

## **The Dead Pound on the Living**

On March 9, 1933, I lived in Munich at Kurfürsten Street 41, Parterre. I lived in the apartment left of the entrance; a pretty typical apartment for Schwabing. Facing the back yard there were two windows (since walled up) which belonged to my little student apartment. In front, next to the door, was a window with a grating. I can hardly believe that this house still stands today, hardly changed! One morning, the doorbell rang around 4 in the morning. "Wow," I thought as I looked out the window, "the milk is here early today." Then I spied the two bayonets planted on the ground, with the steel blades attached to the guns. I only saw this little snapshot of reality, no humans. Two "slash, hack, and stab" weapons, nothing more. What would your reaction be if you suddenly saw two bayonets planted in front of your window?

There was another impatient ring of the bell. I stumbled to the door. Here, right here, is where two uniformed state troopers and two detectives in civil clothing stood.

They sent four elephants for a little worm like me! The armed police stayed outside. The other two came inside and waived a search warrant under my nose. They ransacked everything, searching for incriminating evidence. "You are coming with us," announced one of them.

I wanted to know why.

"Well, we really can't say, but we would advise you to bring a toothbrush."

First I got dressed. Then I grabbed my toothbrush and a razor. Then the ball really got rolling.

"Take a toothbrush along." Don't you think it's strange that a sentence like that transformed me into a historical figure, the

prisoner with the number one? The sentence should have sounded more important.

I was appalled. I couldn't believe what was happening to me. What was this? What happened to basic rights? To do something like this to me, a law student, a human being! I had always believed that humans were free.

From then on came a well-ordered sequence of events. First, to the nearest police district, next a ride in the paddy wagon to the police headquarters in Ett Street, where the headquarters of the police is still located today.

### **Without Cause?**

Why was I arrested? Why? To this day I have not received any explanation for it. What could I have done to cause me to be arrested? What?

It should be a basic human right to know why! It should be a basic human right to at least be charged with something! To understand the reason for the arrest – to know what you are supposed to have done. Even when the charges are incorrect from front to back, at least you would have a clue about how to react. But groundless...without substantiation! “Groundless” is so inconceivably nebulous, even unfounded. Do you understand why I still maintain, even today, that I don't know why I became a concentration camp prisoner? Am I just being naïve?

In an attempt to save yourself, you begin to try to answer the question: “Why was I arrested?” It is true that I did a little work with the Communist party and I jumped in against the Nazis, but that was really nothing. It really was no big deal. I cannot claim to have been a big freedom fighter. In the end, it was all just child's

play with me. I wasn't even 24 yet, even if I thought of myself as a powerful adult.

Why wasn't I embittered later on, after my imprisonment in the concentration camp?

You know, somehow I understood that THEY had to imprison me. People like THEM had to imprison people like me. I also understood why I was arrested. These caps, these boots, these uniforms: everything was so conformist, everything was in one direction. It was so brutal, so stupid, so dead end. Anything colorful and full of life only pointed out the truth regarding their own condition. I am not excusing the deeds of these scumbags, but there are some things within the Nazi mechanism that I can understand.

Concentration camp prisoners who saw themselves as Hitler opponents had it easier. Through all the inconceivable horrors which happened to them, they knew that their resistance had brought them to the camp. Most of them were justifiably proud of this.

“When the enemy takes action against us, we can see that we really are enemies.” Despite the degradations, many prisoners viewed their prisoner uniforms as battle uniforms. They wore these uniforms in the battle against death, the arch-enemy of life.

There was something we had contributed to our imprisonment, and naturally something which we did not contribute. In the end, the biggest share of the blame for our arrest belonged to the whole Nazi mess, the groundless Nazi mess.

### **Gradual Collapse**

Ett Street. I was at the police jail in the basement; a collective cell. 45 men were lying on the floor, in a very small space. In March,

the stony floor was still very cold. I hunkered down – enraged, enraged. The groundlessness of my arrest enraged me.

Desperation filled the cell. There was moaning and groaning among the men who were sunken down, flat on the floor.

I have been asked, abstractly and intellectually: In reality, what is worse, physical or psychological pain? In a situation like this, there is no difference. You are hunkered down on the cold floor of this cell with 45 men. There is one man there who cuts his vein against the ring around the toilet. On this rusty, thin iron edge. What part of this is physical pain, and what part of it is psychological? And which is worse? Body and soul are united as one entity.

The unfortunate man is soon unconscious. We call for the guards. He is carried away and his wounds are bandaged. It was terrible for me to have to watch something like that. It was much worse than if someone had cut my veins. I realized that my life had been happy-go-lucky and filled with sweetness before.

Even if I view this whole Hitler era as an assault, as a sudden drop into hell, somehow I still view it as a gradual introduction to a terrible world. “Gradual” because you gradually realize that you are becoming accustomed to these disturbing events. It is a completely new high-wire act, no voluntary adventure, not fun and games. It is forced onto you from outside, quite against your will.

When you are hunkered down in the dark, you have time to fight with your anger and your fear and to deal with the forebodings and perceptions of the preceding weeks.

A few days before, in Munich, 75 communists had already been taken prisoner.

And I remember a dream. You know, I believe it is the only dream which I remember after 60 years. I swear, it is the exact dream that I dreamt just before my arrest:

My mother had died four months before. However, in the dream she sat next to me in a lecture. Mesmerized, we stared toward the front. I can remember the room exactly. It was a lecture hall, built like an amphitheater. Down in front of the tiered seats, where the professor normally stands, was a guillotine. People were being beheaded as if it was an everyday thing. The mood stayed with me a long time, this surprising relationship of routine – guillotine.

When it was dark outside, we were picked up. Outside swarmed threatening figures: men wearing brown shirts with swastika armbands. I had never seen such large numbers of them before. The paddy wagon was also confusing for a newbie prisoner. It was a big, green, closed box wagon, somewhat bigger than today's armored cars. When the doors closed, we couldn't see anything - 25 men in absolute darkness. We were frightened by this uncertain trip to the unknown. The motor revved, and the driver wrenched the steering wheel erratically from one direction to the other. You were disoriented, swinging from one side to the other as the truck went from curve to curve. You didn't know top from bottom. Why did the driver have to rip the steering wheel around so? Suddenly, the transport stopped. The heavy iron doors creaked as they were opened, and chills ran up and down my spine. It was such an eerie sound in the darkness.

We were in Stadelheim Prison. The conditions here were somewhat better, as the normal prison guards were still working. There was no brutality, no torture, no "sub humans", no scum, and no death. The organization of the prison was strict, but fair, although the food was completely inedible. You were confronted with an unfathomable world. I did not eat one chunk of bread

during these few days in Stadelheim. Stadelheim Prison, which later was to become the execution site for the members of the “White Rose” resistance group.

On we went, of all places to Landsberg on the Lech. Imprisonment. Let’s not discuss what low-lives had already been imprisoned there. This was confinement in a fortress, first-class, not imprisonment. Hitler had been an honored political prisoner here. He had been in a special building - a two story villa with a garden and yard to walk in. Even the food was supposed to have been better for him. He was equipped with writing tools and dictionaries. How else was he able to write “Mein Kampf” here in 1923 – 1924?

Do you really know what such a cage, such a prison cell, looks like? Do you have any idea how it feels to be closed up in a prison? It took days before you were allowed an interview with the director. Finally, the supervisor brings you to the door, outside the holy sanctuary. He explains that when the door opens, you are to take exactly five steps forward until you are standing directly on a carpet. Then, and only then, are you allowed to say “Prisoner B 0 100 reporting for an appointment.” Then you can present your requests.

At an appointment like this, I explained to the prison director that I had stomach problems. Somehow, it also came out that I was a law student – a law student with stomach problems. This must have tipped the scales. “I will make sure that you have a new cell and better food. And do you have reading materials?” All at once the director was very friendly, an “almost colleague.” He felt very awkward having a law student as a prisoner.

