatever the case, Ma could never change.

I understood Siggi's frustrations and yearnings; they were the same as mine. He boiled in quiet desperation that they could not be resolved. He wanted to find comfort in the home of his mother. And in his mind.

Siggi was going to travel to Europe and would meet me there if I decided to go also. But I had many doubts about the trip: Would we get along together near our former hell? Now Ma was requesting us to come to help her clean her apartment so she could die in peace. We were not sure how to search out the mementos that we might want from there. Something in us craved for them; but we were also pained by them. Should we haul her stuff to the dump? Should we give it away? Would there be anything useful? We'd find childhood memorabilia in schoolbooks and toys that we had crafted. We knew that all of these would still be there, buried in deep clutter, as had been the memories of them in my soul. What would we do with our frail mother? What if she died from the excitement or torment of our visit? Should we bury her or carry her corpse in a suitcase to the university in Basel and deliver her "To Whom It May Concern?" Was Ma's request her final attempt to gain sympathy from someone, anyone? Would I be emotionally strong enough to be able to inspect her skull? What other secrets did she keep? Did I even want to know? Had

she suppressed them, because they had been too painful? Could I find the loose screws in her head?

My questions and doubts could only be resolved if I returned; therefore I decided to make this trip. This would be the first time that our mother, my brother and I would be together in thirty-five years, and we would have a fine time. We were a closely-knit family; we were a blown up family. When I had received the announcement of my father's death in the seventies, my only comment at that time had been, "Well, the old bastard finally croaked." I went into the bedroom and closed the door. Then I cried. But I do not know if I cried for myself or for my father.

* * *

Siggi picked me up at the Zurich airport, where he had rented a car, and we drove to Rheinfelden, Germany, to stay at a bed and breakfast. It was the middle of summer and central Europe was suffering from a hundred-year heat wave. In addition, there was almost no air conditioning or insect window screening, and I wondered how the walls of my room had gotten so bloody. To keep cool, I had to keep my window open at night, and I soon figured out that no one had been murdered here. During my nightly mosquito hunts, I also added to the décor of my room with Type A negative blood splatter.

The day following my arrival, while still suffering jetlag, we drove to Switzerland to visit our mother. Without previous announcement we walked into her "living room," where she and Franz were sitting in immense disorder watching television. She was wearing two pairs of glasses, on top of each other, so she could see better and removed one pair so she could see us even better, as her face momentarily lit up before turning to a frown. Her body was frail with a slight dowager's hump that mismatched her much younger face which had surprisingly few wrinkles and no "age spots."

"Ami!"

A bubble of joy momentarily rose in her soul. We did not exchange greetings, did not hug, even though I had resolved to do so. Ma's mouth kicked into action, not with advice as before, but with subtle excuses and reasons for her past behavior. Thoughts burst forth rapidly, skipping from subject to subject. Pointing to a photo of her young father hanging on the wall, she said:

"He hanged himself. When I was small, I prayed: Dear God, I wish my father were dead. Amen."

Then why are you an atheist, Mama?

I interrupted her: "Ma, how are you?" wanting to bring our conversation to a more soothing level. But this was not possible. Years of brooding kept pouring from her soul and Siggi and I could not stop her.

She presented me with a strap, holding it as if to sell me a tie.

"See this. This is what I used to spank you with."

To show me that it is harmless? Does she feel guilty for spanking me so hard? Or is she proud of it?

"No," I said, "I don't remember it but I remember two others. They were made of rubber and wire." I did not know why I said that because I did not feel any animosity towards her, only sadness. I thought it to be a miracle that she had lived this long, physically intact, and apparently suffering only a form of *organic brain syndrome*. I'm not a doctor, but it seems reasonable that a dented brain could be the physical cause of her

behavioral abnormality.

Before too long Siggi rushed out of the room. *The pain?*

"I'll wait for you in the car, Neuman," he said to me on his way out.

Not long thereafter I followed him out. The pain! My fourth visit with our mother in thirty-five years ended in twenty-five to thirty-five minutes. Numbly, we drove back across the Rhine River to cruise aimlessly around the city of my birth, speaking little as we passed through our old neighborhoods. Everything was so prosperous, clean and well maintained even though Rheinfelden was still mostly a factory town. The German middle class had greatly expanded, and had grown a lot wealthier as well, while many areas in America had stagnated or declined, twisted statistics notwithstanding. This also caused me pain.

Two days later we made another courageous charge on Franz's house and immediately asked Ma for the key to her German apartment.

"You cannot go there alone. I will go with you," Ma insisted.

"But why? We want to go there alone," I said.

"No, I will go with you!"

Siggi and I did not want her along, because she would add to our homesickness, or whatever our complex, convoluted emotions could be called. She'd cackle with advice and draw the attention of her neighbors. As older children we had not wanted to be with her in public because of her incessant advising and instructing. Although she had a sweet, beautiful face, it contradicted her overbearing personality and irrational behavior. For years her neighbors must have wondered about the things that she had dragged into her home. Therefore we wanted to sneak in now and take a quiet survey of her German nest. But she insisted on going also. Since she could crash stone walls with her delicate bullhead, we relented, and the three of us drove to her apartment, while heat and gloom filled our car, and we spoke little. We walked up one flight of stairs, where Ma fumbled for the right key among a messy bundle of strings, keys and safety pins. *Hurry up, someone might see us.*

She finally found the right one, opened the door, and I noticed that there was no obstruction in the lock as she had claimed. A wave of repugnant, intensely antique odor rolled over us from the dark vestibule. Without a word, Siggi pushed Ma inside to escape the neighbors' prying eyes. I held my breath, because it was hard to breathe in hell, and Siggi cursed, stepping back out. He had always treated his body with care; more so than I. It was much easier to soothe your body than it was to soothe your soul.

"Open the windows," he exclaimed.

I groped for a light switch and flipped it on, but the power had been shut off years ago. This was the first time that I had been here, because Ma had moved to this apartment after my last visit. In the sweltering darkness I tried to push open the door to the next cell in hell.

What I saw was worse than I had anticipated. The entire cell was a tangled sculpture created by a tormented mind. It was the core of a frozen tornado. Clutter hurled against the walls, vortexing up to the ceilings. Boxes, bike wheels, lamps, newspapers and clothing. There were hundreds of objects, all crammed, mangled and pickled in a tomb-like atmosphere. I climbed through the vortex, bored my way to the window that was hidden on the far side and covered with a moth-eaten blanket. I opened it as far as I could. Barely

breathing, I struggled to the next compartment to open another hole to the world. Though sweating, I was unaware of my physical discomfort, because the heat, the mustiness and the motherly creations had temporarily numbed my mind.

As I groped around, I realized that she had not lived here for many years, because all of the kitchen and bathroom fixtures were totally buried as well. I looked for artifacts from my youth: drawings, toys, school papers and books, anything from my previous life. Of the thousands of objects in Ma's shrine I recognized only the rounded top corner of an imbedded old wardrobe. Two mattresses were stacked on top of it, wedged between it and the ceiling. *Who lifted them? Who knows about this shrine?*

The long-forgotten feeling of shame and disgust anguished me again. Once more I had that sinking feeling in my heart and belly. As I stumbled back out of the apartment, Siggi came back up the staircase. I exhaled and inhaled deeply.

"Did you open some windows?" he asked me.

"Two of them, but not very far. Too much junk in the way," I responded.

"You better let this place air out before you get sick," Siggi admonished me. Then he said, "What is causing that stink?"

"Smells like mothballs, mouse seasoning and mother's armpits to me," I responded.

Ma had always been worried about moths. They destroyed; therefore they had to be destroyed. Courageously, I ventured back in to explore our catacombs. Siggi followed. Ma was wedged in the tangle of her dominion, lost in thought, scrutinizing some papers and was unaware of us. Her face was serious, the way I remembered it from my childhood.

Ma, why do you look so sad?

Little bird, I will explain when you're older.

What is she looking for? What is she hiding? She hides men in her attic.

"Where are the court documents?" I startled her.

"In that cupboard," she responded, pointing to one side.

I moved clutter to get to the doors of a dining room cabinet. Carelessly I tossed things aside, causing dust to rise to enhance hell's miasma. I moved more cautiously. Its first compartment contained only plastic flowers. I thought this to be odd because I had never seen such in this land before. There was no plastic on the graves or in the flower boxes; there was little plastic anywhere. I worked open doors and drawers but all were filled with old newspapers, to be read again some day, to refresh the ammunition for Ma's admonitions.

I lost hope that I would find what I came here for. It would take days of hard work to lift, throw, bore and search through this mess, or to move most of everything to the outside to get down to the mother lode, to discover the items that were deposited there so long ago. Like archeologists, we would have to remove the surface layers to get to the fossils that we were searching for. We could heave stuff out of the window into dumpsters while hiding inside. But Ma would not permit this and scream hysterically, besides it was muggy and hot, and there was no power to run a fan to cool us. *Would her neighbors send for the police when violins and sitz baths were flying out of a second-story window? Would we have to buy beer to bribe a policeman?* But Siggi and I were too honest to bribe anyone; we would just get arrested. Besides I did not have the heart to sever Ma

from her precious collection. It belonged to her. It belonged to me.

Quietly the three of us riffled through separate graves where we could stand up only at the doorways. I was curious and venturesome and crawled around the top of Ma's belongings, often stooping to clear the ceiling. This was a new experience for me because like a daring circus performer, I had to balance on broom handles, coffeepots and many other unusual objects of support. I found something worthwhile, a bundle of new toothbrushes, still in their original wrappings, and put them in my pocket. When Ma came to the entrance of my tomb I tossed them to her.

"Here, you wanted some toothbrushes," I said.

She dismissed me with a disgruntled wave and did not pick them up.

The heat of hell soon drove Siggi and me back out. We told Ma that we had had enough, locked up and went back to our rental car. On the way, I instinctively scanned the windows around us. I had forgotten this feeling, this demeanor from so long ago, my feeling of shame and my desire to be invisible. Now I willed myself to be invisible again. I knew that all of the world's eyes were upon us because I could feel their mockery: There is that crazy old woman again. Those must be her sons. *I'm not her son. I'm not even German.*

Because I could not have a focused conversation with Ma, it was all the more important for me to find the court documents. After our unsuccessful exploratory expedition, I tried to dispel my gloom with objective thoughts, while the three of us silently returned to Moehlin, where we left Ma with Franz without a goodbye.

When I get back home I'll have Insensitivity Training.

* * *

The hot, muggy days passed while Siggi and I drove around in the villages near where we were born. We had come to tour and sightsee, as well as to visit relatives in Germany and Switzerland. But we could not leave the place that oppressed us, the grave of our souls.

This is my home! There has to be a mother, there has to be a father! Maybe we could be reborn. We stopped to visit many churches, to find relief inside from the humid heat and to admire their treasures. Many of them were unlocked and unattended every day and this impressed me.

"In America it would not be possible to keep the churches unlocked," Siggi said to me. "They would be destroyed within hours or days," he continued.

"Why would they do that? You and I never even thought of deliberately destroying anything. Many of the experts might agree that we could be justified to rape, pillage and murder," I said.

"Yea, shall we start right now? With our ol' lawyers?" Siggi replied.

"Then if we get caught, we can say *we made mistakes*," I continued, "and be pampered and rehabilitated. The only thing I ever destroyed intentionally was the antenna on your father's car. I was mad at him and took a swipe at it. Broke it off. Even felt guilty then."

