

Reports of Locals after 1945

Report from Paul Gromm, born 9 September 1877 in Niemaschkleba, Roßack's Büdnergut No 23

The winter of 1944/45 was very cold and with lots of snow. In January the first refugees came through our village. They had no more belongings than what was on their handcart. Snow was lying and a lot of them stayed overnight in our village. At the beginning of February the thunder of the canons could be heard in a distance, the front was coming nearer. Soon the "Volkssturm"¹ came and occupied the Oder dam, however, a lot of Berliners were among them who no longer wanted to defend the Reich – there was no more sense in that. Emma (PG's daughter) drove with the car and the children to Frieda (also PG's daughter) in **Groß-Breesen**, they also took a load of hay and 2 carpets with them to **Breesen**². Soon however the Russians were at the Oder and shot into our village. We still believed that they would not cross the river. A refugee from **Wassow**? came over the frozen river further up from **Polenzig**, wearing no shoes and being deeply disturbed, weeping he told how they had been treated by the troops, those unable to flee on time had been captured and put in cellars (Grete Kinzen?). In **Schönfeld**, several persons committed suicide by hanging themselves. Behind our second barn one of the Russian batteries stood, shooting via **Polenzig**, two more batteries were hiding in the forest from where artillery fire started soon afterwards. In **Polenzig** every night several farms burnt down. In Silesia, the Russians crossed the Oder and came nearer every day, soon they stood in **Krossen**. On Saturday, Trunsch, the leader of the village farmers, hold a community meeting and explained that all locals should build a trek and leave the village in the direction of **Koschen**. The children were evacuated by truck, however only very few locals did what Trunsch had said. He then explained that he saw his job done and now everyone had to see to his own needs, it was no longer his responsibility. Before noon, the military authority had set up a horse mustering and as I reckoned that they would take our horse, too, I kept it in the stable. In the evening, the artillery fire had already reached **Heidekrug** and therefore it was high time that mother and I also left our home. Once more I went to Wittchen, one of the farmers' leaders, to ask what he was to do and he said that he would leave at midnight. Actually, we could/should have left then and there, our cart was readily packed. However, Grandpa Halfters came by in the evening and we agreed to meet the following morning, Sunday, on the path where the country road leading to **Heideschäferei** and then to march together. Several days before we had already freed all our cattle and to shoo it away. The designated drivers managed to reach **Groß-Bösitz** near **Guben**. The pigs were brought away by truck. The "Volkssturm" militia butchered the chicken and geese. The fowls remained in the stables, later they too were shooed outside. We were unable to take a lot with us on the cart; aside from great amounts of potables, flour and meat we had to take our bedding with us. Two sacks of bedding we had to leave behind, a box filled with bacon and ham was buried in the barn, also two suitcases behind the wood stack and on top of the pigsty. The manure barrel also was crammed full. On Sunday morning, Georg Türke had planned to evacuate most of the children by car, however he was soon being shot at by a Russian airplane. When we reached the agreed meeting point, the grandparents were there however without the car and grandfather just said that they could not come with us as grandmother was sick. The area of the train station in **Wellmitz** was destroyed, however we managed to cross the Neiße and to reach **Breesen**. Several other families crossed the Neiße at **Koschen**.

We stayed one week in Breesen as the front had settled along the Neiße line. **Guben** was evacuated and the farmers of **Breesen** also planned their escape. The people who had stayed in Lindenhain were captured on Monday morning and mayor Noack had to report who

¹ Volkssturm = was a German national militia of the last months of World War II set up by the Nazi Party

² Breesen = Groß-Breesen near Guben, where PGs daughter Frieda Lehmann lived, born Gromm

was member of the Party, then came the Nazis to **Wellmitz** for the interrogations: many of the people were transported back, the young people had to go to **Merzwiese** and were missed thereof – as had also happened to brother-in-law Bernhard Grimm. Those who were able were sent to Silesia to work in the coal mines. Times and again I had urged Bernhard to come with us, yet on the last Sunday he fetched his cattle and still believed that he was to keep them! After the village was occupied, all inhabitants were to walk across the Bober to the farms for their daily work. Many of them hid in the city forest until they were finally found by the Russians, whole families tried to hide in the plantations. My sister-in-law, Alwine Groß, was particularly hard affected as her husband Emil's feet were paralyzed since many years and he was unable to walk. He did not want to leave his house under no circumstances whatsoever. Alwine was forced to stay with him and to endure the despotism of the soldiers. Karl Schmidt and his wife committed suicide by hanging themselves. Many people were shot. I will come to tell more about the suffering of those who worked on the farms.

Then came the day when the farmers of **Groß Breesen** were ready to leave by horse-drawn carriages. However, on 12 February order came that all families with children had to leave **Guben** immediately. To this end there were three special trains and Frieda and Emma took their children and they went to **Luckau** by train where they were put in a crowded camp for many days until they could live in a small room of a Mrs Deckert.

There were still Frieda's parents-in-law who wanted to travel with us, they had lots of boxes and suitcases and the carriage was already full. Nobody from **Breesen** had taken their handcart, that's why we had to take them with us and were on our own now, too. We had to stop at **Semften**, as Grandpa Lehmann had gone lost, he fell somewhat behind and went to **Steinsdorf**, finally in the evening he joined us again. The following day we met a farmer with horse and carriage from Wellmitz, when asked he answered that he was to cross the Elbe. He suggested us to join him and so we did and together we went in the direction of **Reifenberg**. In the village, there were also cannons shooting on **Guben** Mükelberg. The country road to **Kottbus** was crowded with vehicles of all kinds. Soon we made a turn in the direction of **Pinnow** and looked for shelter in a barn. The following day we made it through a dense forest to **Lieberose**. Refugees were already everywhere and we had to sleep in a stable. Here we encountered our first confrontation with Lehmanns' who insisted on certain privileges, wanted better sleeping places and felt that Mother was to take care of their food. During the trip, they always set on the carriage and I had to walk the whole passage by foot. My travelling companion also had 2 elder people on his carriage. From one of the train stations they took a train and rode to relatives. Lehmanns also took a train and went to their daughter Else in Berlin. We ourselves did not know where to go.

Next, our flight went along **Golßen(?)**, **Jüterbock** and **Wittenberg/L.** Sometimes we had fine places to sleep, however rather often very bad places, sometimes up to 8 people in a small kitchen; there was no fire wood to make coffee, the small bits of brushwood were wet. When we reached **Koßwitz** on the right side of the Elbe, we came into a snow storm. Finally, one morning we reached the destroyed bridge leading to Dessau, only a narrow emergency bridge had been built and we had to wait until 3.00 PM that it was our turn to cross the Elbe. The slope from the street was extremely steep, however the soldiers were nice and helpful, one leading the horse at the reins, otherwise it would have shied away. 10 km after **Dessau** we stopped in another village.