My new cell on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor was considerably better than the one in the basement. In front of the bathroom – a pail – there hung a

curtain, and the white wall was patterned with dots. Other than that, everything was the same as in “B 0 100”: one wall was two meters long, the other 3; the bed was folded up against the wall during the day. The bench was hung so crookedly that you had to brace yourself with your feet in order to sit on it without falling off. The board that served as a table was too far away from the bench. If you tried to rest your elbows on it, you fell right off the bench. How could a human brain design such a set-up? And the toilet paper was jet black, so that you couldn’t write anything on it. Whose idea was that? On the wall the entire inventory was listed on a piece of cardboard. There were twelve or fourteen items that you, so to say, “owned.” An unfriendly prison trusty regularly brought a bucket of water and a lump of soap and ordered you to clean the cell.

You explored every inch of such a cell. It was exciting to find a little pencil hidden in a crack in the wall. This was a friendly gesture on the part of the previous occupant: “Here you go.” You were very happy, even if there wasn’t any paper to write on.

### **I Wasn’t Ruled by the Circumstances**

We were sometimes able to create a zest for living from very depressing circumstances. For example, I think about the window that was located high up on the wall in my cell in Landsberg. I tried for hours to get up to the window ledge. Over and over, I jumped and reached up with one hand, just to slide back down again. It didn’t work. However, after enough practice, I was able to reach a ring on which I could dangle. I could have just stayed on the floor and cursed the conditions I was in.

If you can’t change the conditions around you, then you must deal with them. Even under such depressing conditions, the way that you react comes from within. I mean, I couldn’t do much, but I

could still accomplish something – even if it was just to get to that small place at the top of the cell where I could enjoy the sun.

“Freedom” appears to be a fundamental motivational factor for humans. And you are never free from outside circumstances and conditions.

In prison, in atrocious circumstances, there is still a lot which is possible. It is up to the individual to decide what he can do and how he can adjust. How ingenious humans are, when it has to do with freedom! For example, I met prisoners who used shoelaces and metal buttons in order to build themselves a cigarette lighter!

Or think about Professor Feldheim, who came to Dachau after I had been there for a while. He had to suffer for fourteen months in solitary confinement in the dark Bunker. It is no child’s play to survive something like that! To keep himself mentally fit, he solved complicated mathematical problems in his head. In the face of annihilation, he prevented the circumstances from controlling him!

Or think about how some people managed to break out. To saw through the iron bars, normally unimaginable. You begin after you have been imprisoned for one year, two years, three years. Freedom provides immeasurable motivation.

### **The First Transport to Dachau**

The first transport for transfer to Dachau was planned. I belonged to this group because the prison director thought he was doing me a favor by sending me there right away.

We made a pit stop in a forest called Ettaschlag, located on the way to Dachau from Landsberg. All the prisoners climbed down from the truck. Shortly afterwards, shots were heard off to the side in the woods. “Two of us are dead,” someone explained when we

were back in the truck. This came totally out of the blue. My heart was pounding. You know, this was the kind of experience that ripped the ground out from under you - the ground and the foundation on which you stood. Two men are dead, just like that, with no rational explanation at all. Why? I still have no idea what these men were guilty of. Even if I did, what would it matter?

After the pit stop, we continued on, as if nothing had happened. We didn't know where they were taking us. If someone had said "Dachau" or "Prittlbach", we wouldn't have known what they meant. "German factory" or "former munitions factory from WWI" didn't tell us anything.

On March 22, 1933, we were the very first of all the prisoners. Everything began with us. Dachau provided special accommodations for the opponents of Hitler; to begin with these were mostly Communists. The prisons were overfilled. Now someone had stretched barbed wire around the administration buildings of the former powder and munitions factory in order to contain us.

We were received by the men of the "green police," as the Bavarian state troopers were known at the time. The words "protective custody" were heard for the first time. What was that? Who needed to be protected from whom?

In the basement, the police entered our names into lists. I can still see this list in my mind's eye; how the police wrote "Bastian" on the first line, in alphabetical order. Who knew that this moment would be of such importance later? Who knew that I would later say over and over, "I am the prisoner with the Number 1 in Dachau Concentration Camp, a founding member?" At the moment, the importance of this eluded me. I didn't know what it would come to mean to be the first registered concentration camp prisoner in the

first concentration camp of the SS. The name “concentration camp” did not at this time really mean anything. Gallows, crematoriums, gas chambers – mass murder like in Auschwitz – how could I have known that the great horrors had now begun? Dachau was the school, the seed for that which was unparalleled in history. And by the way, the camp grounds belonged at the time to the community of Prittlbach; it was not yet a part of Dachau.

Hugo Jakusch, the young man with the harmonica, was also there on this day. Hugo, you were still a boy! You had followed the same path as me: Ettstraße, Stadelheim, and Landsberg. You were Prisoner Number 112 in the Dachau Concentration Camp. On April 29, 1945, the Americans liberated you – twelve years later! You were the first and the last prisoner; everyone knew you by your harmonica. You made music, even when things were horrible. You made music even then, to provide comfort. Oh Hugo, later your favorite songs would be “We shall Overcome” and “In Spite of All of This and All of This...” You had to endure for ten years, eleven months and five days. During that time you were only released once. They really made a mess of you. In 1939, you were 1.80 meters (5 feet 9 inches) tall, and weighed only 35 Kilo (77 pounds). You saved people’s lives; you helped a young Polish man escape. You were Hugo, the carpenter. Oh, what were they starting here?

The buildings of the former munitions factory were very dilapidated. Nothing had been done to maintain them since the end of the First World War in 1918. The only buildings that provided any kind of protection from the weather were the bigger administration and factory headquarters buildings. These were separated from the remaining work buildings by barbed wire. Later, when we grew to several thousand prisoners, we had to expand this fence. The “upgrade” to the electrified fence was by order of the SS.

These rooms were bitter cold! There were no beds, not even straw to sleep on. I remember how we paced around on that first night because we couldn't sleep due to the cold. Were we supposed to have slept on the bare cement floor? It was horrifying for those who were sick. Some of the prisoners had rheumatism from the First World War in 1914-1918. I ran around for that entire first night. It was my 24<sup>th</sup> birthday.

How did you learn to cross the boundaries that had previously ruled you? How did you learn the new ways? How could you make the best of the way things were? I wanted this cursed cold to go away. It lasted for an excruciatingly long time. There I was with my shirt and my dress pants; black with thin, light stripes. I didn't have a jacket, nothing. I can remember nights when we laid on top of each other in order to warm ourselves.

Our guards, the Bavarian State Troopers, were replaced after a few weeks by the SS. The "Green Police" were simply men. They were normal fellow human beings. They shook their heads over the conditions, and tried to make the situation better. They gave us blankets out of their supplies; yes, they even gave us food – a half of a sausage and bread from the commissary in the evening; soup from the field kitchen at noon. They made an effort to be humane. There was no bellowing, no beatings, and no threats. They even snuck cigarettes to us, even though smoking was not allowed in the camp. They had imagined something completely different when they heard the word "Communists." They pictured dark, sinister figures. Under escort, they allowed us to rummage through the surrounding empty buildings for anything that might be useful.

The fabulous carpenter named Freiburger immediately built bed frames out of boards and beams with some tools that he found. Hugo Jakusch was on hand to assist him. Because of this, we at least had bed frames, even if there still were no mattresses. It was

unbearable to stand around and do nothing in such a situation. We attempted to improve the facilities in any way we possibly could. Work which would have otherwise taken three days was completed in eight hours. Really, this is where I learned to admire the capabilities of the working class. A higher officer of the “Green Police” was supposed to have said: “If the Communists had taken over and destroyed everything, they would have built it back again within a very short time. I have never seen anyone work like these people here.”