The churches had been very expensive to build, like all of the houses, and I had seen few such in America. The interiors were decorated with bright colors and intricate carvings; even the ones built since World War II were adorned with large colorful frescoes and had lofts with huge pipe organs. But I was almost apathetic about their outstanding quality, craftsmanship and great beauty and would simply snap a picture or two and go

back outside. The gloom would not lift from my soul.

Even though, or because, Western Germany had been building and renovating more churches after WWII than it had at any time in its history, we discovered that they were almost empty, even on Sundays. There were few worshippers, and we wondered why so much had been spent to build so many churches when so few people attended them. *Worthwhile or not, can a tax remain in place indefinitely? No free market balancing supply and demand? Historical guilt and shame?*

For dinner Siggie and I often returned to the same restaurant in the Black Forest because it was cooler there, with less air and noise pollution. We needed peace. Often we had to wait a long time to be served, for a good meal can take a long time to prepare. Sometimes we spoke little and at other times we discussed our past at great length. We even joked about it. We had the weirdest and funniest parents on earth; two fools who should have been born two days earlier, on April Fool's day.

"What shall we do about your mother's junk?" I questioned Siggie.

"That's not my problem. I've come to realize that for most of my life your parents have burdened me. And this junk of your mother. I've told her many times that she valued it more than her children. Therefore I have no responsibility to clean it up," Siggie answered.

"We don't have parents. We are only by-products of their encounters," I responded. "There are a few things I want from her apartment."

"Ma said that she had three thousand marks in there," Siggie returned.

"Could we rent a dumpster, park it below the window, and just throw her stuff into it?"

"We could. But can you?"

"I am not sure, it would be too depressing. And it is so hot and stinky in there."

We could not throw out the treasures of our mother. We could not throw out the presently biggest burden in our lives.

"The *Sozialamt* provided her this apartment. They helped with her creation. Let them clean it out," suggested Siggie.

"Yeah, but the shame. All I want is those court documents. Otherwise, why did I travel so far? I cannot stand to visit Ma even though I want to. I even want to hug her to help heal pain. You don't want to drive very far because of all the traffic. Even these beautiful villages are depressing. I will have to return to the States and look at trailer huts. I read that in my state as many as one out of eight people live in *mobile homes*."

"So far we have not seen a single trailer house. Some of these houses are hundreds of years old. And still look new. Even the new ones will last that long," Siggie responded.

As far as we could tell, the land of our birth was changing, and for the better. Judging by the homes and yards, it was difficult to distinguish between the rich and the poor neighborhoods. Even to view only the entrance doors to these homes was like visiting an art museum. Most of them appeared to have been handcrafted. Many were custom-made of hammered or cast bronze, iron, oak or stained glass.

There were few signs cluttering the landscape. For example, a veterinarian simply advertised with a cast-metal sculpture of stylized cats and dogs in the front of his building, and the entrance door was of the same design and forged of the same metal as well. There were no written words such as "Veterinarian."

During his visits here over the years, Siggi had taken many pictures of cemeteries, houses and restaurants. He had photographed some of them repeatedly because of the great improvements being made to them between his visits. A restaurant might have the simple words, *Café Sonne*, Café of the Sun, which in later years would have been replaced by a gilded iron sun hanging from an ornate, black wrought iron bracket from the side of the building. We inspected a door to a village restaurant that was made of a one-inch thick tempered glass panel set behind a heavy, hand-forged, ornamental wrought iron grille. In all my travels around the world I had never seen so much consistent and widespread quality, combined with such man-made beauty, as in this country and some other European countries as well.

I noticed that the seemingly oversized rain gutters and downspouts on the houses were made of copper. This prompted me to find the cheapest ones, so we kept looking for them as we drove around. We thought that we had finally found them on a house, and after we stopped for a closer look, we discovered that these downspouts were not made of plastic, iron or aluminum but of welded stainless steel.

"These people have pride. They build everything to last a thousand years," Siggi said to me.

"But in America we have Desert Sky Mobile Home Estates, with flags flying. Here there are no estates," I replied sarcastically. "But things are not so rosy here either."

"What do you mean? Look around you. Where can you find so much beauty in America?"

"Mostly with the rich, mostly in nature, but remember what got us to America," I said to him.

Siggi could not acknowledge the problems in Germany, and his temper rose instantly. Every morning at breakfast we read the newspapers about dioxin-polluted eggs, dying forests, and the pollution theme was constant in the news media. We had looked at a polluted area in Rheinfelden that was located next to the house of our former friend, Juergen, where Siggi and I had camped in his backyard as children. This half-block was now cordoned off, and no one was allowed to enter. Its soil was contaminated with dioxin to a depth of more than one hundred eighty feet and would be very expensive to remove and process.

Juergen's backyard was also the place where someone had stolen our new tent in the middle of the night. I remember it well. We had pitched our small new tent there; it was to be our haven away from our hot attic during the warm summer nights. We had kept our bedding and our beebie gun in it, along with a few other things. Late one night we had heard the cracking of the tiny grenades that children threw during celebrations. Wrapped in paper, these blew up on impact. Crack. Crack. We had crawled out of our tent with our gun and had found no one outside, but I had yelled, "Shoot whoever is hiding out there." I had wanted to intimidate whoever was there, so that he would leave us in peace.

The next night it had rained, so we had stayed in our batty attic and had left our tent in place. During that night Juergen's mother thought that she had heard the firecrackers again, and the following morning our tent and its content was gone. The thief had wanted to wake us, to check if we were sleeping in it, to determine if he could steal our home away from home. We hadn't been paranoid enough to anticipate such a clever

robbery scheme.

This very area next to Juergen's house was now identified as the most dioxin-polluted site in the world. During the reconstruction after WWII, the bomb craters around Rheinfelden had been filled with the toxic waste from the factories as well. Later I learned from a Website in Switzerland, that that waste had also been used to remodel this entire townscape until well into the seventies. Someone had bargained with the devil, and only now was this evil deed being publicized. I would have to be paid at least fifteen dollars before I'd pollute the earth in such a fashion! *Who was punished for this? Who was rewarded for this? Who might suffer from this? Who will be sued?*

We also read that the trees were dying in the Black Forest, so we drove to the higher elevations to verify this and found it to be the case. They would be dead forever. There might never be trees here again, at least not certain kinds. Billboards explained the cycle of pollution, the nitrogen and heavy metals that fell from the sky and were taken up by the soil and the trees. *How can such poisons ever be cleaned from mountains and streams?*

* * *

As we waited for our meals to arrive, we studied the menu of our favorite village restaurant. It was always quiet here. It was quiet in all of the restaurants that we visited, except when there was a big crowd. I made the observation that there was never any background *music* playing in stores, restaurants and other such public places, and I was able to converse more easily. I wondered why the difference between here and the noisier equivalent locales in America. I could only guess as to the difference and have not yet learned why this was so. *Were deaf, acoustically-challenged people not included in the extensive handicap laws?*

A hint of Ami's Avalanche Axiom?

"Look at all these entrees," Siggi said to me.

We counted the drinks listed on the menu of this country inn. There were one hundred forty-two different beverages, everything from dozens of brands of beer and wine to various undiluted fruit juices and many different mixtures made from them.

After we enjoyed a delicious dinner I said to my brother, "I am going to find those divorce documents."

We had kept Ma's keys from our first safari to her apartment. They were a messy collection of every type ever invented, including ancient skeleton keys. It took Siggi and me several days to regain our nerves to return there and did so several more times during our sojourn. We dug around in her helter-skelter but only for short periods each time. Reaching into crannies, to search for files, I found a plastic bag containing glossy porno magazines. I scanned the naked couples in wonderfully interlocking and contorted positions...*Did Ma find these in her garbage mines?*

I pulled out an egg carton filled with black, shriveled fruit from under a cupboard. It was garnished with mouse droppings, the inescapable spicing from my slavery days. There was a half-liter carton of unopened, ancient orange juice and many other exotic delicacies. Finally I discovered a foot-thick bundle wrapped in newspapers, tied securely with string. I pulled it from its crypt and noted that its date of publication was 1952, about the time of the divorce of our parents. So many years ago. I tore open a corner, determined that these could be some of the files that I wanted and placed them into a

bright-yellow *Elmer Citro* brand backpack that happened to be nearby.

“Siggi, I found something. Let’s go.” Documentation of our disaster.

We locked up Ma’s secret warehouse and drove into a forest, parked our car, and opened the rucksack to inspect our find. A musty odor escaped from the file folders which mostly contained letters that were written by our parents, including a few from relatives and some official documents. It was obvious that these files were prepared as evidence for the court. One of them contained only love letters that our father had written to our mother before they were married. Saving letters was in our genes because I had also done so all of my life and Siggi probably as well. Quietly we studied our newly found bundle of garbage, our new treasure, in the darkening forest. We hardly knew our father and were anxious to learn more about him.

I was disappointed that most of the official papers were not in this bundle. There would have to be hundreds of documents generated during the subsequent fourteen, fifteen or more years of court activities. We discovered that this bundle was only for the initial divorce process between our father and our first mother. Therefore we made a few more attempts to find more court files, but by the time we had to return to America, we could not find any others. The biggest reason for this was that we could not bring ourselves to dwell in Ma’s warehouse long enough to search for them. Like workers handling hazardous materials, we limited our exposure to keep within reasonable health guidelines.

Siggi and I never threw out one single one of Ma’s items, leaving it all behind in forgotten silence.

* * *

Before we flew back to America, we returned Ma’s keys to her. We arrived at her place in Moehlin at about eleven fifteen. Siggi stayed in our car, as he could not face his mother again. A long lost son could not face his brain-whacked mother anymore. I still wanted to talk with her at great length, and also assure her that I was not bitter about what she, Pa and so many countrymen had done for us. At one time Ma had written that, “What we will never forgive is that the police never helped us when our ‘father’ wanted to kill us. Poor Ami has required years to overcome the consequences of this terrible intimidation.” Had she never realized that this had been only one tiny incident in my seemingly unending intimidation, and that my most painful and intense one, aside from our wonderful WW II experiences, had always been her whip? Oddly, I have always felt differently about forgiveness than Ma. As I have never suffered from envy, I also feel blessed that I have never felt bitter about our parents because such bitterness would probably have destroyed me long ago. Instead of bitterness I suffered sadness, but I have always attempted to live my life at its fullest. I also wanted to tell Ma that I did not blame her for anything.

With a mixture of bravado and trepidation, I entered Ma’s living room. Within minutes of my arrival, she realized that it was nearly eleven-thirty, lunchtime at the old age home.

Without any greetings, Ma accused me: “You came just during lunchtime so you would not have to stay very long.”

“I did not realize that your lunch starts this early,” I replied dumbfoundedly.

“I have to go now, or the *Altersheim* will get mad with me because I’ve reserved lunch for today,” Ma continued. “I could tell you many interesting stories. And you come

just before lunch. Don't you have a heart? Forty-two people who have tormented me are now dead, or very ill. Remember that, Ami."

My mother threatened me with a grim, sad look. A familiar emotional bomb from our past hit me again. Like so many times before, it destroyed all of my objective thoughts. I did not say, "Dear Mama, don't worry, we'll tell the *Altersheim* you won't eat there today. Or maybe I could eat there also."

Instead I said, "I'm leaving. Good bye."