On 7 March, we reached our last accommodation, a small town called **Acker** (?), 1 km apart from the Elbe. After a long search, I found a shelter for our horse and finally a place to sleep for us in the house of very good people who gave us a small room of theirs. Several weeks later we received a message from Elly that Frieda and Emma with the children were in **Luckau**. In order to be able to keep the horse, I gave it to someone with an acre whom I helped to till his field, to lay the potatoes or to chop wood. Easter came and we decided to visit the kids in Luckau.... so we were able to go there by train. They were living in a back house

with a small parlor. Everybody was happy because of the reunion. However, we all were shocked when Grandpa and Grandma Lehmann also came with all their belongings and wanted to stay with Frieda. This was not possible at all, they were to live with their daughter in **Berlin**. Finally, they understood and moved back the next day. 4 days later we went back to **Acker**. When the American Front came closer and the air raids forced us into the bomb shelters every night, we decided to be together with our girls. We hardly managed to pass all the road closures. Also, it was difficult to cross the Elbe which crowded with cars and military by night, I could barely handle the horse. 2 days later we were in **Luckau**. The horse found shelter in a small chamber. Soon afterwards, the Eastern Front came near and one evening around 9.00 PM order was given that all children had to leave the city immediately. We packed very fast, I ran to our carriage but nobody else was to be seen, only a school boy helped me to drag the carriage back onto the road, which was 25m away. Then we had to pass a park and the bridge of a deep ditch, the bridge being only a few centimeters broader than the wheels of the carriage stood apart. Finally, we reached the country road full of refugees returning. We stopped in a village, the horse was put in the washhouse and we slept in the corridor, Emma and Klaus on the carriage. Shortly before **Dahme** the enemy overran us, we found shelter for the night in the house of the graveyard's guard. Then the ravaging started, worst during the nights, the shooting started immediately when the doors were not opened. Mrs Deckert was determined to return to **Luckau**, we all went with her, however without horse and carriage as they had been seized. The horse had a large gland wound and stayed at a farmer who took care of it. In **Luckau** we found a room on the third floor. Very little bread, ... six days later Mother and I went back to **Dahme** with a handcart where we had hidden several tins. Unfortunately, little of our stock was left, however I could take our good horse with us again, yet without bridles. We then put it in a chicken house, the chicken had all been shot by the Russian soldiers. When darkness came I usually went to get some grass and during the days I helped one of the farmers to get some grains.

At the beginning of May, the war was over and soon the displaced persons tried to return to their homes. We had a bigger handcart by then and our horse had a self-made bridle and by mid-May we were going over **Lübben** towards **Guben**, Frieda back to **Breesen** and we back to **Lindenrain**. At Whitsun we were home again – but what did we find resp. not find? All doors, boards and planks were missing, the apartments were emptied yet full of dirt and beds of straw. There had been 8 weeks of trench warfare, a large and completely planked went all the way through the Guben forest. All in all, I had driven 4 loads of fine boards and planks back home. By and by, the other locals also returned and we started sowing the fields and preparing the potatoe acres. We worked in a communistic sense in a commune, as not every returning neighbor had brought back his horse/s. We also had to transport planks to the Russian barracks in **Mückenberg**. Our commander was a Pole and lived in the parsonage.

One night we returned with 4 horses from a transport, we had had to leave behind the carriages, it was early morning around 3.00 AM and we wanted to wanted to go to bed then. At 4.30 AM, everybody was ordered to line up with hand luggage only at the commander's headquarter. Of course, we did not want to do so, however the Polish bayonets drove us out of our houses fast enough. I managed to take our horse with me. When we reached the school, I realized that we had forgotten to take some bread with us and I started begging some friends. It took until midday before everything was in order and then we left, marching from **Heideschäferei** over **Born** to **Seitwan**. The road was sandy and more than one droplet of sweat was lost. We had to leave both horse and handcart at the manor in Seitan and were only to take hand luggage with us. The sick people were brought to the river Neiße. At 7.00 PM, they started examining people for weapons, afterwards sending them over a narrow wooden jetty across the river. At 9.00 PM, it was our turn. Grandpa and Grandma Halfter were already waiting for us, Grimms also came with us and at 10.00 PM we reached **Gr.Breesen**. Frieda was quite shocked because the upper room was already given to the Germersdorfer family, who went on the next day. Now we were 11 persons in the house and everybody needed to eat. We took wood from the dugouts along the Neiße and also from the forest. There was little bread, and fat/butter did not last very long. Many times, the Poles and the

Russians came by with the cattle herds and stayed overnight with the cows. Emma and Anny went to milk the cows, receiving some milk for their service. When Grandpa and Grandma Lehmann came from Berlin, Grandpa and Grandma Halfters went on to **Grunewald** and Grimms to **Grünau**³. Soon the potatoes were ripe and during the nights we went to the acres and took some, also from the "Mieten"⁴ of the farms in **Sempten** and **Steinsdorf** Grandpa Halfters and I stole with the handcart. During the nights, we went up to **Breslack** for some grains of wheat. The factory in Wellmitz didn't give us potatoes when we asked. Often, we collected grains and worked for the farmers to get some food. Lampe and I collected apples from the trees along the country roads in the evenings, also Rucksacks full of small carrots from Steinsdorf. In autumn, many people were sick of typhoid fever, Emma among them (*daughter Emma Gromm, married Halfter*), and the children were very sick. Neither was there helpful medicine available, nor were doctors available. A lot of people died.

We had to bury our dear boy (*Grandson Klaus Halfter died of typhus, *25 Jan. 1937 +25 Nov. 1945 in Groß-Breesen*). It was a hard time. Karin (*Granddaughter Karin Halfter*) was also severely sick, however after many weeks she recovered. However, she and Emma had gone insane during the sickness. Little Klaus was buried in a small white coffin. Then winter came and no heating, the window panes were only scantily repaired, the wind was blowing everywhere. During the evenings, we huddled in front of the oven. In the city, misery was even greater. People tramped to the villages to get some bits of food. All kinds of things were swapped for food: fabrics, furniture, clothes and beds. Frieda had received a goat and we bought another one, so by then we always had milk.

From Otto (*son-in-law Otto Halfter*) we heard that he was in **Alsfeld** and I decided to visit him there. I was given a permit/pass by the mayor with which I came to **Eisenach** where a lot of people wanted to cross the zonal border. It was a Sunday and we all had to go into a barrack so our papers could be checked. My permit was not sufficient to be able to join the next transport and so I decided spontaneously to cross the border by night. After I had passed several villages in the dark, I came to a first roadblock, went about 100m through a small wooded area. I was also lucky when crossing the main blocking and when I reached the last roadblock, this was not manned at all. However, walking was not really easy, there was a snowstorm that night. I sought for shelter in the next village and was given some space in the attic of a house. The next morning, I marched 21 km, then took the bus for 15 km via **Eschwege** and **Bebra** to finally **Alsfeld**. When I found Otto, he was constructing a car and 3 days later we both drove back to **Breesen**. It was there and then that he learned about the death of his little son Klauschen, buried on the churchyard. Soon he drove back to **Alsfeld** and in March 1946 he came to take his wife and daughter with him to their new home. With his truck, he started a transport business, in the beginning collecting and driving the milk from several villages to the dairy in the early mornings. Easter 1950, we, Grandma and Grandpa (*he, Paul Gromm and his wife Bertha, born Grimm*) visited our kids (*in Ahsfeld*). Karin had started school, 14 days later we took the bus to **Erfurt** and went on by train, back to **Breesen**. Soon, Grandpa and Grandma (*he was probably talking of the parents-in-law of his daughter Frieda Gromm, married Lehmann, which were Paul and Anna Lehmann, born Richter, who were also living in Groß-Breesen in the same house. However, they died already in 1945 resp. 1946*). In order to earn some money, I worked for farmer Helm and Mrs Lange, also for Pohlacker, a winemaker. Finally, we rented an acre of land from Frieda (*his daughter Frieda Gromm, married Lehmann*) providing us with potatoes, rye and linseed oil. What happened when Mother got sick is told/written on the following pages.