Schlemmer, the captain in charge of about one hundred police, asked me if I wanted to work in his office. He trusted me to be his trainee. I would have to write letters and order the food. Administrative work for a police captain – why not? What kind of person was this Schlemmer? Well, he was a very pleasant Bavarian. There wasn’t anything soldierly about him. He treated me more like a colleague than like a prisoner. It was amazing that I got witness a pivotal telephone conversation he had with Adolf Wagner.

You will see what kind of man Schlemmer was. Adolf Wagner, the Bavarian minister of the interior called on the telephone. In the Bavarian dialect, Schlemmer let loose his wrath regarding the situation in Dachau. He fought tooth and nail against the entire system. He thought it unpardonable to chaotically lock up people without any organizational prerequisites and provisions and then force the State Troopers to give a cut of their rations to the prisoners. Yes, Schlemmer laid the blame at Wagner’s feet. He threatened to quit. He would never accept such a system. This was no kind of organization, and by the way, he prohibited the imprisonment of people without some kind of legal grounds.

It had to do with the legality of everything. Yes, he let that show through: he did not cheapen the fact the prisoners were there

without any kind of justification for their imprisonment. It was certainly a very clear and bold stance to take. I admired him, even though it was not fitting for me as a prisoner to express that.

How could Schlemmer have known that his protest came at exactly the right time for the Nazis? Himmler was both the Superintendent of Police in Munich and the Commander of the Political Police in Bavaria. What he wanted most was to hand over the supervision of the camp to his SS, his political police.

### **The SS Takes Over the Camp**

The night came when we spotted the SS for the first time. It was April 1933. We were tired from a very exhausting day. We had been working on expanding the camp. Some were already sleeping. It must have been between 11 and 12 o'clock when we were awakened by the sound of marching boots. We listened to the sounds in the darkness, carefully sticking our heads out of the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor windows. We heard shouted commands and the sounds of weapons. Below us, someone was giving a speech. It was the SS officer Freiherr from Malsen-Ponickau. You know, he later became the Superintendent of Police in Nürnberg-Fürth and was publicly beaten with a riding crop by Streicher.

“My SS Comrades,” the “nobleman” below called out. “You all know why the Führer has called us...If any of you comrades cannot stand the sight of blood; you do not belong to us and should resign. The more of these animals we get rid of, the less we have to feed.”

Martin Grünwiedl, a very strong guy from the first transport, remembered this sentence. I can still hear how the SS leader yelled: “If any of you can't stand the sight of blood, you should step to the

left. We can't use you here. If any of you believe that those prisoners inside, who we are here to guard, are humans like yourselves, you should also leave."

"Tolerance is weakness."

This speech immediately showed us from which direction the wind would blow in the camp from that point on. It was the beginning of a world which was no longer comprehensible – a world which could not be imagined.

Lieutenant Kiesewetter, one of the prisoners, immediately screamed: "They are going to kill all of us." He screamed it out of fear for his life.

I simply did not believe it. It wasn't true; you couldn't put any stock in it. What was to happen in the following 12 years was unthinkable beforehand. You did not have any basis to compare it to; you couldn't have had any basis for comparison.

### **Absurd Theater**

There is nothing to give you a key to understanding what is happening to you. You see the events around you as unreal, and that helps you. It was exactly like that in the camp. If you let the events get to you, you would have to kill yourself. You would want to do it. Or you would react in the wrong way. You realize that you will put yourself at risk if you react incorrectly. This realization helps you see all the events from a distance, like they are on a stage – a huge absurd theater. If you don't see it as such, how else can you manage to hold onto the shaky balance that you have managed to maintain thus far?

The whipping block, for example. You wouldn't even be able to bear the sight of it, if you thought of it as being real. Prisoners received 25 or 50 lashes to the buttocks, usually naked. The

person's pants were pulled down around their feet. They were lashed until they were bloody, sometimes down to the bone, suffering nerve damage. You heard terrible screams. We had to be there. We were forced to watch.

Did it shock me when someone was beaten? I really can't say. Naturally, it disturbs me now, it makes me crazy. Afterwards, you can imagine anything. You take today's reactions with you when you look at yesterday's feelings. Every memory of then is covered with the film of today's reactions.

However, I do remember the absurd; in fact the absurd controlled everything.

Fred was with me in the camp, Fred Fruth. I know that he was there, but I don't know why or how he got there and what became of him. You only found out in the end "they killed him." That was depressing, really depressing. Fred, yes Fred. Do you think you could view something like that as "reality," as stark reality? Could you view it as such, being a realistic realist?

At twenty-four, I could not imagine that the world could go on if I wasn't a part of it. I didn't express it in words, but it was a concept that was always there. This was just like you, as a child, could not imagine that the world could have existed before you were born.

Before the concentration camp, I had no understanding about the realities of the finiteness of life. Rather, I lived in a fantasy world. I remember always thinking, "How can that be? How is that supposed to be?"

Realism demands that you understand – no, that you KNOW – that the day after tomorrow everything will be the same. You know that there is nothing more than the life you are living, and that one day this life will end. You have to know that - there simply can be

no other possibility. You will die sooner or later. However at twenty, you simply can't imagine that this will happen. The world can no longer exist if there is no "me." Do you know what I mean?

I was at this age when I was in Dachau. Suddenly I saw death, the death of very young people. I mean, that was a horrible shock to my picture of the world. At that age, death is unthinkable for oneself. Yet, suddenly, you are confronted with it face to face.

For me it was like sinking into an irrational world. Basically, everything was irrational – not real. It was real to trade for coffee, and to perform other everyday tasks. That was reality. Otherwise, the events in the camp were nothing more than absurd. That's when I discovered for the first time, that all of it was absurd.

Sepp Zäuner was the chief of the prisoner fire brigade. He always had to march up and down with the fire-department pump. Two big, high wheels with a pump and a nozzle mounted between them. During the day, he had to do exercises – fire department exercises. He was an object of ridicule with this huge, ineffective pump. He also had to clean up the booths where the corpses were thrown. It was theater at its most basic. He had perform this theater piece, a type of absurd theater.

From the administration building, I observed how the SS built a small wooden shed against the wall in the yard, the death chamber. The corpses were stored there and burnt at night in order to erase any record of their deaths. It was not acceptable to say that a prisoner was "beaten to death, shot, or hung." At this time, the death records were still kept by the government officials. If there had been a fire, the corpses would have already been turned into coal. This is how they discovered how to make people disappear without a trace. Would you be able to accept something like this as reality, as stark reality?

Then, there was the most absurd of all - the Hitler greeting. It was insanely stupid to raise your hand like that. We prisoners were the only people in Germany who were not forced to say "Heil Hitler." However, we did have to put our hand on the seam of our pants and quickly pull the cap from our heads when we heard the greeting. Insanity! The hand placed on the pants seams, very angular movements, goose steps! The SS started this routine, and as time went by we were ordered to follow the routine as well. "Place your hands on your pants...." they bellowed hideously. And then clicking the heels together upon exchanging greetings! We simply couldn't do it. Suddenly we were faced with the opening act of a circus – a circus.

I saw this circus for the first time in my life on May 1, 1933. We had hoped to be released on Labor Day. Instead, the SS men were made to line up in rank and file. We heard this "one-two-one-two" in this abhorrent bellowing! And that head-turning was lunacy! The SS exhibited it for us. Once they were positioned in rank and file, they were ordered to count off. Someone began with "one," the next "two," the next "three" until everyone was counted. Suddenly, there came the bellow: "eyes" and then came "left" and afterwards came the command "eyes right." Do you understand? You had to know all of that, because you had to be prepared. When somebody screamed "the," you had to know that it meant you should turn your head to the left.

That was the introduction to the roll call, which was later to become one of the cruelest tortures of the concentration camps. Most of these "discoveries" were made in Dachau, and were immediately enforced in the entire absurd military circus.

On the first of May a "oompapa oompapa" band was there. On this occasion the music played uninterrupted: "ta dum, ta dum." I thought, "Now they will play something different." But they

played the same thing over and over. The entire time that this Hans “Wurscht” marched in front of the company, the band played only this one melody – a parade march.