"Will you take this to the city hall in Rheinfelden?" she asked me, while handing me a sheet of paper. It appeared to be a form that she had filled out for the *Sozialamt*, to reserve a place for herself in a German *Altersheim*.

"No I won't take it, but I will mail it for you and pay the postage."

Ma followed me out of the house, insisting that I take her form, but I obstinately refused. Her stubbornness further shut down my objectivity. With a final wave of rejection, paper in hand, she shuffle-jogged down the sidewalk to her lunch. Her long white hair was fluttering about her battered skull. Sadly, I watched her; she never looked back and disappeared around the corner of a building. I resisted my urge to run after her. And hug her. But I was not even man enough to yell out that I loved her.

I will never see her again. Maybe only her skull. Maybe in heaven.

* * *

Siggi and I flew back to America on different flights. On my way from Zurich to New York, I visited with a young man from Oman who sat next to me. While waiting for our next flights, we continued our talk and he insisted on buying me a drink. During my next stop, O'Hare Airport, I waited in a deserted hall for another connecting flight, while admiring a man gracefully floating through the motions of T'ai Chi Chuan by a high glass wall.

"What is he doing?" I heard someone say behind me.

I turned to discover a man who was wearing a long, threadbare coat. I explained to him what little I knew about this ancient Chinese exercise. Then he told me that he had been robbed on the subway and had lost his wallet. He showed me his injured wrist, where the thief had torn off his watch as well. His old-fashioned, horn-rimmed glasses, which had broken during the shuffle, were held together with cellophane tape. But I was suspicious of his story because his clothes looked a little shabby, like the ones I always used to wear.

"I have to get to Virginia and need some money," he said to me.

"How would you get there?"

"I would take the bus," he responded.

"How much will it cost?" I asked him.

"I need twenty dollars."

We had a long discussion; he was intelligent and well read and this impressed me. He told me that his wife was from Joburg, Johannesburg, and that they now lived in Israel. He said that if I gave him this amount, he would send me a copy of a book that he'd written. I told him that I would like to read it, but that I might not be able to understand its contents. Regardless, I gave him the money because his book would be a fascinating souvenir.

In our many travels we had found people who had been very friendly and helpful to us. In Australia, Linda and I had bought something, and the clerk had insisted that we did

not have to pay for our purchase. In France, a traveler had bought us sandwiches, while at another time, we had returned a like favor to a lady on a train in Italy. I liked Italians. They had fiery spirits and fit my liking of the wildest, the mostest, the fastest, the.... Linda and I had observed two dark-eyed women arguing with each other. They had gestured vivaciously and shouted melodiously, as if acting out an opera scene, and their language was music to my ear.

And we also had met a few people who were not so kind to us. I had let an older German gentleman step onto the train ahead of me because we had a lot of luggage with us. He entered the doorway and lingered there as if no one else wanted to get in behind him. Forgetting what I had been taught so long ago, to have respect for my elders, and without saying a word, I placed our biggest suitcase on his foot. He moved forward and said nothing as if he hadn't felt a thing.

I remembered other *Sauerkraut* that I could have done without. After Linda and I had visited Aunt Adele on her farm in East Frisia, we took a taxi to the city of Emden. We had told the driver in English to take us to a hotel and did not let him know that I could understand German. I was an American and played the role. He told us that he knew of a good hotel and would take us there. But before we arrived in Emden, we asked him to take us to a hotel near the railroad station instead, so we would be able to walk there in the morning and save a taxi fare. But he insisted on taking us to **his** hotel. When we arrived there, he hurried into it, closing the door behind him, even though we had not paid him or gotten our suitcases out of his trunk. I rushed after him and heard him say to the clerk "*Dies sind Amerikaner, verstehen Sie*, these are Americans, do you understand?"

When I then heard this clerk repeat, "*Dies sind Amerikaner, verstehen Sie?*" to the porter, I remembered little firecrackers in the night. Crack. Crack. I knew that someone would try to take advantage of us, but I did not yet know when and how and would have to be vigilant. The porter led us to our room in a house next door, and I found that its lock was broken. Knowing that this was highly unusual in this land, since Germans always build things that are difficult to break, window hardware being up to ten times as massive as its American counterpart, I told Linda "I'll bet the window won't lock either." This was the case, and it appeared that it had been intentionally disabled.

We blocked our door with a chair and went to bed. But I could not sleep. At about four in the morning, I heard someone tinkering outside our door. I cleared my throat to let them know that I was awake and heard the would-be thief run away. That's when I finally fell asleep. When we checked out of this joint late that morning, the clerk asked me if we had slept well.

"Yes," I forced the lie.

After I paid for our room, he asked me again: "Did you really sleep well?"

Linda and I did meet kind German strangers as well. We had landed very early one morning at the Frankfurt airport and took a taxi to a hotel in this city. There was yet very little traffic, and our driver was in such a hurry that he drove across two, and three, lanes through some curves. Linda again left finger marks in her seat. When we checked into the hotel and told the clerk about our exhilarating ride, he offered us a free hotel room for the remainder of that night.

Another kind stranger that we met in this land was at the ruins of the Roetteln castle. While we were paying to visit it, I casually mentioned to the ticket agent that the

German middle class appeared to be getting a lot richer than its American counterpart. This prompted him to let us visit these ruins free of charge.

* * *

On my long flight back I wondered why I had taken this trip. I had found only a very small portion of the files that I wanted from Ma and had visited only a few relatives after Siggie already had returned to the States. For one long month we had been immersed in stifling heat and gloom from our past, and our visit with our mother had been a disaster. Again. She had written us for help to clean out her apartment, so she “could die in peace.” When we arrived there, she did not ask us to do so, and we had left it as we had found it. *Would she not now be able to die in peace?*

Had her request to clean up only been another bait to lure us to visit her? Or did she not ask us to help because it would be too great a trauma to part with her material collection that she had acquired as an emotional anchor? Why could she not exchange her junk pile, her treasure, for the great pleasure of having two sons that she so longed for? To always be together with the two heroes that she had created?

* * *

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment for crime whereof the party shall be duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

*Amendment XIII to the Constitution of the United States of America
Ratified December 6, 1865*

6

THERE'S NO END TO THIS LIFE

When will we be free?

* * *

On my high school graduation Sunday, Fullo and I were sitting in his living room, when with great concern for my future, he casually asked me:

“Would you like to continue to work here?”

I wanted to shout, “Are you full o’ it?”

“I guess so,” I mumbled instead, while shrugging my shoulders. *Did I just seal my fate for life?*

I had no choice, either stay here or secretly live in a barn somewhere, to feed with cows. But that would not be much different from what I was doing now. I was still too intimidated to ask how much he would pay me or about anything else related to my employment. For my two years of work for him, he’d never paid me one cent, except twenty cents for school lunches and dimes for the church collection plate. He even had stolen what little German money I had brought with me and had displayed it at the county fair, along with Houwke’s vegetables, to win a blue ribbon. My only reward from him had been minimal room and board and an occasional whack on my head. In addition, I was also allowed a few days to pick beans and strawberries at nearby farms so I could buy some clothes and school supplies for myself.

Siggi and I did not even know who had paid for our passage to America. It was very doubtful that it had been Pa or Ma. Many years later Maxo would tell Siggi that he had paid for it, and that Fullo had pressured him for me to reimburse him for my trip. This was akin to a plantation master asking his slaves to pay for their voyage into the unknown after their arrival there.

In some ways, Siggi and I were worse off than the earlier slaves because we were completely alone in a new land. We were isolated and could not draw strength in numbers from companions in suffering. Like them, we were torn from our homeland, had to work hard without pay and could not escape to freedom. And we could not derive hope from an underground railroad or a war that might liberate us.

We became slaves in a foreign land as a direct result of our Progenitors' War. When our parents should have supported, counseled and guided us, they were fighting each other. And against us. Pa never paid any attention to us; Ma's whip paid too much attention to us. By the time our war would end with a bizarre peace in the mid-sixties, Siggi and I would be strafed in the crossfire of at least **twenty lawsuits**, involving at least **two dozen lawyers and judges** that I someday would identify by name. The foundations of our lives were not cemented with friends and family ties or fortified by religion. Missing were the steel re-bars that prevented the collapse of concrete buildings during earthquakes. *Will the constant tremors someday collapse Siggi and me?*

I still had no money, no car, no friends and no means or a place to which to escape. Fullo never suggested a wage and nothing more was said about this subject, so my status quo was maintained for the time being. I did not know if Siggi had any plans or if someone had made such for him after he graduated. However, a few days after Fullo's generous offer to me, his brother Maxo visited us. He had hooked Siggi and me with delectable virtual bait to land us in America and now needed somebody to work for him. *Was this why he had acquired us in the first place?*

"Jiminy cricket, doesn't anybody want to work anymore? What is this world coming to? The Communists are corrupting this country!" expressed political Maxo. I learned that "jiminy cricket" was Maxo's favorite expression. He could cuss in a highbrow fashion because nobody would know what a "jiminy" was, and everyone would think that he flew to India to play cricket. He owned several thousand acres of tideland that his parents had bought long ago for pennies an acre from our distant relatives, the Bursmas. While we were still living in Simonswolde, we once had visited a Bursma family in the nearby city of Norden. I remember that they had given Siggi and me each one Deutsche mark so we could ride a carousel at a nearby carnival. Eventually Maxo became the sole owner of the tideland. When one stood at one end on a clear day, and had good eyesight, one could barely see the high structures at the opposite end of his land.

Every day the tides covered this marshland as they had for eons. Maxo wanted to farm some of it and the salty tidewater had to be stopped from flooding in. During the previous summer he had hired a nice man, nicknamed Bud, to build a dike around several hundred acres with his dragline shovel. Bud had dug clay out of the ground to build it, and in the process created canals on both sides of the dike. However, during the winter, the fierce storms and high tides had eroded it substantially and had washed a long section of it out into the bay. *Did this require an environmental impact study? Or qualify for taxpayer-sponsored disaster aid?*

This washed out dirt and the sediments coming down from the rivers and shorelines helped build up the undiked portion of Maxo's tideland, thereby enlarging it because it was officially recorded to extend out to the waterline of the lowest tide. The more sediment that built up on this mudflat, the further into the bay moved its boundary. Since it was so flat, it did not require much rise of the land to extend the run a long ways out into the bay.

Now Maxo wanted to fill in this gap in the dike and strengthen it along its entire length. He and Fullo agreed that I would help with this project. I suspect that this was their arrangement from the very beginning, but they had left me clueless. Slaves, like children, do not need to know what is planned for them, especially since such information

might encourage rebellion. But for obvious reasons I was ready for a different kind of work.

Siggi was already working on the dike when I arrived there, and he and Maxo were staying in a little old house on Freddy Bursma's farm. I was sure that by moving there, I would increase my chances of gaining freedom. We had little money but were allowed to pump gas from Maxo's tank for Siggi's car. Sometimes he even would give us a few dollars so we could see a movie.

But now Siggi and I worked harder than ever, mostly building a new bulwark of lumber on the outside of the dike to protect its clay from erosion. Bud drove pilings into the ground with a pile driver at regular intervals. In the areas where the dike was the lowest, Siggi and I pushed posts into the ground with Maxo's bulldozer. During high tides, which also occurred at night, we floated truckloads of boards down the nearby river to intermittent places along the dike. Floating was the best way to transport the great quantities needed to build this two-mile long revetment because trucks could not easily access this muddy area. We spent most of the summer nailing planks to these posts and pilings. Afterwards Bud filled in the resulting space behind this board wall with more clay from the borrow pits.