I stayed with Frieda, who – after her divorce sought work in **Guben**, first in a cloth mill, later in a clothing factory. While Otto and Emma lived all the years in a rented apartment (*in Ahsfeld*), nevertheless they wanted to have their own house. They went through quite some trouble before buying some property but in autumn 1953 the construction of the house could start.

³ Grünau = Berlin-Grünau

⁴ Miete = Haufwerk (Lagerform) = big heaps of farming products such as beets, roots, ...

When they wrote that I could come and live with them I did not have to think for long and arrived on 16 March 1954. On 1 April, we moved from the apartment in Til-Schnabel-Street to their own house on Hofwiesenweg 17. Otto had his own garage now and the car was no longer kept on the street. Up until then Otto did only short hauls but now he wanted to do long-hauling transports as well. He finally managed and decided to buy a new vehicle. First, he wanted to sell or trade the old car in, yet then he decided to keep it as there was so much construction going on in **Alsfeld** and people needing transportation and hauling, that he figured to make a good bargain.

Now we have the 24 March and finally, as all snow has melted away, I will end my story. Perhaps some far-away day, our children and grandchildren will want to read what happened to their ancestors.

Memories of Gerda Türke, married Nauck, *14 September 1927, Heideschäferei No 8

The harbingers of war and displacement

As a child, even before the war, I was always afraid that they would arrest my father. He could not bear Hitler at all. When discussing politics with other men, my father got immediately furious. Even today, I can still hear his warning words: "Is everybody blind? This megalomania bloodhound wants war! He will not rest before our house stands in the neighbors' yard." And of course – everything came the way he had predicted. He was talking like a fortune teller. Unbearable misery and suffering was brought upon European nations because of and through him.

The war started on 1 September 1939. German soldiers invaded Poland and defeated them within 18 days. In April 1940, Denmark and Norway were occupied. On 10 May 1940 the Western Offensive started with the German Invasion in the Netherlands, Belgium and France. In April 1941 Yugoslavia and Greece were suffering the same fate. On 22 June 1941, the Soviet Union was attacked without prior declaration of war. The anticipated Blitzkrieg ended in December 1941 right before Moscow due to the severe winter. It was the first time the German Wehrmacht was badly defeated. The target – to defeat the Soviet Union – was dismissed once and forever. After further heavy defeats, among others Stalingrad, the retreat of the complete front line started. That was when the war came back to Germany, from where it had spread in 1939.

Escape from the Russians

In January 1945, the Russian front approached us day by day, we could hear the cannon shooting every day a bit louder. There were many refugees from **Warthegau** and **Silesia** who had left their homes for fear of the Russians. It was bitterly cold, - 30°C⁵, and a great many people froze to death. My father was ordered to the Wallitz station to meet and pick up refugees who were to live with us. However, he returned with an empty carriage because nobody had left the train. They all wanted to go west as the Russians would be here quite soon. All the streets and country roads were crowded with fleeing masses of humans. There were handcarts, bicycles and horse carriages, babies in prams and buggies. Men old enough and liable to military service were hardly seen whereas women, children and elderly people

⁵ - 30 °C = - 22°F

strayed and wandered helplessly the icy roads. What a horrible mass migration! So many homeless people! On 4 February, the Russian army hit the **Oder** at **Frankfurt** and **Fürstenberg**, all along the river. Right across the **Wellmitz outwork** in **Rampitz** they had positioned loudspeakers. From our yard, we could hear every word. German songs were played and in German we heard "German soldiers and citizens, stop this futile war!" However, Hitler and his Volksgenossen remained mute and sent old men (Volkssturm) and 14-year-old boys to the front. In the middle of February, the Russians came via **Crossen**. We still had not decided whether to stay or to leave. Nobody wanted to leave behind his home, far and cattle. Nevertheless, we started to put our more valuable belongings in a chest and to bury it beneath our shed.

On Monday, 19 February, 2 German soldiers went through our village. They shouted "Hey, you people are still here? The Russians will be here every moment." Now we really were afraid, fed our cattle one last time, took our packed bikes and rode away. Father (44), Mother (41), me (17), Gisela (12), Grandma (67) and Grandpa (68). The nephew of Grandmother lived with his wife and 3 small children at the village exit. They wanted to stay and may grandparents also decided to stay. The family had split up now. We looked back one more time and with tears in our eyes we left home.

We four, our neighbors with their daughter Gilda (19) and another elderly couple pushed our bikes, taking a shortcut to **Seitwann**. We were lucky and the bridge over the Neiße to **Coschen** was not yet destroyed. Further we went through **Steinsdorf**, **Bomsdorf** and **Göhren** to **Henzendorf** which we reached in the evening. We found an empty farm with a burnt-down house. We entered and even found small potatoes in the cellar, as well as a utilizable cooking machine and some fire wood. So, we cooked potatoes and ate them with the bacon we had brought along. It was the first warm meal on foreign ground. Everywhere was soot, grime and ashes, and the naked walls stood there. Where should we put our tired heads to rest? The parents and neighbors wanted to stay right there. The three younger ones of us decided to check the surrounding area first and found a nearby tavern with a large hall. The hall was spread with straw and refugees from **Ratzdorf** already lay there. Shoemaker Klose assigned the sleeping lots, we were given a corner of the stage. This was oh so hard on the floor with only our coats to cover up. How nice and snuggly had been our beds in **Heideschäferei**... However, we had to cope with it. To make it even harder, an unbearable stink started during the night, nobody knew from where, whom or why. The next morning, we saw where it had come from: one of the Ratzdorf woman had brought along her curing barrel for fear of theft.

Already the very next day we suffered from home sickness. Together with Gilda we went by bike to look whether the **Coschen** bridge was still standing. In **Bomsdorf** we were already told that it had been burnt. Therefore, we had to return to our shelter "hard stage".

The following day twelve of us went like the gypsies to **Reicherskreuz**. There we stayed for 5 days in a room with straw. Often, I looked up at the starry sky by night, thinking that at home they could see the same stars. How would the grandparents do? Who would now be sleeping in my bed? I remembered the song "Heimat deine Sterne..."⁶. Yet I had to return to the filthy straw beds.