I thought, “Oh my God, a circus!” They are running around in circles exactly like a horse in the circus! Tricks!” That is how it appeared to me. It was completely new to me. Later I understood that it is the custom in the military to have this “ta dum, ta dum” all the time.

Do you really understand what made all of that appear absurd?

In addition, the horrible bellowing of commands was so mechanical and dehumanized! The dehumanization is what made it appear absurd! They were drilled until they became like machines and sounded like machines. Brainless, absurd, order-following machines! That was the impression you got. It was expressed in the voice. For this reason, the military places such importance on this bellowing.

### **What do You Have, when There is Nothing Left?**

May 1<sup>st</sup> brought the first big release campaign. A few prisoners were released. I was convinced that I would be released with this group. I couldn't believe that this could go on much longer. It didn't happen. I wasn't mentioned. I couldn't understand why they didn't release me. There was no reason for it. Afterwards, I was very depressed because it seemed that I would be there forever. Unending! The fear-inspiring future was unending!

Later, this was the discovery made by countless concentration camp prisoners: You believed the rumors which hinted that a huge release of prisoners was approaching. When the day came and nothing happened, the disappointment could hardly be borne. This

led to many suicides; caused prisoners “to run into the wire” because there was no end to IT.

You need to know that this camp will end before your own death happens. What keeps you going, what helps you bear the circus, if you don’t have this certainty? Later, millions of people agonized each day over this question. You could only come up with an answer to it for yourself. If you simply didn’t believe that you would come out of this alive, what reason was there to carry this sorrow?

If I had known in March that I would have to stay for half a year, and really just half a year, I would have thrown myself onto the electrified fence. I would have guaranteed it. A half of a year like that one is unendingly long. Day to day I thought; “This can’t be happening! What do they want from me? Why am I even here?”

Everybody had thoughts of suicide at some point. You think, I’ll kill myself, why not? Without a doubt, everybody thought that at least once. You try to fight through it; you want to stay alive. You want to stay alive not only in body, but also in spirit as a human being.

I mean, the reason is firstly you – only you yourself. You yourself are the reason that everything is hanging over a cliff. In such a situation, it is good to see yourself as important, so that you can pull through. You need to believe that it is important to save yourself. Then you yourself are the reason for surviving. In the end, in such a situation, you have to be the reason.

First, I am a gift to myself. The “I” is the center of my being and nothing else. It is my inner core. You have to be true to yourself if you want to survive. You have to completely confirm your own worth. To keep your own inner core decent, you need human

characteristics – understanding, heart, and soul to help you to develop.

And how do I develop my inner core? Or even just keep it intact? First, I must be true to myself, to that which was important to me. I must be true to my inner core. I am important to myself when I believe in that which is important to me as a human being. I thus become my own reason for being.

Take a look at Franz Brükl. He grew up as a child in an orphanage and spent more than five years in the concentration camp. He had nothing and nobody to live for. He had no loved ones anywhere, whom he hoped to see again. What about him? He really did not have anything left. He had nobody to stand at his side. How can someone like this manage to survive? He had to be true to himself. Franz did it by remaining true to what was important to him. It is really strange. This important “remain-true-to-yourself” stuff doesn’t change no matter where you go.

Thoughts like these help. They give you the reason that you can look yourself in the eyes. Your inner self will remain when nothing else is left. Your self-worth is important. When nothing else remains, you can at least say that you have yourself.

### **What Helped Me? It was the Belief in Humanity.**

Oh Hugo; Hugo Jakusch. You lost eleven bitter youthful years to this horror. What gave you the courage and strength to hang on? “The unshakeable belief in a better world, free of misery, persecution and oppression,” wrote his wife, Ruth. And: “Don’t let yourself become discouraged; continue to fight for a humane and peaceful future, in spite of everything. Dear friends, that is what I wanted to say to you in his name.”

Hugo, there are many who believed in humanity because of you – through you, Hugo. I lived with this harmonica in the camp. Your music lifted us up out of depression. I can't believe you had the strength for that!

I don't believe that your belief in a better world just simply appeared to you. It was a gift, an honor. "You either have this belief, or you don't." I believe you came to this belief through many unending inner battles. I believe you discovered how these were not just beliefs, but also conscious decisions. And I believe that you came to this belief in humanity, in good, through a belief in yourself. You believed in the good in yourself, you discovered it within yourself. Therefore, you could also see it in others.

I drew upon thoughts which helped me. For example, there was the thought that bad things were not the only things that there were in the world. I saw this in small gestures of fellow prisoners, when I saw how one helped another tend his wounds in the evening or when I saw how one prisoner eased the torture experienced by another. I collected these observations within myself. The only thing one could do was to collect the good. Other people collected stamps; we collected acts of goodness. We made a decision to do this. After a while, you realize that beasts such as these will someday disappear.

When I am asked today how I stood a half a year in the concentration camp, I usually answer: "I didn't lose my belief in humanity." Looking back, I think this was central to my survival.

You know, I was really astonished at the strength of the men I met there. What kind of experience did I, an intellectual from the upper class, have with the working class? And most of the prisoners at the beginning were workers – Communist, German workers or

Jewish citizens, most of whom were imprisoned because of their political beliefs.

I learned to treasure men, who I would otherwise have passed by on the street. They were real people. Many of them stood up for what they believed in. To be able to observe and experience this was something important. It could sustain you.

For example, Barfuß, the cook, was a humble, little man. He was a baker by profession. If I had met him on the street, I would have probably thought “There is probably something wrong with that guy with the big ears.” However, he was able to help others through his kitchen.

In my mind’s eye, I can still see how the cook, Barfuß, stood in front of the huge buckets with the ladle in his hand. He looked alertly back and forth, trying to find anyone who needed a double portion. He tried to be fair, in that he only favored the truly needy. Such a little man! I can still see his face, with his round head and his big ears!

You know, I was always free to decide what outlook to take. I could freely decide if I wanted to nurture my optimism or my pessimism. To perish there, to have to remain, was something terrible. You therefore searched for cases like this in order to strengthen the optimism. You therefore somehow remained free.

Every day, I had to once again learn to believe in humanity. The people around me always provided me with a way to do that.

I also thought a lot about Maria. I wanted to see her again. For me, this was also a reason to go on – a very important reason. Clearly, the desire to see her again was a force that influenced me to go on. Why was it important to survive? My answer was: Maria.

How love can motivate you to go on living! What a force love is! Love is at the pinnacle of the belief in humanity.

You can also say that in another way. Love is a force which can protect you from outside circumstances. For me, Maria was a wonderland that filled my memory. This was quite clear.

And the image of her - I always had the image of her in my mind. I always tried to remember the way she looked - her ideal body was the most perfect that I could imagine. She was the first woman for me; the premiere. To illustrate this sentimentality, I can only describe a package of Gold Flakes cigarettes she sent me. It was the most wonderful thing that could happen to me. When the cigarettes came in the mail, I knew immediately who had sent them. I couldn't believe that she had thought to send it! She bought the cigarettes and sent them to me at the camp. As I smoked the cigarette, I was not just inhaling the smoke; I was inhaling my relationship with her. This cigarette was the same cigarette she was smoking!

You realize the commonality of all these events afterwards. You can say "that's how it was" without fibbing.

What else helped me?

It was my intuition, clearly my intuition. It was the belief that I could trust my own intuition. It's true – I had a lot of faith in my intuition. The faith in the unknown or the little known, in your own intuition, is a kind of a belief in people.

As a child, I was always interested in the antennae of snails. If you poked around at the snail with your shoe, it would pull the antennae in. After a while, these antennae would come out again. The feelers of the snail were something wonderful. With them, the little

animal learns more about the world than it would without them. It is exactly the same with human intuition.