We also cleared the big tree roots and trunks that had been deposited over the years and had gotten stuck in the mud. We sawed them apart and blasted them with dynamite to be able to bulldoze them into piles for burning, because the ones outside of the dike could be set adrift to damage it again during subsequent storms.

On hot afternoons, Maxo brought us ice cream cones to boost our blood sugar in order to sustain our production. Even though we worked hard, I did not mind this so much because we were mostly without supervision and could smell the sea air and often bathe in sunshine. Mud was better than manure, and we could eat all we desired. Maxo was a good cook, compared to mother, and fed us a lot.

Uncle Deepo's son, our cousin Willem, also helped us for several weeks and Maxo paid him one dollar per hour. Had I known this, and had I had the courage, I would have requested to also be paid a specific wage on a regular basis.

Later in the season after our work diminished, I did occasional yard work for Bud and his wife. She made a note in her cookbook that "Ami will make good someday." Years later, I would visit them again with my bride, and Bud's wife would show her prediction to us to confirm that she had been right.

* * *

One evening we were having dinner in the unfinished basement of Freddy's house where Maxo prepared our meals. We discussed our progress and what we had to do next. He had a sample of his cooking stuck to the corner of his mouth, where he usually kept a specimen until it fell off. Frequently he also decorated his shirts and pants with various soups, sauces and beverages. His designs were arranged in an artistic fashion on his shirt and around his zipper, where his fly advertised that he peed more often than he re-zipped.

After a greasy dinner our talk became serious. Our bellies were full, and Maxo savored his usual coffee but shouldn't have. His blood pressure increased to the point that it created a pink patch of a map of his tideland on his balding forehead, at a scale of twenty thousand to one. He acted like a jet setter, leaned back in his chair, pensively drawing on his cigarette much like a plantation owner would smoke a cigar. He talked

importantly about politics and drew upon his vast education and experiences to observe that Washington D.C. was corrupt. There were goons who were interfering with his freedom to build a dike, to develop clam beds and also were stealing the fruits of his labors. There were mysterious events happening in the nation's capitol. When we asked him for specifics he became nervous and vague. This indicated that there could be some basis for his claims, or he could be paranoid, since he never mentioned names but always referred to everyone as "they." He traveled to the East every winter but always was very secretive about what he did there, so I asked him directly, "What do you do in Washington, D.C.?"

"I work for the State Department."

"Doing what?" I questioned him further.

"Oh, I travel to Eastern Europe and write reports," he answered, looking at the table as if it had asked him that question, while the map on his forehead became more defined.

He was always so nebulous about his employment that people teased him that he worked for the CIA. He never denied it because he liked to play the spy role, as well as the professor role and implied by his demeanor that this might be the case. This image was reinforced in that he never smoked before he left but was always very nervous and smoked heavily upon returning. We could tell that there was something troublesome in the nation's capitol. Was it its politics or was it simply the rat's race of its traffic, especially because he was a very inattentive and inept driver? Whenever Siggi or I rode with him, we worried greatly for our safety because he ground gears, drove too slowly and drifted out of lanes. But after a few weeks back on his tideland, he would always quit smoking and calm down again, although his driving would improve little because of his lack of attention.

* * *

That summer Siggi applied for admission to Washington State University and was accepted. I had no idea how he could pay for it, did not ask him, and gave little thought of attending college myself. The scores from my grade prediction test were too low, I never had much confidence in my academic abilities, and I had no money. In Germany only the elite attended the *Gymnasium*. We had been lucky in that respect, even though we had to struggle to meet the academic standards, and I more so than Siggi. I also thought that only the elite attended college in America and dairy cowboys were not quite the elite. After Siggi entered college my desire for freedom intensified, and I told Maxo that I would also like to get more education.

"What can I do for a living? Should I go to college?" I asked him, instead of "how much will you pay me?"

I watched Maxo's face grow dark while he gazed at the food that he was preparing. My instinct told me that I had said something unpleasant to him. He continued to fix his stare on his work while the electro-chemical activities inside his skull increased dramatically. He appeared to be thinking:

"How can I tell him that I want him to work for me forever?"

Instead, he humanely told me that I was a little lazy and stood around a lot. He expected me to wrestle and pound more vigorously, and to emphasize his remarks he continued that Willem also had that opinion. *I weigh one hundred and fifty pounds. My hammer is heavy. Reward has nothing to do with one's drive to succeed in slavery.*

Then he cheered me: "Let me see your grade report."

Obediently I dug out my final grades from high school and showed them to him.

Then he landed his final punch, such as I had suffered before.

"You are not smart enough to go to college."

My heart dropped into my dirty shorts, then bounced back into my dry throat. I believed him and had no reason to think otherwise. Often I hesitated before responding to others, to fill in the words that I had not been able to hear clearly, to construct the meaning of indeterminate sounds. When you don't hear well, stupid people will conclude that you are stupid and some will also tell you so.

For as long as I could remember, a heaviness hung over my soul, but I could not define it. I did not know what it was or where it resided. A blackness often burdened me and interfered with most cognitive thoughts, but I did not realize that this was so, and that most people did not suffer from such a state of mind. I did not recognize my SSS, Scorched Soul Syndrome, which surely must have contributed to my poor performance in school.

* * *

One day during late summer Maxo had another brilliant insight:

"Why don't you buy your brother's car to help him with college?"

Maxo paid me intermittently only a few dollars, and I didn't know how much per hour, or if my pay were in arrears. We did not keep time sheets, and he was always vague about our work, our pay and our future.

"Help with what?" I shot back at him.

"We'll work it out," said Maxo.

"I don't want to buy it. The tires are bald and the springs are sagging."

"You should help out your brother," Maxo insisted.

He had a strange sense of humor, had no clue about reality, knew too much about reality, had a perverted thought process, wanted to exploit me, or a combination thereof. My net worth could not have been more than twenty dollars, he probably had more than a million, and Siggi worked for him and not for me. He did not explain how I was to help Siggi. His plan was to retain me permanently on his new farm. He did not tell me this at the time, but oddly enough, he told me this when he visited my wife and me long after I had left his tideland. He knew that an ignorant slave was easier to manipulate. To give hope in lieu of pay, he dangled virtual carrots before us with vague promises of help. He was single and often lonely and retained a few friends and relatives in contact with him by implying that some day they might inherit some of his wealth. His method worked quite well because it attracted them like, ouch, I bit my tongue again, honey attracts flies.

As it had been on the dairy farms, Siggi and I did not know if we'd ever get paid a fair wage, and we did not even know what a fair wage would be. I was still held captive with invisible chains, while Siggi was quickly loosening his. I worked without complaint and was ignorant of such basics as wages, paid vacation, health insurance, and Maxo kept quiet about tangible compensation for us. But intermittently he made insinuations about future rewards. Since Siggi and I were isolated from the outside world, his vague suggestions were singular, powerful incentives for young people with little hope in a foreign land.

I had no means to help my brother with college. We never received any help from

anybody, expected none, and did not know if and where it was available. Our mother's court battles with our father had always provided insufficient means for our living, and therefore we knew how difficult it was to get money. Ma had fought for it like the devil, and our labors on the dairy farms earned us not even enough food. Now, as before, the one I lived with and worked for kept me intentionally isolated and ignorant.

* * *

That September I drove Siggi across the state with the old Ford to take him to college. The question of its ownership was not resolved because it was still registered in Maxo's name. Long after this, Siggi told me that I never paid him for it, and I insisted that I had not bought it. I did not pay him personally and Maxo apparently did not pay him enough on my behalf. At this time I had signed no transfer papers for this car. The vague idea of its ownership was part of Maxo's manipulation to keep me befuddled and tied to his land, while at the same time making me think that he was paying me a decent wage by implying that the Ford was part of my wages because I was allowed to drive it.

I did not know how much Siggi earned from Maxo. Since neither one of us received a regular wage, I thought that the Ford was a reward for work that Siggi had done during the previous summer. Now it became my reward. Occasionally Maxo gave us some money in the spirit of making a *gift*, which it was not. We more than earned his *gifts* with our hard work on his tideland. Nevertheless, Siggi and I appreciated whatever little he paid us because otherwise we would have continued to have nothing.

* * *

Before he left for his annual trip to the East, Maxo drove with me to the employment office in Everett to find a job for me. Or so he said.

"What kind of work would you like to do?" he asked me on the way.

I did not tell him that I wanted to be an astronomer and count the stars to compute the size of the universe because I did not know how to go about becoming one. I did not know what I was or what I could be. I was dumbfounded because I had not given this much consideration. I mainly had had experience in cow and *nutrient* management and spike hammering and lots of it. I barely had had any outside contact and was not the world's greatest listener or conversationalist.

"I don't know," I shrugged.

"Would you like to be a grocery clerk?"

"Maybe," I answered uncertainly.

I felt uneasy about having to work with the public. It meant having to smile politely, cluelessly, when someone asked me a question that I did not hear well enough. It meant being ignored when my slow monotone speech put someone into a trance. A future friend would tell me that I sounded like actor Peter Lorre. I was born on the edge of the Black Forest; he was born in the shadow of Dracula's mountains in Hungary. He had a low voice and a slow speech also. Even so, he became a famous movie star, and therefore there might be hope for me also.

Maxo led our way into the employment office.

"Do you have a grocery clerk job?" he asked the officer.

The bureaucrat searched his files.

"No, we don't have anything around here, but there is an opening in Pasco."

"Is that in Texas?" I inquired hopefully, confusing it with El Paso from a Western

song.

“No, it’s in Eastern Washington, one of the Tri-Cities.”

I felt ignorant, I was ignorant. It was one of the worst traits in a human being, to be ignorant. But I did not know this because I was ignorant.

Maxo did not ask about other types of jobs or what other openings there might be, and we filled out no papers. If he really wanted me to get one, he would have told me to apply for the Pasco job or for anything else that was available that I would be able to do, no matter in what city or state it might be.

On the way back to the tideland, he informed me, “I have to fly to Washington D.C. next week. I want you to stay on the tideland and keep an eye on the dike.”

“OK.”

“Also, I want you to take my mother from the nursing home twice a month and drive her for a visit with Uncle Deepo.”

“OK.”

Freddy’s house where we had stayed for the summer was located several miles from Maxo’s land. Now he informed me that he wanted me to live on his tideland and drove me to the abode that he was going to move there. By now I had learned not to expect too much in my new homes. Rather than getting hyper again, I acted disinterested. Unlike our homes in Rheinfelden, this one was not a mansion. It was not a mobile home, trailer house or cozy attic. It was a shack. I had never seen such a dilapidated hut in my whole life even though there had been severe poverty and a great housing shortage in Germany. This contraption was built of pressed fiberboard decades before and had expired long ago.

It was to be my American Dream but became my German nightmare. I felt severely homesick because it was so much like my sick old home in the attic. It had no electricity, no water, no telephone, and worst of all, there was not even an outhouse. My father didn’t think that his children needed a toilet, so there was no reason that a slave should expect to have one.

After we hauled my new home to the tideland, we placed it behind the old dike on the neighbor’s field. We placed it exactly square with the world, so it would not look so out of place, so there’d be a hint that an architect might have designed it. This location would also provide some protection from the frequent southwestern storms and serve as a scarecrow for destructive hunters. Maxo wanted me to observe his dike during the winter, not only because of Mother Nature, but also because humanoids, euphemistically honored as *Vandals*, were destroying his property. In the past someone had thrown dirt into the fuel tanks of the equipment, and hunters had either mistaken his boat for a spruce goose or had wanted to titillate themselves with *Schadenfreude*.