Again, we moved further, via **Lieberose** to **Goyatz**. Again, straw beds, this time on the floor of a cold laundry room. There, for the first time we saw clothes lice. On 8 March, we reached **Kaden** (motorway exit **Duben**, in between **Lübben** and **Luckau**). We were assigned a room with two beds. First, we did the laundry and washed/cooked our underwear with hot water to get rid of the lice. The neighbors were assigned sleeping places nearby, everyone had found a shelter.

⁶ „Heimat deine Sterne...“ = „Home's stars...“

On 12 March, Father had to report at the army district command. Although almost 45 years, he was ordered as soldier to the barracks in **Königsbrück** three days later. We visited him there twice. The motorway Berlin-Dresden passed right behind our shelter, so we hitchhiked to Königsbrück. One month later, Father's troop was sent to the Czech Republic and we heard no more of him.

For the moment, the Russian front kept staying at Oder and Neiße where they had camped since 19 February 1945. It should be a deep breathtaking before their last run and battle against **Berlin**. Mr. & Mrs. Ziege who gave us shelter in **Daden** were very friendly. For the first time since Christmas, my sister went to school again. Mother and I helped on the small farm and we were all able to join the couple for the meals at the table. The room with the two beds was big enough for us. Our thoughts however were daily on the way homeward and with our grandparents. And what would our future look like? Could there still be a future at home?

On 19 April, we finally heard "The Russians are coming". Tank traps were built – which proved to be pointless. First I cut the beautiful locks of my sister to make her look more like a younger child. On the morning of 20 April, we were advised to leave our homes and to seek shelter somewhere outside our village. Thus, we all went hiding in a nearby forest patch. Soon afterwards we could hear the Russian tanks. In the afternoon, we digged sleeping holes with our bare hands into the forest soil as we thought we'd have to stay out there during the night.

Suddenly a drunk Russian came towards our little forest. They had discovered us!! He bawled incomprehensibly and we had to follow him like the "Pied Piper"⁷. Our group of twelve stayed together and we were brought into one of the school's cellars. Again, we prepared beds of straw on the bare floor.

We found the teacher who had hung himself in the attic – nobody was allowed to take him down. His wife sought shelter with us. We lay there like the herrings, eleven persons in a row, Gilda and me at the head end. The rioting started before we could sleep, the Russians came, bawling and shouting, knocking at the locked door. They hit the door with their rifle butts until one of us opened. Typically, they were shouting "Woman come" and "Uhri, Uhri!"⁸

The teacher's wife was taken, even though she was not really young anymore. However, she kept quiet and did not give us away. Gilda and I no longer went outside during the day, instead we stayed hidden all the time. Our mothers secretly brought us something to eat. When dusk came, we crept back into the cellar, hiding again under the head end, trying to sleep. Because of the nearby and highly frequented motorway, the Russians stayed. First, we thought that they would only stay a few days on their way to **Berlin**. However, on their way back they again took quarter in **Kaden**. We had seen so many horrible things! The rapes of girls and women, no matter how old they were, were terrifying and brutal.

Coming home

Life stayed like this until 8 May, the end of war. Then the first refugees were immediately on their way home. As the Russians had confiscated all bikes at the beginning, everybody had to walk again. However, we knew that there were handcarts standing about in the forest. Mother and our two neighbors went to get one each and loaded them with our few belongings. We had not much left, however we were still alive and our trek back started on 10 May. It was a very hot day, over 30 °C⁹. The tar on the street to **Lieberose** via **Lübben** stuck to our feet.

We walked up to **Lamseld** where we were able to sleep in a field barn. The following day our way took us from **Staakow** and **Pinnow** to **Schenkendöbern**, where again we found a barn for the night.

⁷ Rattenfänger von Hameln = Pied Piper, famous story of a rat catcher in the city of Hameln

⁸ „Uhri“ = Germanised Russian for „Uhr“ meaning handwatch/clock (taken from the prisoners)

⁹ 30 °C = 86 °F

During the third day, even though we were looking forward to returning home, we suddenly were afraid, not knowing what might await us there. We started early in the morning. Right after the **Grunewald** a small emergency bridge had been built over the Neiße. However, after having crossed it, we had to realize that the land was no longer our "Heimat" but a foreign land to us. The 9 weeks of Russian occupation had changed and stamped their sign on it. Shortly after the bridge we found dead soldiers and around Germersdorf there were many dead horses lying all over, their cadavers bloated and stinking. Neither did we see human beings nor a living animal. Not even a dog was seen, all were dead. A terrible stillness was all around and the horse cadavers were a horrible sight.

It surely was a real wonder that despite of the great heat no epidemic started. Everything and everywhere was horrible. Shortly before **Wallwitz** we finally met the first humans in this deserted area. They were from Lindenhain, looking for hidden furniture in the woods. They told us that our house was broken, details they did not know or tell. The grandparents should already be there, we heard.

Even though we were totally exhausted, we moved went faster and faster. When we reached the forester's house, the other houses – ours too – could be seen. The roof tiles were missing and two giant holes gaped in the rafter beams. We started to cry and slowly went through the yard's gate.

Grandfather stood in front of the barn – barely recognizable due to his long beard. He had not shaved since our departure. Grandmother was working in the new home – the former horse stable. It was a very teary welcome among the debris of what used to be our home. In **Heideschäferei** there also was this spooky stillness. No rooster cooed, no dog barked, everything was dead and still. There were only some wild cats around, screeching from time to time. They did not allow us to touch or come near them.

After the first shock, our grandparents started telling what had happened to them during the time we were away. Shortly after we had parted, a Russian had arrived in our village, however had disappeared again. Our grandparents had taken refugees from **Lindenhain** into their house. During the following night, they had heard a tremendous blast – two hostile grenades had been shot and all roof tiles had come down. It was in the early morning that the Russians came and took all cattle out of the stables, hustling it towards Russia.

Everywhere people where wandering about. As the area belonged to the front line, all the people had to go east, towards and over **Crossen**. Some were hiding as they did not want to leave. They had built themselves shelters in the woods, earthen caves roofed with brushwood. For weeks, they had lived like that, like prehistoric cavemen.

When the front changed via **Berlin**, the Russians left our area and all the people went back home. Our grandparents returned home on 30 April. However, the Russian Army had only left devastation and havoc behind. All furniture had been thrown into the woods. Barns, stables and shacks were filled with horse manure. When still at home we had seen a heavily pregnant woman preparing the pram for the baby. Upon returning we saw the pram still standing in the garden – full of manure. Even the convertible top was crowned with horse muck.

As our house was no longer livable, our grandparents cleaned the walls of the horse stable and the floors too, on which they spread first gravel and then carpets. Our furniture consisted of 2 beds, a cupboard and a couch. Therefore, and by huddling, all of us found a place to sleep in Grandma's country hotel "Horse stable". In the shack, we found a transportable cooking machine which served as our kitchen. What a pity!