“Don’t attract attention” quickly became the motto in such a camp. It was essential. “Don’t attract attention” was the most important thing, and you had learn it quickly. If possible, be invisible. Through my assignment as an equipment manager, I was gone for the day – simply absent from the screen. In this way, I was relatively inconspicuous. I was gone early in the morning and returned in the evening. At the most, my SS boss, Erspenmüller, this Jew-eater, came to check if everything was in order. Otherwise, I had my peace. I could read, if I had something to read. However, the desire to read was not always there. You needed to be alert so that nothing happened to you. You needed to stick out your antennae. With your antennae, you could discover not only what is happening, but also what is about to happen. You had to keep your ears open to what was happening, and still remain invisible. That was the main thing. You had to watch out. You had to keep your ears open, if you wanted to discover how you might be affected by what was happening. You also had to know that you could only pass on stories that you heard when your intuition told you the source could be trusted. Otherwise you would quickly disappear into that dark camp prison.

I guarded my actions so that I would appear to be someone who collected the facts and made connections. I was just a nobody. I followed my intuition. I put my trust in the promptings of my own intuition.

### **Watch Your Step**

Was I, or the others, ever overcome by rage or rebellion? It is good that you ask about that. When a person is aggressively threatened, especially out of the blue, then he is like an animal that rolls up into

a ball to protect itself. This is done instinctively. The person becomes exactly like the antennae of a snail, pulling back, and then carefully feeling around the immediate surroundings. It is instinctive life preservation.

The day has 24 hours. Throughout the day, there were countless moments when something happened that made you wish to get it over with. You felt as if you had no control, as if you were harnessed. You always had to think about what the next step should be, the very next step.

Imagine that you are harnessed to a street roller, a huge street roller. We prisoners were harnessed like horses, worse than horses. With all of our strength, we had to pull, egged on by beatings to force us onwards. These beatings came from all sides. If one person decreased his speed, the person behind him was stepping on his heels.

This huge street roller was filled up three fourths of the way with water, so that its movements were always jerky. They used the whips to hit us heavily in the body. Being hit in the stomach was the worst for me. I completely focused on anticipating the next round of pain. Can you understand that?

If you looked around the immediate area, you could see that this was useless work in the purest sense of the word. A squad of prisoners followed behind the street roller, and swung at the street with their pickaxes. That meant you had to pull the roller over the same area once more. What would you think about this? What kind of ideas would come to mind? All of this happened under the banners that read "Arise!" and "Germany, Germany above All Others." You only looked around your immediate area if you wanted to remain alive. You just looked down at your feet, not off

in the distance! You don't even notice the squad with their pickaxes.

Anger and outrage were useful when you had the urge to kill yourself. If you were to turn these against the SS men....pick up a stone, knock them down...! Of course from time to time I had feelings like this, when the anger would rush through me. That is when I decided just to look at the next step – and only the very next step. I would look ahead just far enough so that the giant street-roller didn't run me over.

People who have never been in camps like these don't understand. They ask: "Why didn't the prisoners revolt? Why didn't they escape? Why didn't they...? They outnumbered the guards!"

The reasons why this was so difficult were often hidden. Should you risk your life when you still had a spark of hope that you would survive the camp? Perhaps you would have less of chance by escaping than you would have by staying. There are many stories about people who suddenly risked everything when their death became certain – but only when their death became certain!

Hans Beimler, our prominent fellow prisoner, dared to make the seemingly impossible escape when he became certain that he had no other choice.

I still remember what a sensation that was for us: "Beimler escaped." It was "easy" to handle the hours of standing at attention as punishment for this news. We just couldn't believe it. It was sensational, especially because we knew that he had been locked in darkness in a cell in the camp prison. He was in such a poor physical condition. He was stooped over and his face was yellow – not gray. I had seen him in this terrible condition a few times outside the office. I mean, he was barely standing. I had the impression that he would collapse at any moment. I wouldn't have

thought that he was physically capable of escaping. It was amazing that he was able to do something we all thought was impossible in that condition! And on top of that, to escape from the camp prison! Twice, no three times the sensation! Did he have help? We were amazed that a man in such a state still had so much strength!

It is right to want to save your own life. Your own life is important! You needed to pay attention to it. At the same time, you had to carefully weigh the risks of a revolt or an escape. You really had to look at what was possible. You needed to pay attention to the steps that were open to you, and to what was necessary for the present.

These thoughts, so often expressed, suddenly appear existential. You simply do not just throw your life away! You are worth something. If that wasn't true, it would be too late anyway. In order to assure your survival, there is nothing more to do than to accept what is immediately before you, and only that.

### **Everyday Life in the Camp**

The food was often so unappetizing, that I would have rather starved. Hunger is the worst; it saps all your will to resist. You better believe that I can remember what it felt like to be hungry. Indeed. Your eyes would be as big as saucers if you stood before the field kitchen and noticed that there were white noodles in the soup. For once, there were no stinking, rotten potatoes! Finally something edible!

Any money that was sent to us in the camp had to be deposited. Once a week we received five Marks. Around the first of May, we were actually able to buy something with our money for the first time. A packet of margarine. Somewhere in some corner of the camp there must be some prisoner selling margarine. I ate the

entire thing in one sitting with a coffee spoon. Can you imagine how I indulged myself?

We also had nothing to wear. For the entire time I was there, I wore the shirt and pants I had been wearing when I was arrested. March and April were horribly cold. The first pieces of clothing that were provided in the camp were primitive pieces made out of ticking and thin nettle cloth – prison clothing. A mountain of it arrived. These things were distributed in a couple of barracks. The rest had to walk around with holes in their pants and ripped shirts.

The shaving of the prisoners' entire body hair was devised later in Dachau. This was often done with blunt razors. Afterwards, you had to immerse yourself (with all your opens cuts) in the disinfection bath, which was a caustic, disgusting liquid. "These Jews and Communists have to be cleaned up, because they are pigs-dirty and everything. They could be contagious."

We lost the hair on our heads during the first "SS days." Later on, you would often hear prisoners saying that "The only thing one had left was his basic existence – minus the hair." How many millions of people were not even left with that?

I had my life plus my hair because of the scar on my head. I was able to convince the camp doctor that I got terrible headaches if I didn't have my hair as protection. He agreed, and wrote a note stating that my hair could not be cut off. I was therefore the only prisoner whose hair was left alone. I was the only one who did not look like a convict.

You did what you could to keep clean. We didn't have much water to wash with. Here and there was a water spigot. There was one, maybe two, wash bowls for each sitting room where 50 or 60 men lived. Otherwise, there was nothing. You had to borrow the wash bowl and go outside to the spigot to wash. You brushed your teeth

as best you could – you didn't have toothpaste. And shaving: I had brought a razor and one razor blade with me, along with my toothbrush. I got by with this. It hurt, but I was able to shave. You didn't get any soap. I always wiped the blade in the palm of my hand.

Most of the prisoners were unable to shave. That's how they got those photos of us that were in the papers at that time. We were placed in a row and photographed from the perspective of the ground. We were dirty with stubbly beards. We looked like someone might typically expect a criminal to look. This was the intent of these photos, and we were offended by it. Above these photos there were often headlines that read things like: "The Truth about Dachau...The First Concentration Camp for the Enemies of the State....The Victims of Foreign Ensnarement will be turned into Productive Members of the National Socialist State through Hard Work and Strict Discipline." That's how it was in the beginning – with room for 5000 prisoners.

And then there was "shot while escaping." Everybody at that time could read about it in the newspaper – everyone knew about it. Nobody could claim that they hadn't known anything. They could really only say: "I didn't want to know about it, and therefore I didn't allow myself to know anything about it."

Everything that the SS wanted to keep hidden from the public appeared the next day in a Swiss newspaper. There must have been an illegal news smuggling system to get such information out of the camp! Konrad Heiden, a former journalist with a newspaper in Frankfurt, was prosecuted for it. He must have had connections to some of the prisoners. It was amazing how much he knew. The information he reported in Switzerland came directly from Dachau.