After we protected my new *mobile home estate* with *Lifetime Warranty*, *Gold Bond* quality roof covering, I moved into it with my keepsakes. To go potty, I just went out to the frequently wet and/or muddy field and let it all hang and fall out, au naturel, always cognizant of which way the cold wind was blowing. There were no bushes or trees where I could hide, and unlike our attic, I had no neighbors whose toilet I could use now. As in the good old days, I could not wash my hands or take showers. To get fresh air into my new home, I kept the windows closed because they leaked so generously. Although I had moved yet again, I still felt so much at home.

All winter long I brought in drinking water in an old milk can, timed between storms, when I could spin and slide the Ford all the way to my in-the-mud hut. My standard of living was now lower than ever, when I had been sure that this would have been impossible. Now I was a lonely, powerless, waterless, toiletless stick stuck in the mud. I thought that I had reached the zenith of my accomplishments when I had belonged to the virtual Boys Club in high school long before I grew facial fuzz. And as yet, I still did not have to shave even though I was almost twenty years old.

* * *

I was getting desperate about earning an income so I could become independent and begin my life. Anyone would be desperate in such a situation unless one was like Mahatma Ghandi. I was not, or not yet, and I wanted to discover what I could be. I now had a car that I could drive and a little money that Maxo occasionally “gave” me. This allowed me a taste of freedom. *Do I have enough confidence, intelligence to overcome my lack of guidance, knowledge and support to escape to freedom?*

After my eighteenth birthday, Fullo had taken me to a draft board to register me for the Selective Service. I could be selected to be drafted because I was classified 1-A, the category to be called up first during man-made crises. From my perspective from the mud flats, I saw no other employment options, so I visited the Army recruiter who smiled from a poster. If I had to work, I might as well earn some money and serve my new country as well. The recruiter wanted me to serve inside a tank of a tank corps. I knew that I’d suffer severe claustrophobia inside a tank because it would be a mobile bunker, but nevertheless I agreed to enlist.

I rode a bus with a group of draftees to the Seattle induction center for the required examinations. There we had to take written tests and fill out lots of papers that also required our health histories. The soldier in charge said that anybody who lived in the Seattle area should add “sinus trouble” as an existing ailment. Since coming to the Evergreen State, I had had a lot of bloody snot that continued to worry me a lot because I had never had such before. I even had told my secret to Aunt Houwke, and she had assured me that this was normal, and I had seen daily Dristan© ads in the newspapers that made me wonder if everyone had to sniff it in order to keep breathing.

I was not sure of all the diseases that I had had as a child, but there had been many. After completing our paperwork, we prospective servicemen were herded into a big room, told to shed all clothes and assemble in a queue to be inspected. In this queue were thin ones, fat ones, tall ones, short ones, and some with short ones and some with long ones.

I stared at the floor. *This place stinks like a high school locker room. How can a mass of flesh, such as this, annihilate other masses of flesh such as this? And for what? Land? Power? Tomatoes? The rules of the Geneva Convention have to be amended that all wars be fought by naked men. And naked women. I'll volunteer without pay...*

“Bend over!” came from behind.

I snapped my butt to attention.

This was not worth fighting for. I squeezed shut, fearing to offend the inspector of the assembly line.

“Spread your cheeks,” he ordered me.

A man I had never seen before ordered me. I was stark naked and yet he ordered me. Everyone always gave me orders, whether I was fully dressed or stark naked.

“Good. Next.”

I straightened up again, blushing. Blood had rushed to my head from bending over. Down the line came another orifices inspector and stuck a funnel into my left ear. Shone a light through it.

“OK. Right ear.”

“Jees!”

You mean cheese, Mon?

He removed the funnel and replaced it with a clean one.

“You have a problem,” he advised me as he made a note on his clipboard and continued his inspection down the line.

Later a Uniform mumbled something to me.

“Pardon me,” I asked. He was authority.

He did not repeat what he had said to me. Important men do not repeat; they can throw tantrums. Uniform threw the papers to the floor. He must have asked me to take my papers that he had handed to me. Naked, I stood under the gaze of naked men. Befuddled, not having heard his request, I said nothing, nor did I pick the papers. Uniform did and gruffly handed them to me. This lesson was not lost on me. I had disobeyed an order, but only because I had not understood it. I did not have to obey everyone, not even Uniform.

After the physical exams, our herd dressed again and was led into a corral without windows where we had to wait. Sometime later a herdsman wearing a spiffy uniform and a snow-white cap arrived with the results of the tests for which everyone was anxiously waiting. The first call came.

“Neuman.” That was I.

“Here,” proudly I rose, waved my hand and stood at attention.

“Get your ugly face out of here,” is how this important man shocked me.

Only Germans had insulted me in such a manner before. No one had ever done so in America, except my uncle Fullo. I will remember forever what he had said to me because he prevented my escape. Unfathomable wisdom had to be remembered, to be passed on down through the ages. Maybe someday someone will find the answer because I have not yet discovered the association between what was in my orifices and my appearance. *Was it only because I was ugly that I could not escape?*

When I was told that I was ugly, the draftees cheered because they hoped to receive this message for themselves. They didn’t care if they were ugly as long as they did not have to kill or be killed. I came here seeking a job, even though I might have to scrub latrines in the service of my new country, as I had scrubbed my adoptive cows. Since this man had called me ugly, I remained in the corral to see if anyone else would be ugly because I had to wait for my bus anyway. But he found no one else to be so. Oddly, after he called up most of the names, he called me again, and I again raised my hand.

He said to me: “I thought I told you to get your ugly face out of here.”

I had learned enough now, so I traveled back to the womb of my pressed-board shack. Back to my homestead with hair-trigger dynamite under my bed. I had never entertained the idea that I could use this dynamite to express myself to get people’s attention. If I did, people dumber than I or less experienced in heroism than I, would just think, what is wrong with this boy? Is he crazy? Not, why is he blowing up the world? Who caused him to do that? What drove him to desperation? Who should be punished?

Who should be sued?

* * *

A few weeks after Maxo left for the East Coast, he wrote me the following:

“I was sure happy to receive your letter and hear that everything is O.K. and that you are still going strong in spite of your troubles. I remember when I had my first car. It was an old jalopy, and needed many repairs, but I found later on that I knew a lot more about the cars after I was through fixing them.”

I feel such kinship with your struggling soul. I'm thankful that you let me drive your jalopy.

“You mentioned that the road had not been graveled. My plans are to close all of the hunting and the travel on the road, if those people using it do not put gravel on it, as they promised.

“If no one comes by the first part of December, you may let me know and I shall write to Tiffany to put on enough so that you can get in and out with your car or truck. If I have to put gravel on, then you should put up ‘No Trespassing’ signs where my road starts. To the devil with the hunters if they want to treat us that way. That will end the hunting in years to come too.”

Treat us?

“I can well imagine you cannot do anything with the Caterpillar, and it may be best to let it go until the weather clears up.”

If you can imagine your bulldozer getting stuck, why can't you imagine me drowning in mud?

“However, if there is a chance to make some cedar fence posts, you could try and split a couple hundred. Only if you are out of work. I would like to have you clean up the tracks on the cat and paint them with used oil to keep them from becoming rusty. Perhaps you have done it already. Then take out the batteries and throw an old canvas or plastic or something around it for the winter. I believe Uncle Deepo can help you get an old canvas. Then it is just about in as good a shape as if we had it in a shed.

“You mentioned what should be done with the dynamite. Ask my sister how much of the dynamite she wants and take it to her, and take a little extra down there in case we need some. If there is any left, let Mike have the rest. He can also get the black powder that is in Freddy's shed. The powder is dangerous because it takes only a spark to ignite it. However, I am not aware that dynamite is that dangerous. Dynamite should not be thrown around...”

“Now with Siggi. Your brother wrote me a letter saying that he was well and coming along well in school. Do you think he should go the next semester to school (if he does well)?”

Since when have you asked me what we need or think? Are the natives getting restless?

“Would you want to help him out if he does not have enough money? Maybe he should work after the first year and help you get started, if you want to go to college? Actually he should find a fair job, if he does well in school. I will let you think it over and perhaps you should talk it over with Siggi.”

Just tell me how much you are willing to pay me.

“I see where you had an 11.7 ft. tide at 6:46 this morning. (I have the tidebook

lying next to me.) Have you had any storms? Has the revetment been hurt any? I am interested in this and in you. Please write as soon as you can.

“Give my regards to Freddy! Do you still have food and money? If you lack you should talk to my sister.”

Shall I ask your sister to build a road, install water, shower, electricity, cookstove and a refrigerator?

“I will try to get a pair of binoculars to be used on the dike. Would this help you?”

Sincerely your Uncle Maxo”

Have to research the “uncle” part.

Since Maxo H. H. Schitzma thought that dynamite was not that dangerous, I was not too concerned about it. I kept it under my bed because that was the only place where there was room for it since my hut was the only shelter on his tideland. However, this dynamite became so mushy that I could push a finger into it. I assumed that the watery pearls on the surface of the sticks were condensation because of the damp air in my cold hut.

The hut had an oil stove next to its exit door. This stove had a three- or four-gallon tank attached to its back and was located about three feet from my mousy arsenal bed. But I rarely fired it up because, like my groceries and drinking water, I also would have to bring in the fuel oil. It was just too troublesome, especially when I had to carry it several hundred feet over slippery mud when it was raining and that was practically all winter long.

In my constant struggle to become civilized, I mostly wore pajamas to bed instead of muddy clothes. One night I woke up freezing, so I attempted to light the stove. To do this I opened a valve to drain some oil into its firebox. It was too dark to see if, and how much, oil entered it, so I had to guess how far and for how long I had to keep this valve open. Intermittently I threw lighted matches or burning paper into this oil that was not very volatile because it was so cold. Frustrated that it would not light, I stuffed newspapers into the stove and lit it. After the fire finally started with a roar, I adjusted the flow control and returned to bed.

The stove and pipe began to thunder, pop and crackle and became very hot. I jumped out of bed, shut off the oil valve and dove out of my hut. Outside, roaring, flickering shadows told me to keep running. *How hot can stovepipes get? How hot can dynamite get?* When I turned around I saw that the chimney was a giant torch lighting up the night. Barefoot and shivering at a great distance, I did not return to bed until the stove burned itself out.

Because of my warming experience in this cold night, I thought it to be a good idea to carry out Maxo’s request, so the following day I carried his dynamite to the trunk of the jalopy. To do so I had to embrace the box to hold its soggy bottom together. Getting it to the respective parties required me to drive on a bumpy road. Only years later did I learn that I might have been dancing with the devil, when the following article in my local newspaper enlightened me:

“MOSCOW, (IDAHO) (AP) Andy Shemline did not want officials burning his barn to dispose of old, possibly dangerous dynamite. So he took care of it himself..

“Latah County sheriff’s deputies spent most of Thursday searching for Shemline and the dynamite...

“Shemline said he decided to tell deputies what he had done Friday. But he made detectives sign a form saying they would not prosecute him if he revealed the whereabouts of the dynamite.

“Sheriff’s Lt. Vern Moses said officials thought the public safety factor was more important than charging Shemline.