Our house was the only one destroyed and soiled of the village. We were very desperate! Further to this, we had been waiting for Father's return in vain for quite some time now; especially Grandmother was very desperate that we had not brought back Father with us and did not know his whereabouts. Alas – moaning and wailing did not help – live had to go on...

The following day we started making plans again. Grandpa Halfter had somewhere found a horse and had started plowing a field per day for the neighbors. The cellars still were full of potatoes so we looked for seeding potatoes and planted them in the new furrows. After that the vegetable yard was put in order and next we had to look for roof tiles. This was not so easy as we had to walk everywhere and it was very hot. Each village was about 4 km away and to be reached only via the dusty country roads. Mother, Gisela and I went every day with a handcart getting old roof tiles. After about 6 weeks we had roofed two rooms and the kitchen so that we could live again in our house. Happiness however did not last very long...

Often bands of robbers came along and took what they saw and liked. Females were raped on sight. Once Mother and Grandmother were working on the field when the robbers came by. In front of Grandmother they raped Mother. As soon as a band of them was seen, Gilda and I ran into the cornfields behind our garden. When danger was over, Gisela called us. This happened almost daily.

Once I was on the attic, to be seen easily from far because of the missing tiles. A Russian came by on bike. He saw me and turned into our yard. I saw him, however was unable to move, thinking "now it's my turn". Then I heard somebody shouting "smoking chamber" which in that time every house used to have between the two chimneys. The door was on the other side and I ran into the small black chamber. In this very moment, he came up the stairs and stood still, listening. My heart beat was so loud that I thought he must be able to hear it. After a while, I could hear his footsteps going down again. Afterwards I stayed quite some time in my hiding place, thanking my guardian angel a hundred times. A sense of safety and security was not being felt at home anymore.

On Sunday, 17 June 1945 we buried two older neighbors. They had died shortly before the dissipation. As there were no coffins, they were nailed into cupboards. Grandfather Halfter gave them their last transport by horse-drawn carriage to the graveyard in Lindenhain, where they were buried in home's soil, however no relative would be able to visit their grave later on.

On 19 June, we had heated the baking oven very early to bake 8 farm breads. All this had to be done before the robber bands were awake. In the afternoon, we made heaps of potatoes. The following day Mother wanted to cross the Neiße with some neighbors to buy a cow for each family. However – everything happened differently and it was worse than any of us had ever dreamt of or could imagine...

Forced displacement

Early the next morning, it was 20 June 1945 around 3.30 AM, Grandfather knocked at the door. We thought the robber bands were coming again that's why I put an old apron dress over my nightgown and ran outside. Gilda was also coming and together we hid in the rye field. We sat there, were terribly afraid and listened to the voices and shots coming from the left and the right. Suddenly Mother came and called us, saying we had to come into the house with her where Polish soldiers were waiting, writing down everybody's names. Within half an hour we were to leave our home and the village, allowed only hand luggage. The soldiers stayed in our house, watching everything we did and everywhere we went. We put on all clothes we could find in our excited state of mind, on top finally the winter coats. Next, we were looking for old bags to take food with us. In each bag we were able to put one bread, not more, making 7 breads to take with us. Half a bread we had already eaten, the other half remained on the kitchen table. With a bag of bread in each hand, we were ready to leave.

The soldiers hustled us to the exit of the village where we had to wait for a long time. All at once one of the Polish soldiers brought the half bread and said we were to take it with us, as a lot of hunger was still ahead of us. The waiting was terrible, especially as nobody knew where we would have to go. In our minds, we already heard the sounds of motorcars and vehicles, transporting us to Siberia. Nobody imagined that our homeland would become Polish land.

We did not believe our eyes when we saw the long line of people from Lindenhain. The convoy was headed by a man with a cow, pulling a wagon, guards to each side. He should go in the direction of **Borack**. The man wanted to take a small shortcut, but was slapped in the face for doing so that his head rolled to each side. Strokes with a stick on his back followed. Now we queued up, four by four, guarded by armed Poles to the left and the right, and our convoy marched westward. Between **Heideschäferei** and **Borack** the inhabitants of **Lahmo** joined the convoy which was getting longer and longer as the day grew hot and hotter, we wearing all those layers of clothes and our winter coats... I would have loved to throw away the two bags with the breads, however did not want to be hungry either. They hustled us to the manor of Seitwann which was then ravaged. Again, the man up front was bullied by the Polish soldiers. They wanted his good boots, however when he was to slow opening the bootlaces, he was beaten up again. Afterwards they took his boots and he had to walk barefoot the rest of the way.

I also want to remember another experience which still today moves me deeply as not every Polish soldier automatically was a mean human being. We had already felt so at the beginning of our displacement, when a soldier brought us the rest of the bread to take with us. Those brutal soldiers beating our people would have never done so. On our way, I recognized a nice-looking young Polish soldier who made a somewhat friendlier impression on me. When the ravaging took place, it was him who protected our family and managed to organize a handcart for us. How lucky we were not to have to wear the heavy winter coats any longer but to put them into the cart. We shed tears of joy!

Then the convoy went on, direction was **Guben**. We still did not know where they would bring us. Suddenly we turned right to Buderose and then to the Neiße, where a narrow, shaky emergency bridge had been erected. The crossing of the Neiße over this wobbly bridge took hours – it was already evening when it was our turn.

The Poles took everything they liked from us and threw it on a large heap. An acquaintance was only wearing thin clothes, carrying the rest in a small handy suitcase. A soldier came towards her, taking the small suitcase and I remember thinking that there must also be Polish gentlemen when at the same moment, the suitcase was thrown onto the heap of stolen belongings.

Down at the river Neiße, the Polish had put up a tentlike curtain for ravaging and all women and girls had to let them look into and rummage in their underwear. I had wrapped my wristwatch and Father's wedding ring in a handkerchief, hiding it in my bra. Despite their fumbling, they did not find it.

When crossing the shaky bridge, I was thinking of Father. He had predicted a doomed future for us. But I doubt that he had foreseen that we would have to leave our Heimat. That's how I reached the western shore of the Neiße: two old bags with two breads, my wristwatch, Father's ring and the clothes I was wearing – those were all my belongings and my wealth.

Now we stood between **Coschen** and **Bresinchen** and did not know where to go to. Evening had already come but we were afraid to go into **Coschen**. We assumed it to be occupied by the Russians and rather wanted to spend the night and sleep in a corn field. However, the mosquitos were so bloodthirsty and we could no longer stand the stinging so ran to the village and found shelter in Nauck's barn.

With our hands, we had to feel for some free space as it was totally dark. The barn was full of refugees and displaced persons. 20 June 1945 probably was the darkest day in all our lives! We all had had to leave home unwashed, unkempt and with empty stomachs while outside it was hot as hell. Because of the general exhaustion, anxiety and fatigue we did neither feel hungry nor thirsty in the evening, we only wanted to rest in peace.

When morning dawned, we were surprised to see how many people had slept in the barn and who had been your "bed neighbor". The barn and the yard were teeming with people. Nobody knew where to go or what to do.