The word that was used most often in the camp was “bullshit.” If you talked about an SS man, or about a newspaper article with the headline “Shot While Escaping,” you reacted with only one word – “bullshit.” Everybody always said “bullshit.” It was clearly a part of the vocabulary of the prisoners. First, you landed in this bullshit. Afterwards, everything that happened to you was bullshit. The use of this term was reported by prisoners for the entire twelve years. Bullshit. I haven’t used this word since then. Today, constantly using the word “bullshit” is low class, really crass. The entire Hitler story is a big pile of cow dung. It is a huge brown spot that covers all of us, stinky and ugly.

Shortly after the first of May, a group of prisoners came from Augsburg. They were the communists, including the leader of the communist organization there. The SS troops spread the rumor that these new arrivals had denounced their associates, betraying their friends to death. “They’re coming, they’re coming!” We had to form a gauntlet upon their arrival. More than any other group, these communists from Augsburg were greeted with beatings; in fact they were forced to run the gauntlet. The prisoners were incited to perform the beatings through the rumors that were spread before the group’s arrival. Some of these new arrivals soon had almost no skin on their faces. They were thrown into the ice-cold pond and stoned. Prisoners also did this as well as the guards – at least those prisoners who believed the rumors they heard.

We were forced to line up and watch. Yes, this was everyday life. There is no kind of explanation that you can think up to rationalize it.

Dr. Rosenfelder, a well known lawyer and commentator on the civil process, was thrown into the latrine by SS men. They pulled him out and hung a sign on his back which said: “I am a Jewish pig.” You really needed nerves of steel to endure something like

that. This is only one story among many; it was an everyday event. They drove him through the camp like that. From the day he arrived, he was constantly knocked to the ground and hit in the face. They even placed a crown of thorns on his head. Blood just ran down. No, he never made it out of Dachau alive.

You know, we were forced to watch the punishments by whipping. The goal was to shock us, to make us afraid – to know that the same thing could happen to us. It was done so that any humanity, any empathy towards each other, would be eradicated. I won't say that this happened, but it was definitely the goal. We didn't yet have the wooden block that now stands in the museum of the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site. The prisoner was tied to a normal board. He was whipped with an ox-whip; yes, yes, they whipped him with that. Bloody backs – everyday life.

### **Worthy of Life – Unworthy of Life**

We were no longer humans. We were talked about as “them.” Part of the discussion had to do with who was human and who wasn't. It had to do with who was worthy of life or unworthy of life. Later, when the concentration camp system was “refined,” those behind the electric fences no longer had a name. They had to remember their number, which was the only thing that distinguished them one from the other.

From the beginning, one continually heard the sentence, “You are not worth as much as the bullet that would be used to shoot you.” “Shoot you? No, you are not worth the bullet,” is what the SS-Commander Wäckerle said to his most famous prisoner, Hans Beimler, as he threw him into confinement in total darkness.

Why did the SS men who were trained in Dachau repeat this sentence in Auschwitz, Treblinka, Buchenwald, and all the other horrible places? “You are not worth the bullet” was just as

common as “bullshit.” Were they just saying it to try to convince themselves? Was there something in them which did not believe what they were saying? Was it something that they had to say over and over to justify their actions to themselves? Was there something inside them that believed in the merit of the prisoners as humans? Is this sentence a sign that the SS men were also human?

If you look at it from this angle, then you can view the constant consumption of alcohol by the guards as a sign of their humanity. Yes, certainly, they needed alcohol to numb what was left of any humane feelings they might previously have had. They poured the alcohol down their throats by the liter in order to watch the death dance of the murdered prisoner, Dressel. Otto Spornier, an SS man known to us as “Ivan the Terrible,” needed huge quantities of beer so that he could enjoy his “fun” with the prisoners and the lavatory buckets. Fresh, warm dung in the face, smeared into the mouth. Cheers!

What is actually a realistic picture of humanity?

“Man is inherently good,” as the communists said. Wasn’t this view massively contradicted by what they now experienced?

“Man is inherently evil,” as the misanthropes or fatalists avowed.

You believe that humanity is both - good and evil; black and white. That is realism. We experienced the most extreme situation of the century, the entire scope of human behavior from the extreme opposites of saint to devil.

The question regarding humanity is exactly that question which such a camp threw out. Did I still see the guards, the SS, as human? Isn’t it dangerous to deny their humanity unless I really can no longer recognize any good in them?

The Commander was Wäckerle. He ruled the camp like Al Capone ruled Chicago. He gave murder free reign, as he went through the camp with his arms planted on his hips. His successor, the unfortunately very famous Theodor Eicke, had the same bodily stance. He pranced around with his hands behind his back. I know what they thought, Wäckerle and Eicke. "I am the mighty, I am the king. I can now rule over people, make them afraid and do whatever I want. They aren't really people." Seeing Wäckerle and Eicke always made me think this.

The SS men found themselves in an existence outside of the norm. Either because they were strengthened by the things that befell them, or because of their suddenly elevated positions, they allowed the most horrible sides of themselves to awaken. They very often sang the song: "We are the Masters of the World."

Wäckerle had a huge need for recognition. He appeared to me as a very insecure person, who had climbed above himself in station. Could he even read and write? I'm not sure, he was uneducated.

It is not a sign of inner supremacy to be so cruel. The violent temper, which often exploded, was certainly a sign of insecurity. Such a commander must always be alert so that his men don't mutiny. There is no doubt that those in the brutal lower ranks were often thinking about how they could be elevated to a higher position. Those with the stars were always vulnerable to intrigue. Later, Nazis-with swastikas shaved into their hair-were also imprisoned in the camp. The SS men must have always been aware that this could happen to them as well. The desire to rule and wield power was terrible!

I immediately had the feeling that these were murderers. I never even saw Rudolf Höss, Adolf Eichmann and any other of the Nazi criminals who all learned their craft in Dachau. Despite this, it was

clear that you couldn't play around with them and with their envy and their hate for Jews, intellectuals, and former communists. Death heads, sewn on their sleeves and on their caps. This was real embroidery, with silver threads! There were even rings with the death heads; big, thick rings! Do you understand how they gave themselves this symbol of the death head? A government made out of skulls. This signified death, with no brain in the head and with empty eye sockets. You just had to look at them!

They obeyed every order without question. They didn't ask themselves if it what they were being asked to do was right or wrong. They were brainless. In this way, death wrapped itself around the living. Were these criminals still men if you took the realistic view of humanity?

### **When do I Recognize a Person as being Human?**

Earlier, I talked a lot about how you must see your life as being important, in order to give yourself a chance of surviving in such a situation. It is you, your own inner self, which is the starting point.

But can I believe that someone is "all around human" if he only keeps himself in order? Can I even keep myself in order in under such radical conditions?

You immediately have to ask the question: "For what? What makes me important to myself? Why is my survival important? What purpose does my survival play?"

What impresses you the most about these prisoners? What fascinates you? Who do you feel is the supreme human being?

Even though being human has an unending number of facets, let us positively describe someone who has convinced us the most of his humanity.

It would be someone who takes care of not only himself, but others as well. He not only cares for them, but really worries about them. In doing this, he is living out that which is most important to him.

The story of Dr. Katz is the story of a person who really cared about others. I have carried this story with me throughout the years. Dr. Katz is more real to me than almost anyone else. If he were to come in the door now, I wouldn't be surprised. He is that real to me. I don't just see him as an apparition; I can actually see him walking. A photo could never catch the liveliness of his walk – he wasn't very tall, kind of pudgy, with a nice kind of waddling walk. He was a very amiable, friendly man.

I always heard him say, "What can I do? I must help!" It is always this sentence that I think about.

Dr. Katz was a doctor, a Jewish doctor from Nurnberg. He was a victim of Streicher, and therefore a fellow prisoner. He provided help, tended to the wounded, those delirious with fever, and the beaten - those who were beaten half to death and whose buttocks were just a mass of bloody flesh. He performed surgeries with no anesthetics. He put all of his strength into saving lives. He was present at countless executions, and knew when the bodies of prisoners beaten to death needed to be picked up.