“The decision to burn the barn was made after explosives officials from Washington’s Spokane County advised Moses that it would be dangerous to move the dynamite.

“‘No one wanted to burn the barn, but compared to risking an explosives technician’s life, there was no question what we had to do,’ Moses said.

“Instead, Shemline disposed of the dynamite by dousing it with petroleum to neutralize it and then removed it from the barn and burned it, he said. He went to the University of Idaho to research the matter and learned how to dispose of the dynamite himself.”

Maxo, do you know how close you came to sending me to the attic in the sky?

When I told Siggi about this article, he confirmed that one could wipe off the drops that formed on aging dynamite sticks and fling them to the ground to make them explode. The liquid beads were not moisture but highly unstable nitroglycerin. He also informed me that during his first summer on the tideland, while carrying a box with dynamite on his head, a not-too-distant explosion that was set off by someone else shook him.

Our guardian angels had protected us as they had so many times before. They had saved us from bombs, bullets, head-rot and Ma’s high altitude boiling. They had safeguarded us during many serious illnesses and starvation, from our father and his Teufi, from our bomb making, from spoiled and E. coli-charged foods and unwashed fingers. They had protected us on a raging ocean, from raging bulls, and who knows how many other attempts to reduce us to dust. And now they had protected us from ignorance. *But why had they blessed us with so many lawyers?*

Our send-off to heaven would have been in such a unique fashion. Blow our bodies into little bits, sending them flaming into the sky, to rain back down like brilliant rockets on the fourth of July. But we would not have been wasted because our stir-fried parts would have landed in big circles to feed our little friends, the mice, foxes, ducks, geese, crows and magpies.

All of this was nearly accomplished without forethought. But what a thrilling afterthought!

Although my life was spared again, and I could not shower on the tideland, I did take an unexpected bath that also could have done me in. After it had been raining heavily all night, I was driving to town and crossing a big hump in the road that was part of an old dike, when my car splashed into a swirling sea of muddy brown water. Unbeknownst to me, the nearby river had risen over its banks. I waited and pondered how I could continue my journey. Because I grew impatient I put on the rubber hip boots that I always carried with me in the car, entered the flood and continued float-walking, trying to follow the submarine roadway as best as I could. But the current became too strong and I floundered into a hole, immersed to my armpits. Afraid that I would be sucked down the river, I struggled back to the car and drove home to dry out again. *Is there no end to **this** life?*

* * *

Although I had missed a lot of chances to depart from Earth, I observed others coming down from the sky to lose their lives during another brief relief from my boring existence on the tideland. While I was returning there late one afternoon, I observed a large airplane descending into the mountains far from an airport. I kept watching it until it disappeared over a forested peak, barely missing it. Since it appeared that this plane was in trouble, I turned toward the direction of its flight to investigate further. I reasoned that this plane was unable to control its path because it did not change its course to land in the open pastures at the bottom of the foothills.

Before long, the car radio confirmed that a Boeing 707 on a training flight had just crashed. A couple of vehicles with "Press" decals passed me at great speed, and I tried to follow them, thinking that since this was a very low population area, they were also heading there. Although they left me in the dust, I later found them parked by the edge of a forest, along with a few other cars. I looked for a road or trailhead but could not find any. So I took a chance and simply went straight into the thicket, in the direction the vehicles were facing, to struggle through the underbrush, hoping to find the crash site. Within a few hundred yards I came to a clearing, a huge disaster area around a small river. Only a few people had arrived here as yet. Like everyone else, I was browsing around the widely scattered debris when a sheriff announced that anyone who was not with the press or on official duty had to leave this scene immediately. Dutifully I headed back into the woods to where I thought I had entered. But night had settled quickly, and I encountered such a dark forest that I could not even see my hand in front of my face. I felt and beat my way through thick brush. There were no lights or stars, and the only sound that I heard was my thrashing about. I had no idea if I remained on a straight course or if I were just struggling through a random pattern to be lost forever. Strangely, I did not worry about this, or that I might fall off a cliff, and miraculously exited the forest within a short distance from my car.

* * *

Maxo's apparent concerns for Siggie and me in some of his letters were part of his scheme to keep me on the tideland under the guise of actually wanting to help me. He only hinted about helping us but always evaded my probing questions with his own questions. He advised me only superficially and did not do anything useful to help me. His artificial concerns were like Pa's occasional interest to fool someone. Maxo, like Pa, had a few words of support but never followed them up with concrete actions. Siggie told me that during his first summer on the tideland, Maxo and he had had long discussions about various subjects. Therefore I decided to impress him with my intellect and simply asked him:

"How does a person think? Does one ask questions?"

His face formed the same worrisome expression and the pink map appeared on his forehead, just like the time when I had told him that I wanted to get more education, and he just mumbled:

"No. I don't think so."

That was the end of our debate, and I could tell by his demeanor that he did not want to talk about this subject under the principle of "let sleeping dogs lie," let slaves be ignorant. Again I read his thoughts: "I can't let him start thinking."

In his letters he wrote me that he was worried about the storms destroying his dike. Coffee intensified his worries because it stimulated his nerves and brain enough to create vivid nightmares. He once told Siggi that he had never slept through an entire night for as far back as he could remember. I confirmed this problem years later when I stayed with him in his house for a few nights, and he would wake me with his shouting dreams.

I followed Maxo's suggestion and enrolled in night school at a junior college, now community college and soon to be a university. Eventually it might become something that hasn't been thought of yet, maybe something like intergalactic super-cyber university. I enrolled in mechanical drafting and descriptive geometry and did well in these subjects.

One evening, during my commute to the intergalactic super-cyber university, I felt that my steering felt soft or wobbly. I inspected my tires and discovered that one front one was worn through and its inner tube was bulging out. I did not know for how long I had been driving on air, and it was a miracle that it had not blown out, especially at highway speed. Although it was getting late in the day, a stranger stopped to help me. Since I did not have a spare tire, he drove me to the tideland and back again, and when I offered to pay him he refused to accept anything. He told me that if I'd help someone else, he'd be satisfied.

* * *

Often the field to my shack became impassable because frequent rains turned it into sticky, slippery mud. After the jalopy buried itself to its axles, I pulled it out with Maxo's Caterpillar. This packed clay into the very tracks that I had cleaned and oiled so well. From then on I parked the car at the end of the gravel road and changed into rubber hip boots to be able to walk back and forth between my hut and car. Mud would ball up on my soles and travel up the sides of my boots. At times the wind would howl and cold rain would blast me when I returned home from school late at night. Inside Villa Schitzma in the Mud, mud accumulated faster than I could sweep it out. I quit brooming and shoveled it whenever it became too deep because it would dry into concrete-like slabs or wear into a fine powder.

I noticed that I did not live alone because the decor inside my villa was further enhanced by the black rice that my mostly invisible little pets generously sprinkled over everything, including on my bed and *kitchen* surfaces where I prepared uncooked, straight-out-of-the-can, gourmet-type meals. So far my little decorators had always scurried into hiding whenever I entered, and I did not realize until the darkest of winter that I also did not sleep alone. One morning I opened my eyes when a mouse bolted away from my face. Thereafter I was determined to kill them immediately, vigorously and mercilessly before they pierced my ears or other sensitive organs. But I could never stop them from coming.

Besides furry pets, I also had feathery friends that were afraid of me. There were dozens of swans, hundreds of ducks and thousands of snow geese. They did not want to be shot out of the sky, so they landed on the tideland only at dusk or during great storms. Sometimes I'd sneak up to the geese from behind the dike and slowly peek over the top so as not to scare them. It did not take them long to spot me, however, and then their racket would start. With honking and screeching that could be heard for miles, acres of white, flapping and fluttering feathers rose to circle the fields, rising ever higher to sail away into the sky.

* * *

To provide me with companionship, Maxo thoughtfully had left me an old car radio and battery before he departed on his annual winter trip. But within a day or two this battery went dead. I resumed reading and occasionally visited Freddy's in the evenings to watch television. Maxo also bought me a subscription to *The Christian Science Monitor* and sent me a paperback book, *Ethics*. I did not know the meaning of this word and found it puzzling that he expected me to read or understand these publications. *Was he looking at me as a college man or as a slave master?*

I read these publications religiously with a dictionary close at hand. Initially I was unable to comprehend the meaning of *Ethics* but doggedly worked my way through this book, underlining the words that I did not know. I looked them up and reviewed them later so I'd remember them. From the *Monitor* I learned the words "ultramontane" and "insurgents." I felt that I should become one but did not have the courage to be a lone rebel.

At night, a camp lantern provided a gloomy light in my shack. It was more luxurious than a candle, and I didn't like candles anymore, especially at Christmas time. But this lantern was supposed to be used only outdoors because it produced a lot of soot. In the black deposit on the ceiling, I traced with my finger "HOME SWEET HOME." My deeply ignored message went to the *sanitary landfill* when Maxo discarded my sweet home after my escape from it. *Great health benefits far in my future?*

* * *

One day I was driving the Ford across a single-lane bridge when a farm truck came onto it from the other direction, and we stopped bumper to bumper in the middle. Since the driver was very beautiful, I did not back up to let her pass because I was still not civilized. She smiled, I waved, and she backed up her big truck to let me through. I noticed the name of a food processor on the truck's cab and later called there to find out her name. A voice at the other end of the wire told me that they didn't give out information about their employees, and I wished that she hadn't smiled at me because I never saw her again.

Occasionally I went to church with Maxo's sister near Monroe. There was a tall, blue-eyed, blonde girl in attendance that I had to meet. After the sermon I inquired about her name and wrote her a letter to ask her for a date. She accepted and we dated for a couple of months. I was almost in heaven until I found out that she was still dating her old boyfriend as well. Keeping a girlfriend was as difficult as earning a dollar. What could I expect, I didn't even have a toilet. To acquire a flushing toilet and a shower with warm water became the goals of my life.

* * *

Maxo did not communicate well verbally, even though he had almost earned a master's degree, having completed everything except his dissertation. His verbal discourse could be very ambiguous because he'd use pronouns without identifying the person or object referred to, as in "they did this," "he did that," causing the listeners to wonder who did what. Frequently this became even more confusing when he did not introduce the subject matter or changed subjects without transitions. Often he also spoke while walking away from the person he was addressing or did not finish his sentences. A banker once told Soggi that Maxo must be very intelligent because so often he could not comprehend what he was talking about. His unique method of bamboozling people could be as confounding

as legal and insurance documents, and it did not require much intelligence.

Maxo's friend Mike asked me to help him build a loafing shed for his, gulp, dairy cows. They both had given me the definite impression that they had an agreement about this. I wanted to get paid every week but did not receive anything from either one of them. I mentioned this to the carpenter whom I was helping on this project, and this started a grapevine that eventually reached Maxo in the nation's capitol or beyond.

Up to this time Maxo had written me friendly letters because he worried that his dike would be destroyed again and wanted to make sure that I quickly repaired any damage. It had cost him, or the Unknown Taxpayer to whom a monument has yet to be built, a lot of money to restore it after the previous winter storms. He wrote me instructions and demanded that I inform him weekly of the status of his dike, tides and weather. But I did not write him often enough because I did not like to write, as words did not come easily to me. I was struggling with my soul and the forces of nature, constantly repairing his dike by filling hundreds of sacks with clay and driving hundreds of stakes with a sledgehammer, often in the wind and rain. In December, after Maxo learned that I was complaining to someone about my pay, I received a letter from him, wherein he skillfully tugged my chain to make sure that it still was secure, while intimidating me with the most powerful method available to him:

"Apparently you don't find it necessary to write me a letter to tell me about the project, and how you are getting along at least every second Sunday (taking mother along and back to Snohomish). This was agreed between us and you could and should talk over the problems and difficulties you have with my sister. Instead you act and do towards my friends as if I were responsible for your troubles, etc. This is something that Americans (and good people in Europe) don't do either. I am not going to stand for this. Actually you act like a boy, when you should act your age. For this reason I am telling you in all seriousness to do the following, or else I am through with you. If you don't do the following I will write to Uncle Fullo immediately and you will have to go back to him. He is your guardian and he sponsored you to come to America. He is responsible for you."