The only thing we were happy about was that we were in Germany and not in Siberia. We too were considering what to do now and next. Grandma remembered that some distant relatives of us were living in **Coschen**. She went to them and came back with the positive news that for the moment we could stay with them until we had found something else. They only had a small apartment. Then suddenly order came to evacuate **Coschen** and **Ratzdorf!** This was because of the railway. Polish soldiers had already taken quarter in the rooms of the train station. Their headquarter was set up in the biggest room of Nauck's farm house. However – nothing came of it – the Poles had to return.

Now we planned to go to **Ratzdorf**. Grandma's daughter, i.e. our aunt, lived there with her husband in a small house. On a Friday, the grandparents went there together with Gisela. They wanted to find out how everything was over there and came back reporting that Aunt and Uncle had still not returned from their escape. All doors stood open, all belongings spread about up to the front door. That's when the five of us went to **Ratzdorf** on Saturday, still believing and hoping that soon we would be returning home. One had heard that there ought to be a new frontier at Oder and Neiße, however nobody wanted to believe this and thought it a cruel joke of the Poles.

Childhood memories of Lindenrain's elderly citizens 1926/1927¹⁰

Alas, how nice a time when we were children
The wooden clogs always waiting, faithful throughout all those years
The boys wore short trousers, the stockings long and knit by mothers' hands
The hair cut short, this was modern, everybody looked like that.

When spring came with warm and dry weather
We ran barefoot until autumn, saving our shoes and socks.
Midday when school was over, our second shift started
Shepherding geese and cows was a child's job at that time.

While doing so we built the biggest castles and sat on the highest trees.
We also stole carrots from the neighbors garden, forgetting meanwhile all geese and cows.
The boys swam naked in the Strieming, indulging, feeling like heaven.
However when the girls hid theirs clothes, they ran after them, hands hold in front of their p...

We knew every tree and brush in the small forest¹¹ and heard the howling of the steamboats.
We sat at the Qualle-shore smoking sorrel stems.
All people worked on the fields, in the village only the clucking chicken.
The harvest was rich and nourishing, even from the smallest acre.

Our fathers swung the scythe for harvesting, they mewed the golden corn.
The mothers bind the sheaves and the kids and grandmothers ?? ("mandelten")
We collected the stalks¹² lying around, and shoved everything into lines.
Every stalk and stem we found was collected by hand.

Environmental protection was a foreign word for us, as we were still very close to nature.
Today, everybody talks about ozone, waste gas and pollution.
The boatmen came only home for winter, enjoying then the calm life.
In the evenings they went for a drink in Paulin's¹³ or Stein's¹⁴ tavern.

¹⁰ The original German memories are rhymed, author Gerda Türke from Heideschäferei, 1994

¹¹ Pusch/Busch = local slang for small forest on soil with high groundwater

¹² Orschken = the stalks left when the grain is harvested

¹³ Paulin's = Pauline Frohner's tavern, born Gromm, house # 14

Carnival in Lindenhain was a great celebration
A week of dancing, good food and hilarity, often Stein's tavern was crammed
On Wednesday we only had school till 10.00 AM and then the teachers sent us outside.
The white horse riders were already there and greeted with "hooray".

Then our romantic childhood ended and the bloody war started.
Nobody believed anymore in future and changes – Greater Germany suddenly very small!
The Poles pushed us out of our homes and we were scattered in all directions.
Home sweet home it stayed for us – and Lindenhain a sweet memory as long as we lived.

My Escape from Lindenhain (Niemaschkleba) by Anna (Anni) Türke, married Eisler, *7 November 1913, Niemaschkleba No. 168

From mid-January to the end of January 1945 never-ending currents of refugees came through Lindenhain. Many of them had horse carriages. They were "**Warthelanders**". At the beginning of February, they were followed by the neighboring people from **Polenzig**, which is situated across **Lindenhain** at the eastern border of the river Oder. About a week later, the population of Lindenhain was ordered to pack and leave westward.

My mother, me and my two children first went to my cousin in **Guben**, living in Eichholzstraße. Whenever possible, I rode back to Lindenhain by bike and afterwards back again to Guben. In my house, there was first the office of a battalion of the German Regiment, afterwards an SS-Penalty Battalion and at last the Crossen Infantry. Each of them stayed about a week. Right in front of **Polenzig**, Russian tanks wanted to cross the frozen Oder, however the ice broke and two tanks had to be left, half-sunk. From the top of the roof and with spyglasses I could see as far as **Polenzig**. In the night from 17./18. February 1945 a German raiding patrol came into the office and reported that the Russians were about 4 kms from **Lindenhain**, just occupying **Augustwalde**. I asked the major who was at that time in the office "Where shall I go with my children, what shall we do?" It was Saturday and we had just returned home again. One of the horse constables drove us by horse carriage back to **Guben**. We had to use field paths as the normal streets were damaged or blocked. Three days later, a last train left Guben for **Cottbus**, we were on it. In **Kerkwitz**, the train stopped for 4 hours, as the Russians had broken through in **Gr.-Gastrose** and had to be fought back first. My mother had stayed in Lindenhain as she did not want to leave the cattle behind. My father was not at home, he had been drafted to the "Landesschützen" and had to guard prisoners of war in **Ziebingen** across the Oder. I continued escaping westward. The train stopped again in **Erfurt** at the station, about the same time when the air raid on Erfurt started. In the tumults, I lost both children, however found them later thanks to the help of others. Three days later we arrived in **Niederrodenbach**. Before Christmas 1945 I went back to get my parents who had been expelled from **Lindenhain** by the Polish in the meantime. I found them in **Göhren**. It took us 14 days to return to **Rodenbach**. On our way, they told me what had happened after the invasion of the Russians and the Polish.

¹⁴ Stein's = Hildegard Stein's tavern, born Gromm (formerly Krüger's farm # 95, then Dammaschke)

Memories¹⁵ of Hildchen Kreutzer, born Schiller, coming from the neighboring village Friedrichswalde, district Crossen

Hildchen Kreutzer, maiden name Schiller, born in 1928, lived together with her grandparents, her parents and two brothers in **Friedrichswalde**, a small village near the river Neiße. "My grandfather was a cartwright and had a cartwright's workshop. Furthermore, we had a small farm with about 6 cows and 15 pigs, also some smaller domestic animals and some fields. You could not do without at that time. However, I do not remember how much land it was."

A substantial part of her childhood was the time of WW II. When her father became prisoner of war of the Russian army and the Russian troops came nearer, Hildchen together with the rest of the family crossed the river **Neiße**. They were deeply afraid of the Russians. "Everybody was still hoping that after the end of the war, we could simply go back home. It was our Heimat. That's why we returned at the beginning of May. On 1 May, I was still riding my bike around, wanting to look for some of my girlfriends as I did not know, who had survived."