Back then, I talked to him. "You know too much about what is going on - it will get to be very dangerous for you."

He answered, "What can I do? I must help."

I am quite certain that he said "I must help." He didn't say "I want to help" or "I would like to help." He said "I must."

He saw the torn-open backs in front of him, the pain which could not be eased without him. For him there was no choice. He had to stay true to himself.

Do you think Dr. Katz denied himself when he said “I must help?” Did he forget about himself? Was he selfless?

Yes and no.

At a very deep level, he was true to himself. His inner core motivated him. He knew what was very, very important to him and he acted upon it. The thing that one finds meaningful belongs to this act of being true to oneself. One must feel, or know, what is important – but usually feeling is enough. And then must live according to this feeling.

This “I must help” came from deep within Dr. Katz’s inner being. It wasn’t to his best interest in the camp. His inner core forced him to “I must.” He was clearly forced; he had no other choice.

He probably hoped that being true to himself, this “I must,” would not cost him his life. He hoped that being true to himself and life would be compatible for him. He believed in it. You would think that he should be warranted in such a belief.

Wäckerle, the SS Commander, said to him: “If you take care of the sick, I will make sure you are released, since you have the Iron Cross.” He had been awarded the Iron Cross during the First World War. It must have been in August when he waved his release papers at me and said, “See I told you. I am being released.”

I congratulated him.

And what should I tell you? Dr. Katz never made it out of Dachau. They never let him out. He knew too much.

Could he have done something differently? When “I must help” meant being true to himself? Was there really any other alternative, even if you look back at it? How else could he have been true to himself and yet saved himself?

To me it appears that all freedom of choice and all decision making comes down to the level where you must just follow. You must follow that which is important to you. In doing so, you remain a real person, a humane person. It might be that in doing so you are led even beyond the fear of your own death.

It hurts so much to see that sometimes being true to oneself is incompatible with life. In these camps, these two things were very often incompatible. It hurts to think about real humans like Dr. Katz.

### **Is Survival always Meaningful?**

Janusz Korczak, the world famous educator, went to the gas chamber with his 200 Jewish orphans, even though he had been given the chance to save his own life. It was important to him that he not leave his children alone to die alone.

Can't a self-induced death also be the last act in being true to oneself? There are people who die for others out of love.

Can you understand that Dachau has inspired me to picture the Stations of the Cross? It doesn't have anything to do with religion.

These camps were extreme situations, which taught more radically than everyday life, that you must let go of clichés and beliefs. "If somebody does that, then his life is worth nothing..." "If somebody flees, then this or the other thing is behind it..."

There are no hard and fast rules about how one can show that he is true to himself. There are no rules about the form that self-knowledge must take.

Without being a part of it, can you judge what is involved in a particular action? Can you judge the many contacts with others or

what the action is worth? I must provide some leeway here. One person shows this by surviving, the other by dying.

Look at Georg Elser, the Hitler assassin who was in Dachau until he was shot in 1945. He crafted a time bomb, right down to the last millimeter. He was compelled to do it by his ability as a carpenter, mechanic, craftsman, and probably also by his inner self. He could only think: Hitler means war and war means death.

Therefore, he did what he felt was right. He had no doubts. He didn't think of any other arguments. He didn't need to. He had only one question: What should the bomb look like? How should the bomb function? He put his life on the line for it. Should he have perhaps not done it, since the result was the death of other people and not the death of the monster Hitler as he intended?

At this point, you stop evaluating and judging.

### **To Remain Human is to Resist**

Now comes the most accurate statement. It was impossible for the SS to turn us into that which they said we were. They continually insisted that we were sub-humans or animals, and they tried to change us into such. It would have justified their own crimes. "Now I have the right to destroy them. Look at them! They are just pigs, not human beings at all!"

That was the trend in such a camp. They always wanted to justify their actions. The joke was that they were never able succeed in turning us into "pigs." Everyone was able to fend that off in his own way.

When Sepp Zäuner was forced to watch someone being beaten, he was able to fend this off by saying, "It is a disgrace to beat a defenseless person like that in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century."

Freiberger also dared to be courageous, and was therefore able to build up the huge carpenter shop. People remain human when they do something worthwhile. Freiberger had absolutely nothing to do with those who today call themselves communists. He wanted to improve the conditions in the camp and dug right in to do so. He was a first-class craftsman. That was simply what he did. Ok, you can say that this is how the SS came up with the idea of building workshops where the prisoners could work. Should he have backed down? This was how he asserted himself as a human being! Wasn't this resistance, when it was exactly this form of humanity which they wanted to take away from him?

They did all this, with nobody there to change the bandage on the gaping wound. Not a sound, no cry of pain. Not even when the pain almost drove one crazy. Can you understand what I admire so much?

Most of the prisoners did not allow themselves to be robbed of that which was most important – their humanity. Isn't that proof of resistance?

An important comment about this was made by Hundhammer. "Go, leave me alone. You won't succeed in pulling me down into self pity." He saw self pity as the first step into the muck. "They will not succeed in turning me into a sack of dirt." In spite of everything, thoughts were free.

When Alois Hundhammer was brought to the camp, the SS had already prepared a sign "We have the dog." It was hung on his back. That's how they brought him into camp, as a figure of ridicule to the other prisoners. There were communists who didn't like him – naturally because he was a member of a different political party, the Bavarian People's Party. Later, after the camp,

he played a big role in Bavarian politics as Cultural Minister. He was also a huge supporter of Catholicism.

He retreated into himself, absented himself in prayer. He insulated himself from the realities of daily life. I was probably the only one who spoke to him. His bed was behind mine; his heels were destroyed by the torture of the street roller. He said, “Go, and just leave me in peace. You won’t break me either.”

During the day, he was brought to the street roller in chains. In his limited free time, he withdrew into himself – in dialogue with his God. That was his way of remaining alive. It was his way of remaining human.

What did I do in my attempt to remain human? I bathed, lay in the sun, and led the SS around by the nose through their accounting books.

“I love life” and suddenly I was treated like a criminal. I wasn’t allowed to bathe. Just think, in Dachau I tucked my towel under my arm and went and filled the Commander’s bath with hot water so that I could bathe. I filled it right up to the top! In for a penny, in for a pound! Nobody could take that away from me.

Something very meaningful occurs. However, one first understands the meaning of it later on. At the moment it was just something that one can, may, should or must experience. It happens when you just grab the opportunity. *Carpe Diem!*

I don’t see it any other way.

As I let the water run into the tub, I was convinced that I would be able to pull it off. I was convinced of it. I walked past the guard post with my towel under my arm. Hair on my head, black pants, light shirt – at first glance I didn’t look like a prisoner. With my

towel under the arm, I went to bathe in the commander's bath two or three times a week!

First I went there with the excuse that as the equipment manager, I had to pick something up. Anyway, I noticed that there was hot water and a bathtub. I believe it was the bathtub belonging to the commander, Herr Wäckerle.

For me it was a breakthrough to take advantage of the opportunity. It showed that I would make it. It was the remnant of "I love life," the natural progression of "being" - the natural progression of remaining human.

My way of making a stand was also through the equipment administration. I dazzled them like crazy. I fixed the record books, and therefore saved my own life.

The SS had ordered a vast quantity of shovels and pickaxes from the Dachau shop owners for all of the construction work being done. These items had to be managed from the equipment department.

First, my assistants and I counted the existing tools and entered the total in the book. Above it we wrote, "So and so many delivered on such and such date." Bottom line.

Let me talk about "bottom line." It is an accounting term.

In this way, when the number of shovels and pickaxes that were delivered were added, the bottom line, or the exact number of tools that were on hand, was shown. The number was simply entered. You could see at a glance the number of pickaxes on hand. This was proper management.

Erspenmüller, my SS man boss, received praise for this practice. I was his chief prisoner officer in charge of equipment management.

He believed me to be a very capable equipment manager, because the bookkeeping always balanced.