Slaves are sponsored? Like athletes? Can I get paid to be on TV? Wish I had a TV.

"...So now it is up to you; either you do the things you agreed to and follow directions, or I am through with you and you go back to your guardian.

"Sincerely,

"Maxo Schitzma"

No more "uncle."

Earlier I had written him about his concerns, and that I was working hard to protect his dike, but our letters must have crossed in the mail. I also sent him photos showing some of the eroded areas of the dike. After he received them, he wrote the following letter to his protégé but in a different vein from the previous one. He seemed to be more concerned about my happiness and offered me greater virtual rewards than in the past. What he had learned from me greatly worried him; the dissipation of his dike and the possible escape of his slave:

"...and going often to my sister and discussing your personal problems with her. I have made arrangements with her as I told you before, and she can help you. You must not keep things within you, because they work themselves up to a regular explosion of

bitterness. I like your last letter particularly because you tell me a lot about yourself and the dike. As you know you can get up to \$50 a month from my sister, and your tuition, gas, food, etc. This is all I can afford at the present, but I think you can help prepare yourself for life by studying and at the same time look out for my interest. **You can be sure, if you look out for my interests there, I will do all I can for you.**

"I want you to eat well and get your meat and eggs from my sister and let her buy you canned goods. You should become a fine cook, and by eating well you'll feel better especially on the work on the dike. Eat meat, eggs, vegetables and milk every day, and plenty of them and not so many sweets."

Keep food fresh without refrigerator and cook without stove? Lick dishes clean like a good mother? Are you as deeply in denial as my father?

"Now as to the dike. The pictures shocked me when I saw them and it is probably more serious than you realize. If one or two storms did that what will happen when the storms come between Christmas and the 20th of January?

"...By all means do a lot of visiting, when invited, and in Monroe also go when not invited. I would like to have you go there every Sunday, if you can. Santa brought you something here, and I am going to send it to my sister, because you will probably spend Christmas there. I hope you like it."

What could it be? An electric shaver. A used electric shaver. A used electric shaver with used shavings in it. But where is the 2-mile long extension cord?

"Now see that you get the revetment in order, and write me every week how much progress you are making.

"Sincerely, your uncle,
Maxo Schitzma"

"Uncle" again.

The tone of this letter was opposite from the one before because he knew that his dike was disintegrating, and he needed me to repair it during the continuing storms and high tides. I was cheap labor, and in my humble opinion, greed and hypocrisy seemed to be the primary traits of the Schitzmas. Another growing season would be lost if his land flooded again with saltwater. Even though he was wealthy and expressed concern for me, suggesting what I should eat and finding a girlfriend, he made no effort to improve my living conditions.

Although some of the hairs on my head now seem to be growing in a reverse direction and are pushing out of other places, I am still waiting for Maxo to help me all he can as he had promised. When he died recently, I hoped to reap my reward, to receive the pay that I had earned so long ago and was happy to learn that a lawyer had prepared a will for him. *Will he reimburse me for my labor and my deprivation of a toilet and other civilized conveniences?*

I did my best to do everything that he requested me to do. I inspected the dike frequently, especially during storms and high tides. Since most of it faced squarely into the prevailing winds, the waves assaulted it with great force, washing it out in many places. The sea rolled in from the open bay and crashed abruptly against the boards, blasting through the gaps between them. The highest tides also washed over its bare top, diminishing it somewhat in height. I worked alone filling hundreds of gunnysacks with clay to plug the holes in the dike. I did so by hanging these sacks in a wood frame to hold them

open so I could shovel dirt into them. After tying them shut, I dragged them, and dropped them into the washouts behind and in front of the lumber bulkhead, some of which I had to re-nail first because it had been smashed from the pilings.

And so I continued to live and work from day to day, alone on the tideland, miles from nowhere. Deepo, brother of Maxo, came to visit me. Once. I was glad to have company, any kind of company, but he did not help me, offered no help, and therefore I was not very hospitable. I did not offer him lunch and did not demonstrate how I had to prepare food in my fine gourmet kitchen: gracefully wipe black mouse rice from the counter, plunk lunchmeat on bread with flair, and pour milk down my gullet from a carton. I could not be debonair.

* * *

Since Maxo had ordered me to take his mother to Deepo's farm, I picked up my date at the nursing home and drove her there. She was in her eighties, had dementia and often did not recognize anyone anymore. She sat next to me in my jalopy and just kept staring and smiling at me, and strangely, seemed to like me.

One early spring day, while returning from such a date, I drove past the pulp and paper mills in Everett and almost impulsively turned down the road toward the plants. They did not look or smell very inviting, and I wondered why anyone would want to work there. But I was curious about the myriad buildings, tanks, pipes and machinery from which all the smoke, steam and stink were coming and was stopped at the guardhouse at the end of its entrance road.

"May I help you?" asked the guard, the dreaded authority.

"I am looking for a job," I replied uncertainly. I did not anticipate being stopped and questioned, so I gave a legitimate reason for entering these premises.

The guard gave me directions to the office, and I went in to fill out an employment form. Again I was required to supply the health history and therefore was sure that I would not get a job here. *If the Army won't hire me, why would anybody else?* Ma had sent me the health history that I had requested, and I dutifully recorded everything: whooping cough, measles, diphtheria, *Rotsucht* (red craze or rash), *Nesselsucht* (nettle rash) and mumps. And of course the chronic middle ear infection and long-term exposure to tuberculosis. I could not remember having had consumption per se, but when a doctor in Aurich had looked at my lungs with a fluoroscope, he had reacted with an enthusiastic good-grief-like comment because my lungs appeared to be scarred. Even though I must have been a potential corpse, the factory hired me.

* * *

At the age of twenty I had my first paying job. Hurrah, hurrah! I decided to move out of Maxo's shack and into an apartment in Everett close to the mill. It had a bathroom! My first and my own real bathroom! Hurrah, hurrah! To pay for the first month's rent, damage deposit and expenses, I applied for a seventy-five dollar loan at a nearby bank, which was more money than I had ever had at any one time.

The bank teller advised me:

"You have to see that loan officer over there."

I walked over to his desk where he asked me to sit down. I felt uncomfortable in the opulence of his office, his *Herrenzimmer*.

"I would like to borrow seventy-five dollars."

"What do you have for collateral?" the loan officer asked me while handing me a form.

"What's collateral?"

"It is something that you pledge as a security for your loan."

"Nothing," I said.

I could read the banker's face. "Where did this guy come from? I wish he would get out of here."

"You mean absolutely nothing?"

"These clothes here."

"Do you have a job?" queried the banker.

"Yeah."

"Where?"

"Screech and Stench Pulp 'n Paper."

"How long have you worked there?"

"I am starting next week."

He phoned the company to confirm this fact, thereby implying that I might be a liar, little did he know, and wrote me a check. I was elated. I had made one of the biggest decisions in my life, a decision that was not made for me by other people, to borrow money, had acted on that decision and gotten results.

That weekend, feeling exuberant with new freedom, I visited Fullo's family where Aunt Houwke served tea. I announced that I now had a paying job, and we caught up on important family news that was worthless for me. But it was not long before Fullo asked me if I could help him for a minute. "Sure," I said magnanimously. I was independent now and could not be chained again. Besides I was wearing nice clothes, so I could not get too deep into Fullo's ubiquitous doodoo.

He led the way down to his slaughterhouse barn. Again. When people lead you to their barns, especially if they don't tell you why, watch out. I didn't because I was becoming a trusting soul again, or was still a shy one. There he picked up a pitchfork and handed me a shovel. As we walked over to the milkhouse the air decayed. I suffocated.

There it was.

My spirit decayed.

There was a mass of crawling, wiggling maggots reveling in the putrid carcass of a onetime cow. Fullo had butchered her weeks before and had ostentatiously left her leftovers near the milkhouse by the highway. *To advertise his business?* In the meantime these leftovers had come back to life. When life got out of control, he must have been overcome with doubts, and therefore asked me to help him bury life.

An opportunity was knocking on my noggin that I could replace my nausea with the greatest of joys, *Schadenfreude*. To permanently cure his habit of exploiting defenseless imported slaves, I impulsively grabbed Fullo with a chokehold, flung him to the ground and sat on him. Then I pushed his face into the stinking, squirming remains and vigorously pounded it repeatedly into them, in order to squish a lot of maggots up his nose and ears. And into his soul.

But I didn't because I didn't think of it. Instead I held my breath, dug a hole as fast as I could to bury the squirming carcass.

Again, as always before, he did not thank me for helping him because he couldn't

get a life, but fortunately, I was almost beginning mine.

* * *

The personnel officer at Screech and Stench did not interview me, nor told me what I would have to do, and I didn't ask him. But I was impressed that his company paid a doctor to give me a physical exam and a hearing test, free of charge.

I reported to work on a Monday evening because I chose to work swing shift as it paid a few cents, a lot, an hour more. After I was asked to buy leather gloves and a long leather apron, meaning that I was not going to work in a Musak-enhanced, climate-controlled office, Boss led me deeply into a huge windowless building, into the bowels of screaming hell. I followed him up and down various levels, through a labyrinth of posts and beams, cranes and stacks of lumber. Slabs of tree trunks were screeching through saws and screaming planers. Wheels were spinning, chains and belts were squeaking; thousands of boards were resting, stacking and moving hither and yon.

I resisted the impulse to run back out. *Not here, God, please not here.*

We neared the other end of the building; I could see daylight ahead. I was relieved when we went back out and into a long open-sided shelter covering a river of boards, laid side by side, on a set of moving parallel chains bringing them out of a dark cavern at the far end. Except for the squeaking of the chains and the clapping of the boards, it was quiet here. Men scurrying along the riverbanks were pulling them from the chains, to load them onto stacks, by length and grade. My guide stopped here and spent a few minutes explaining to me the various grade marks on this lumber. Since I was a quick learner, I needed no further instructions for my lifelong career. I was to catch selected boards from the river and stack them on the riverbank behind me. This was the extent of my training, and he did not introduce me to the others because they had no time to stop wrestling big ones from the cellulose river.

I took my station between two human robots that paid little attention to me. I donned my gloves and apron, strapping down its leggings, feeling armored and invincible like the knights of medieval Europe. I lifted the end of a board in order to pull it onto a stack. *Are these made of iron?*

It was heavier than any board that I had ever lifted, and I had lugged hundreds of them for Maxo's dike. This board was full of sap, rough-sawn, and had been part of a log not too long before. I lifted the twenty-foot long two-by-twelve over the rollers mounted at the edge of the waist-high platform, pulled it off, guided it unto a stack and dropped it with a clap. Turned around, grabbed the next one, pulled it off, threw it into place, turned around, dashed to the left, pulled it off, smashed it into place, dashed to the right ... all night long.