Many families did the same as the Schillers did. They tried to start a new live in their old homes. The destroyed houses were rebuilt. The fields were tidied and sewed. Unfortunately – nothing happened the way they had hoped for. "We girls lived in constant fright of the Polish, of being raped. Sometimes, we stayed in hiding – e.g. on the hayloft – during the complete day. Then came the Poles. First, they rioted on the yards, shouting and scolding. Then they went into the houses, destroying everything. They beat my grandfather. They never reached the hayloft, yet we sat there, hiding, crying and frightened. We had been told the cruelest things..." Nevertheless, the Schillers like everyone else hoped to be able to stay. Especially the elderly people did not want to go away – it was their homeland, they had been born, raised and living there for years, building a reputation and a solid living. "In a way, the Polish had promised us that we could stay". However, the trek of refugees coming from the east did not stop. Hildchen Kreutzer said that one day she no longer could bear the constant hiding and to be afraid that the Polish would again pillage their farm.

"And then one day, all of a sudden, it was – YOU HAVE TO LEAVE NOW! Not that I had planned to stay, my bundle had already been packed long ago." The second and final escape – or relocation, as the governments of the concerned countries called it – started in July 1945 for Hildchen Kreutzer. She had just turned 16 at that time. Together with her family and the other people of the village, laden only with some sparse belongings that could be put on a handcart or carried as hand luggage, they had to leave in the direction of the river **Neiße**. "In **Seitwan** we were to cross the **Neiße** over a swinging and dangling little bridge, that's where we had to leave behind the handcart. Probably the Polish took away everything. So we went further, carrying only some hand luggage and what we were wearing."

The trek spent the night in a forest near **Coschen**. The following day they reached the village. The bakery and the station were empty, Ms Kreutzer remembers. That's where they were looking for a place to sleep. Even though the escape "only" took 3 days, everybody was tired, exhausted and completely hopeless. "The station was filthy and infested with lice, it took one night and everybody had caught them. We had to vegetate there for 2 weeks. Then we were distributed within the villages." It had been decided that the refugees should not stay in **Coschen** and that they had to leave for **Groß Muckrow**. There they should be given quarters to stay. So the refugees had to leave again, there was no other possibility and they had to march again. Ms Kreutzer remembers that most of them were barefoot or else had wooden shoes. When they finally reached **Groß Muckrow**, they were greeted with "You cannot stay here, see that you find another place for your filthy butts." And back they went to **Coschen**, where their welcome was not friendlier. Hostile insults such as "Pollacken"¹⁶ or

¹⁵ School essay of HighSchoolStudent Katrin Jänisch, Eisenhüttenstadt, 1995

¹⁶ Pollacken = insulting for Polish

“Verräter”¹⁷ were not seldom. In a way, we could even understand the people. Most of them had little more possessions than the refugees, as the traces of the war were everywhere. Even though the devastations in the bigger cities might have been/wore worse, the war had bereft everybody of their daily living and live situations. And now they were ordered to take complete foreigners into their homes – if only for a place to sleep! Nobody had enough to eat, nowhere, and a slice of dry bread had to last a whole day.

The first shelter which was given to family Schiller was just one room. The room was in a house whose owners had also fled. Nobody knew if or when they might return. The room was about 16 m² and 10 – 12 people had to live in it. They slept on straw bales on the floor. After about 3 weeks, the owners of the house returned. Family Schiller was given a new room for them alone. It was the time when Hildchen Kreutzer’s father returned from war captivity. He had been traced and finally found in a hospital in Frankfurt/Oder. Of course, the Schillers were happy to have a room to themselves even though that was where they cooked, washed, slept, played and lived – at last they had some privacy. Nevertheless – the hunger stayed. “We children were always sent begging for some potatoes. We were lucky when we had gathered one for everybody! Seven potatoes – that was a rare loot. We ate them with spinach, a recipe from my mother: some young rape shoots and stinging nettles. However, this only worked in spring. In summer, we had to collect what was left after the corn had been cut/mown. The cereal was ground in the mill and “swapped” against bread. This was not enough to feed all the family members. Grandfather died relatively soon – starved to death! Also, he had not been able to cope with the certainty to have lost his homeland forever.

In order to earn a little bit of money, Ms Kreutzer started to work in the forest. She was 17 at that time and had to walk each morning in wooden clogs from **Coschen** to **Lauschütz** and there to reforest the area, earning just a pittance. Each evening, she had to walk back. This hardness she endured with having eaten just one slice of bread. Unimaginable nowadays¹⁸ when everybody wishes to eat regularly every 3 hours! Her brothers also tried to find work. The missing money, however, was not the only problem the family had to cope with. “For about 2 years we had been living in just one room, even though the landlady had a spare room, the so-called “Paradezimmer”¹⁹. The mayor had ordered her to let us have this room also, however the old witch did not care to do so! Instead, life became extra hard now, because in addition to hunger and the narrowness of the room we now had to face her hatred. When the mayor finally forced her to let us have the spare room, she stirred the whole village up against us. For them, we stayed the strangers who idly sat in a cozy nest. The spare room stayed empty, we were afraid to use it. Who knows what this terrible woman might have done next?!

Ms Kreutzer told me that these were the two most horrible years after all. Probably also because the winter was extremely cold. The wood collected in the forest was not enough so during the nights everything froze to ice on the walls. “I used to huddle up with my grandmother in her bed, but the boys had to sleep on straw bales on the floor”. I believe everybody was more than happy when they were given an opportunity to move. Now they were living in two rooms, one of which was the kitchen. It was a really small house, more of a shed with a separate entrance. After having lived almost three years in **Coschen** by then, the citizens were no longer full of hatred against them. Sometimes the Schillers even were given milk and vegetables. “For the younger ones, this was not so terrible. It was the older generation who worried about everything. Also, the solidarity was closer among the younger ones. We went dancing in the Pfaffenschenke²⁰. However, we had to look out as the Russians were everywhere. Often, they grabbed the boys, put them in their car and drove them to **Neuzelle** where they brutally beat them in their offices/quarters. One could not miss to

¹⁷ Verräter = traitor

¹⁸ the essay was written 1995!

¹⁹ Paradezimmer = a kind of show-livingroom (→ to show off...)

²⁰ Pfaffenschenke = Priest’s Inn

recognize that. Actually, one was not allowed to be on the streets after 10.00 PM – curfew! Yet the younger ones went out dancing and having fun nonetheless. It was fun and one could forget the problems for a while. Even though you only had weirdos to dance with and the girls' dresses were made of curtains. The girls had to make all their clothes themselves. I was lucky as a girlfriend of mine worked in a wool factory. I always wore knitted underwear, also dresses and pullovers and so on."

Now Ms Kreutzer smiled the first time while telling her story. However, this does not make undone everything that happened during that time. The fate of so many different people seemed to repeat. And yet every person lived this terribly hard life with his own individual problems, worries and feelings.

Explanation from Artur Hartmann, Lindenhain (Niemaschkleba) House No. 105²¹

On 21 January 1948, I had asked to be released from French imprisonment to here, **Lachem** near **Hameln**. In May 1948, my wife and daughter joined me in Lachem. Since the displacement, from 20 June 1945 till May 1948, they had lived in **Lauschütz** near **Guben**, across the river **Neiße**. Personally, I can tell very little of the displacement and flight, having only been told the details my wife remembered. Most of the former citizens of my home village **Lindenhain** now live across the **Neiße** in the **district of Guben**. Few individuals also live here in the western part, quite scattered and I do not know their address.

According to the memories of my wife, I can tell the following: Some of the people in our home village **Lindenhain**, 1,5 km west of the river **Oder**, had known for some time that Russian troops had marched against the Oder and planned crossing it soon. There was a great pandemonium in Lindenhain and most of the people decided on 19 February 1945 to flee. This indeed was highest time to do so as the very next day the Russian invasion started. First, they fled in the direction of **Berlin**, coming as far as to the district of **Friedland**. There they were caught by the Russians and had to march back to **Lindenhain**. When they finally arrived in Lindenhain on 5 May 1945, a totally desolate sight awaited them: the village lay there deserted, some of those left behind had been kidnapped by the Russians and they have not yet returned! My wife does not remember the German and Russian divisions stationed in our village. After having fixed most of the houses/farms, they lived there until 20 June 1945, when at daybreak the Polish came and gave them 10 minutes' time to leave their houses. All villagers were herded together and – under Polish surveillance – chased across the **Neiße**. Only hand luggage was allowed. After having crossed the Neiße they were free to go wherever they wanted and my family moved on to **Lauschütz** near **Guben**. That's where they lived until in May 1948 they rejoined me in **Laschem** after my release from prison. That's all I can recall concerning the displacement. Also, I find it hard to co-operate in your archive file as I suffer from a brain injury and would like to be spared from further co-operation.

Regards, Artur Hartmann

²¹ Questionnaire evaluation on the documentation of the displacement of Germans from Eastern Middle Europe, (Reports on the fates of communities), Source: Federal Archive Bayreuth, Documents on the East 1, No 182

Report from Ludwig Heinrich (Heinz) Gaedcke, 20 October 1989²²

Preliminary remark to my person

I was born in Guben in 1905 as son of the lawyer Carl Gaedcke. After the death of my father (1913), my mother married the then retired pastor Dr. Friedrich Wilhelm Anspach in 1928. At the beginning of 1929 he was given the parish in **Niemaschkleba** (later **Lindenrain**). He held the parish as successor of pastor Kersten until his death in 1930. My stepfather educated me in the essential subjects of a humanist Gymnasium²³ from 1929 until I attended the Gymnasium Luckau from 1922 on. My memories and knowledge of **Niemaschkleba** come from the school holidays and later vacations as a soldier, which I used to spend in there.

The Parish

The parish consisted of the village **Niemaschkleba** together with the settlement **Heideschäferei** along the **Tiefensee** and **Langen See**²⁴, the small village **Augustwalde** with the forester's house, the forester's house east of Niemaschkleba and the outwork **Lahmo** in the **Oderbruch**. The parsonage was in the middle of Niemaschkleba in a very spacious house from 1838. A big garden of about 2 acres, numerous stables and a big green yard belonged to the house. The fields which also belonged to the house had long since been leased out.

The School

The school also lay in the middle of the village, directly opposite the parsonage. The teachers at that time were: master teacher Fleischer, teacher Weber and teacher Weske.

Local Council / Community Head

During the years I recall, this was mill owner Emil Gromm.

Mills in the Village

There were two mills: the water mill of Mr Gromm at the east end of the village and the steam mill of Mr Döring in the middle of the village. Since about the middle of the 1920s, his mill provided electricity for the village until later came the overland cables.

Transport Links

The train station of the Märkisch-Posen railroad was about 7 km in **Wallwitz**. There were stories in **Niemaschkleba** that the original plan had been that the railroad should have connected Niemaschkleba, however that the farmers concerned had expressed the most abstruse reasons against connection. Same resistance would have almost prevented the building of the gravel road from Niemaschkleba to Wallwitz. Since the middle of the 1920s a private bus drove 2-3 times daily between **Guben** and Niemaschkleba.

The Village Church

Situated in the middle of the village, it had no steeple as this had been destroyed by a lightning stroke. Therefore, the only church bell hangs in a wooden framework next to the church. The pulpit for the pastor was not – as usually away from the altar in the church's nave – but integrated as an elevation in the wooden altar. The church could not be heated so in winter one froze terribly, only warmed by brought-along preheated bricks. Neither was there light; the Christmas and New Year's Eve services were illuminated by candles.

²² Written down in the file of the Guben Heimatbund

²³ Gymnasium = German High School

²⁴ Tiefensee = deep pond; Langen See = long pond

The Farmers

The farmers were not well-off. This probably resulted from the meagre sandy soil they cultivated and from the small size of their fields. Woitschack held the biggest farm with about 100 acres of land²⁵. The shortages of the soil were compensated by better soil conditions of the “Oderbusch” and “Torbusch” (near Augustwalde).

Family Names

In addition to the so-called “dozen names” like Lehmann, Richter and Schulze the following were also typical: Budach, Gromm and Türke. In order to avoid confusion and mix-ups, the respective farms would be called after their “Torsaule”, going back to earlier owners. For example, the neighbors’ name of the parsonage to the one side was Vierling, their Torsaule however was “Junger”, to the other side their name was Richter, the Torsaule was “Grieslehmann”.

Taverns / Inns

The biggest tavern with a spacious dance floor belonged to the Dammaschke family. Two smaller ones where owned by Frohners’ and Grimms’. There used to alternately be dance events, a rather miserable amateur band played the dance music.

Special Events

The village did not have many festivities or events. Neither were there any clubs or societies which might have initiated some kind of get-together. A kind of rural event around carnival-time was the “White horse Riding”: 3 young men in white clothes, one in front, one at the back each with a huge corn sieve up his front, with white linen hung over them so with some imagination you might want to see a man on a white horse... The young men dashed through the village, blackening the faces of the young girls they caught with a sooted bacon rind.

Storks

Each year the storks nested on the roof of the church as well as on the roofs of 3 – 4 farms, preferably thatched roofs which at that time the village still had some. The storks found their food on the wetlands along the Oder.

Boatmen on the River Oder

4 or 5 boatmen lived in the village, each possessing a barge. Upriver the barges were tugged by a steamboat, downriver they floated, sometimes using a sail. At that time, there were no motor driven boats. Often, the barges transported coal from Upper Silesia or brown sugar from factories in Middle Silesia.

Marriage

Most usually, bride and groom came from the same village. Very seldom, one of them came from somewhere else, always commented e.g. “He is from across the Oder”, meaning the area near **Pollenzig**, etc.

²⁵ Annotation: This estimation of Mr Gaedcke is not true. 100 acres (= mornings) would be 25 ha/hectares.

According to Niekammer’s Agricultural Directory of 1929 there were 23 farmers who owned more than 25 ha. The biggest farm belonged to Emil Gromm, house no 86, with 57 ha/hectares.