When the sun set that evening, it dawned on me that I was working on the "green chain," which I had heard about in high school as being the toughest job in town. But what I despised most in my new professional life was the lack of interaction with the robots around me. While I wanted to be friends, to enlarge my tiny family circle, they did not talk.

When will I become a robot? Will my brain shrink in proportion to the swelling of my muscles? Had shrinks studied them? Should they reproduce? Yes, yes! For the good of the shareholders. How do I become a shareholder?

When my body-morphing, character-warping encounter was over at two o'clock in

the morning, I followed the robots out of our disassembly plant. As soon as I reached level ground without obstacles, I ran to my jalopy even though I was dead tired and my legs were rubbery. My arms felt inches longer, my legs somewhat shorter, and my back crooked, ready to break. When I arrived home I fixed dinner: five bowls of corn flakes with milk and sugar. While I ate, I read, because I thought I had wasted the night, for I had not yet rejoiced in the night that the Lord had made.

The next evening I returned to my station on the wooden river, and I was doubtful that I could last very long doing this heavy work. My body was aching. The boards never stopped coming. At times I could barely keep up with the flow, running back and forth along the river, lifting boards, while making male guttural grunts, at various locations to remove them. I was using every cell in my body, all but my brain cells, which were cocooned as always.

These boards were sawn from beautiful trees ripped from the balding mountains. Trucks had brought down their corpses and dumped them into a mass-grave pond at the mill, whence they traveled on a chain to be denuded. A giant arm moved along them, blasting them with jets of high-pressure water, to explode off their bark. The pale, naked trunks then moved single file into the sawmill and through giant saws with dragon teeth. Butchers pushed buttons, moved levers to shuttle them back and forth to rip them repeatedly. After each cut they decided how to turn the remaining trunks for best economy, to send them back and forth again to cut more planks. These then traveled to the “green chain” for the historic event, to be sorted by robots, the first humanoids ever to touch them.

And so the weeks dragged on. Night after night after my shift, I ran back to my jalopy, no matter how exhausted I was, because I could not wait to get out of **this** hell. I wondered why others did not run out also. *Are they crazy? Or am I? Can they not run anymore? Had their hopes been sawed to dust?*

* * *

Siggi returned from college for his summer vacation and moved into my sparsely furnished apartment. We finally had our own apartment, freedom and toilet. It had not been easy to acquire this.

And we had motivation.

After I arrived home from work at night, I always wolfed down cereal while reading, then fell into bed at three or four o'clock in the morning. Siggi would be asleep, and we saw each other only on weekends because he had a day job for a generous one dollar sixty-eight an hour in a camper factory far outside of Everett. Besides earning a few cents an hour more, another advantage of working nights was that it was cooler then. Sweat was a by-product of my labors, therefore the Screech and Stench salt mine company supplied us free salt tablets from vending machines. Candy bars cost a dime.

Again our bed sheets changed from white to gray but not as much as before, a hint of old home style. We were too tired and too independent to waste time, effort or money to wash them regularly at a self-service laundry. Nor were we making much effort to cook or do dishes. When we were thirsty, we drank out of a milk carton. When hungry, we opened a can of peas or beans, warmed it on the stove and ate directly from it. I often had four Danish rolls for dessert. Or six. Our diet was as routine and junky as our work. Ma never had cooked but once, so we had no interest in it, and our spare time was too

precious to do more work that we did not like.

Our small apartment on Broadway in Everett was the top of a two-story shack with a flat, black roof and dark brown siding. Or it could have been cowy green. The rising summer sun quickly heated it to afford us the ambience of the tropics. Humid heat often woke me in the mornings, and my muddy sheets would often be tangled around me. This was the setting of “On Broadway” that we listened to on the radio.

I usually rose by noon and was home alone because Siggi was at work. We could not afford a TV, so I got a quick fix for my anomie by reading and eating. Again, while reading, I devoured cereal, boiled eggs and drank from Hi-C cans or paper cartons. We never drank soda or alcohol because they were too expensive, and we had no peers who pressured us to do so. We had not yet found friends here with common interests and the same concerns for the problems in this world, and the papers said there were many. During these days people built shelters in the ground for a possible atomic war, and I thought this to be silly. I did not want to bury myself alive in a bunker because I had done that before, and I didn’t like it. If the missiles came I wanted to be their first target.

* * *

After several weeks on the green chain, I was transferred to the planing mill. This was the last place I wanted to spend eight hours a night. This was where I had asked God to keep me away from when I passed through here on my first day on the job. Here I had to do the same kind of work, pulling and stacking boards from conveyor chains. These did not weigh as much after having been trimmed, kiln-dried and planed smooth, so my work became somewhat easier, but my torture became much greater, although I was harpooned by far fewer slivers. I was now totally immersed in the one hundred-plus decibel shrieking of wood planers, music from hell. It was louder than jets during take off, as painful as the screaming of air raid sirens that had been stretched into one continuous, unwavering note, evoking the unending, soul-piercing agony of yore, nights of shuddering tremors.

Inside our huge bunker several jets shot out wooden missiles in ceaseless salvos. Their noise joined with that from other machinery to send vibrations that quivered every molecule in our world. I could not escape from them. They quivered every cell in my body, and I could hear them without an ear; I felt them in my bones. To talk, we robots shouted directly into each other’s ears but mostly communicated with a simple, crude sign language that was punctuated by the *bird*.

The Company did not provide us with ear protection because this did not yet exist. *Or did it?* I never saw anyone wearing earmuffs. To dampen hell, I stuffed a wad of cotton into each ear, which made no difference in the sound exploding inside my head. After leaving work, I always removed waxy cotton from my whistling ear, rotten cotton from my silent ear. I always checked this cotton to assess the state of my health, to assess how rotten I was. The nightly cacophony would diminish my hearing acuity considerably later in life, gradually being replaced by permanent whistling instead. Now I continuously hear the screeching of tiny planers, distant echoes from hell, with my only and withering ear. In lieu of a gold watch, this was my fringe benefit from the Company for my faithful and outstanding service.

Most of the lumber we produced was a nominal two inches thick, but occasionally three-inch thick beams came down the chain. These had sharp edges and were dripping wet. We also had to remove them from the conveyor and drop them skillfully onto stacks

like all the other boards. To do so, I had to let them slide through my hands to be able to keep up with the production, and before too long, their knifelike edges sliced through the rubber gloves that I always had to buy myself, like my leather gloves and aprons, pickling my hands with preservative or pesticide. *Can I be preserved until I die and long thereafter? Can I remain forever with King Tut, or better yet, with Nefertiti?*

I worked overtime every chance I had in order to earn enough to attend college in the fall. Therefore I once rearranged tons of lumber for three and a-half consecutive shifts. By the time I finished my second one, I could barely crawl. On Saturday morning, on my way to my final shift, after about three hours of restless sleep, I put on my boots and staggered out of our apartment to another off-Broadway performance. Siggie bid me adieu with an intensely serious face, "You walk like an old man, Neuman."

I was going back into the bowels of hell and, therefore, needed a lot of encouragement.

Rare were the signs, "Warning. Ripping Dragon Teeth" or "You May Get Squashed Like A Bug Area." There were so many hazards that there would be signs everywhere. Some robots might spend their entire shifts trying to read them all and produce nothing.

Over the time that I was drawn nightly to this mill by my desire to further my education, while keeping a toilet, I observed differently modified robots. One occasionally rotated through the nearby "You May Get Squashed Like A Bug Area" area. A crane had dumped a load of lumber on him and broken his spine, which had been repaired with bones cut from his legs. This shortened them and when he walked, they appeared to move in a rapid rotary motion under his rigid spine. At this stage he was still not wearing a hard hat or visible back support. Not many robots did and neither did I.

A few weeks into summer I witnessed another robot modify himself. His job was to cut defective portions out of the boards that the lumber grader diverted to him. He pulled these from his left side and placed them squarely in front of a constantly spinning circular saw. To make a cut, he stepped on a button on the floor that caused this buzzing saw to jump forward through the board. And finally through his fingers. Panicked, this robot stumbled around. I became almost paralyzed and could not help because I did not know how. I could not even become a gawker because I could not leave my station at the lumber conveyor. Fortunately several robots were hunters and helped him; they had practiced with sawed off bones before.

The wooden rivers never stopped flowing because there could be no slowing of profit. The highest standard of living in the world had to be maintained and what are a few digits of a robot? If one becomes useless, we can always get another, and he'll be thankful to work here.

* * *

Since I was a chip off the old block I was horny. A bleached blonde who had had to get married at the age of fifteen, bore twins in Texas and divorced at seventeen, was living next door to us. In the afternoons, the three of them sometimes came over to sit on the lawn with me. Her little girls called each other "pee-hole." I was not used to such loose talk from someone so young, although I heard much worse from robots.

Blondie was also horny as well as aggressive. One afternoon she visited me, and we started kissing on the couch. Oh, did I want to. Oh, did I have to. And she even more

so because before I knew what was happening, she unzipped my pants and grabbed me around my muscular chest and said... *What did she mean by that? Was that a compliment?*

Apparently to encourage me, she continued, and her exact words were, "The only time I'm ambitious is when I'm pregnant."

Even though another body part was in total control over my actions by now, oddly, my brain kicked in. My conscience would not allow me to create another "pee-hole," one that I could not support, or she would not love. I wrestled her to re-zip, she wrestled me to unzip, and so it went until it dawned on me that something could get caught in my zipper or somewhere else. Therefore I ran out of the apartment before I got caught or lost control over myself. Wearing only her bra on top, and I can't remember what on the bottom, she followed me out into the alley. Flipping me off, she yelled after me, "You *expletive-deleted expletive-deleted*," for all the neighbors to hear and to see. Fortunately she was chasing me, or they might have thought that I had attacked her. *Would anyone ever believe that she was trying to do me?*

* * *

I worked at the planing mill until fall. In the interim, I had applied at Washington State University and much to my surprise was accepted. In the middle of September, Siggi and I drove across the state to Pullman in the old Ford that neither one of us owned. We carried no insurance for the jalopy, or for our bodies, but for now it was mine to keep. It was still in Maxo's name, and Siggi still thought I had not paid him for it. I never owned it, never signed any papers, and I had not been paid enough by Maxo for my work on his tideland. *Was he also encouraging real brotherly love?*

We took turns driving across the state and after several hours when Siggi was driving through the middle of nowhere, I said to him: "Stop a minute, I have to get out."

He stopped, I squirted. Before I could get back into the car, he drove off. He stopped. I ran after him. He drove off. He stopped, he laughed, we laughed. He drove away. I walked. Finally he let me back in. It was a happy time under the expansive blue sky of America, and we were off to college.

We arrived in LaCrosse and Siggi was still driving. Suddenly, as we approached a stop sign, our car swerved around and screeched to a halt, almost square with the road.

"What did you do?" I asked frightfully.

"Nothing. I didn't do anything," Siggi replied with worry.

We got out and discovered that a steering arm had come undone, causing our front wheels to cross in LaCrosse.

"Wow! If that'd happened at sixty, we'd be dead now," I philosophized, feeling that our guardian angel was still with us.

We found a service station and the mechanic who fixed our steering told us: "You are lucky guys."

We've always been lucky??!! I wonder what the future will bring.

* * *

Inspirational true story of amazing triumph over many extreme traumas.

Heroes from the Attic: A Gripping True Story of Triumph

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/2892.html?s=pdf>