The moron couldn't see through it, because he was incompetent. Erspenmüller trusted me: "He does it correctly. Everything balances out. He took in just as many as he gave out." He never caught on that I was just making up the numbers, which served me well. If I can believe him, he said at the meeting which decided my fate, "I still need him."

The SS heads of guards dealt with the list of prisoners in their meetings. Meier, Huber...if the commander, Wäckerle, pointed thumbs down, the thumbs of the others went down as well. They were to be butchered. Erspenmüller explained later, after my time at the camp, that the commander had pointed thumbs down after my name was read. Only he, Erspenmüller, spoke against it. "No, I still need him for the equipment department." Ha, if only that had been true!

Can you still be human if you are dead?

### **Friendships Within the Camp**

Gasoline was also delivered to the equipment department, to be used by the prisoners to complete their work. The SS men were corrupt from the beginning; they also needed gasoline for their motorcycles. I did business with them on the sly, receiving coffee and rolls in exchange. "I need helpers for my work" I would tell the commanders, when I wanted to bring four or five people with me. I would then be able to provide a nice day with a few friends, with coffee and rolls. If they had shuffled off to the gravel quarry, they would certainly have returned from work half dead.

To work as an assistant in the equipment department was a coveted position. "You have to go with Bastian – you'll at least get

something to eat.” Yes, I sat in the equipment department with a pail of coffee. I was the king. However, you had to be very careful that none of your fellow prisoners had been given the assignment to spy on you or to set you up. Naturally, you were careful. That’s just how it was in this unnatural world. Even if you wanted to do something good for someone, you had to watch out. You needed a secure circle of friends, and a small one at that – very small. Under such circumstances, you could only have very few friends. Friendship had to be proven on a much higher level.

When you were with your trusted friends, you first had to look and listen to make sure that nobody could overhear you. Then we got started. We fantasized about what we could do with this band of apes, the guards. And then there was that irritating and nervous man, Herr Vogel. Such a fool! We made fun of him. “Yodel hi, yodel hi, yodel hi!” One of us would put on some kind of cap and then run around screaming at the others. It wasn’t hard to make fun of someone like him.

After a while, you had your own circle of trusted friends. You could talk to them about everything, even about the most horrible things that you had witnessed. You were always on the lookout for spies. I had three or four such trusted friends.

One of them was named Müller. I think his first name was Arthur. He was an author, the theoretician of the Bavarian Communist Party. I have often thought about him since then. He was a completely obsessed communist theoretician. However, I thought about him because he was a very constructive person. He didn’t attempt to tear you down; he built you up. Outwardly he looked like a worker, but in actual fact, he was an intellectual. I was amazed by his life after the camp. He quickly became very religious. How can someone change so much? Or maybe it wasn’t

so different? More than likely, he is the only one who can explain it.

Also belonging to my circle was Heilbronner, a Jew and fellow student. I looked him up later in New York. Another friend was Pietrowsky, a very intelligent Trotskyite. His mother managed to get him out of the camp very quickly. He is supposed to have gone to America. After the war, the CIA came to my chambers and wanted to know more about him. I was unable to provide them with any information.

Hans Gebele also belonged to my circle of trusted friends in the camp. He was associated with the Communists, just like me. He was a wily fox, a crafty fellow – full of life and very versatile. I don't know if he had gone to the university, but you could also call him an intellectual. He was a very astute and intelligent guy.

On and off, I also had many conversations with Wicklmayr, the SS man. We held an intellectual exchange about philosophy and philosophers like Spinoza. I encountered him by chance, again and again. Do you understand?

What do you understand by “chance encounter?” At the moment you heard him described as being a “Communist” you knew that you would have to have something to do with him. You just didn't know everything about him, or about what kind of man he was.

Among the communist prisoners, I experienced two different basic, yet opposite, things.

On the one hand, there were men like Freiberger, the carpenter, or like Hugo Jakusch, Sepp Zäuner, or Fred Furth. They had the courage of their own convictions, their own ideas. To me, they were the type of men who instigated the type of progress which was honorable and free from taint. They lived their lives for a

world that was just. I think that what I found to be so great about them was their connection to humanism. They were always true to themselves. These were the type of men who asked themselves about what was most important to them as human beings. Then they acted upon it. These were not men who were merely ideologists. They were men who discovered the truth in themselves and did not ignore it. It became the foundation for their actions. Therefore, they were able to think independently. They did not depend on the ideas of others, which was their strength.

By taking their inner freedom seriously, they gave themselves worth. By taking their inner freedom seriously, friendship became possible. Chance encounters led to friendships. Yes, that's how it was.

On the other hand there were the men who just followed the dogmas without deciding for themselves if they were right or wrong. They always waited to see what the party line would be.

For example, there was Götz. As a high functionary of the Communist Party, he was very popular with the workers. However, he once told me at the camp, "You intellectuals are now privileged, but after the Revolution we will use you like cleaning rags." Cleaning rags, cleaning cloths. The sentence hit me like a sledgehammer.

Do you understand that?

Ideology would weed the unwanted out, not humanism.

One doesn't know what stops such men from speaking their own hearts and minds. What is the inner barrier? Why do they deny themselves? It probably happened to each of them for differing reasons. We can't ask Götz himself any longer. He was tortured,

murdered like a dog by Wicklmayr, the SS man, upon the “orders of the Commander Wäckerle.”

### **Regarding the Freedom of Choice of the Wrongdoers**

When violence suddenly is legitimized by the state, when you are granted “free reign” to perform the most horrible acts, does it automatically cause you to become a murderer?

Are you absolutely forced to do something by the conditions around you?

Then why are there always people, if always too few, who say to themselves: “I would rather kill myself than become a murderer?” What is it that intervenes and inhibits?

I am sure you are saying to yourself, “No, not me!” What is it that allows one to say “yes” or no?” There must be something within oneself which empowers you to do so. It is something which empowers you for good or for evil – and it is in everyone.

You can’t say: “They were given free reign and that is why they automatically became a beast, a murderer.” In the same way, the opposite is also untrue: “Through these wonderful circumstances, humans will automatically become angels.”

It is not automatic. People encounter a pull between outer conditions and their own inner characteristics. They are always divided against themselves.

Divided against one’s own character?

Even if a violent temper and sadism are your leading characteristics, you can give yourself the task of either fighting the temper and sadism, or giving in to them. This is done through a decision that you make yourself. It is done through your

acceptance or denial of certain aspects of your character. From this, we can see that there is something within you that allows you to say “yes” or “no.” It is your free will.

I really have no way to express it. “Infantile” offends the child. “Primitive” is not the way to describe it either. How would you describe it when these SS men allowed their agitation, envy, violent temper, and sadism to be expressed without any filters? Without any self discipline or thought? Without any thought to fighting these tendencies? Today, when these henchmen are painted as being sadists, it is sometimes meant as an excuse. “They couldn’t do anything else. You can’t do anything to fight your own sadism.”

If you want to explain what we experienced in these camps, you must first say: “This was a first. There was never anything like this in the history of mankind. Stalin let people starve to death. To systematically murder them by the millions, this was a first. It showed, after thousands of years, what mankind was capable of. And the masters, the masters of death, came from Germany. There is nothing to compare it to.”

You can build a mountain of explanations: the need, the joblessness, the social problems, certain character features of “the Germans.” You can trace the unexpectedly aggressive explosion back to people, who were themselves oppressed, like those who had been in the foreign legion. You can drag together a huge mountain of reasons. There are enough people who do that. Can they really completely explain the industrialized murder of 6 million Jews or the death of almost 50 million people in the Second World War? Even if one has 100,000 reasons - be it upbringing, environment, character or even the refinement of death instruments- these are still only explanations and not the final causes.

Would you become a murderer just because this, that and the other thing were the conditions at the time?

It is your decision, your acceptance or denial, which gets you caught up in this machine.

What has to happen before humanity recognizes: “I am free.” Free, under all circumstances, to decide for myself what kind of human I am. I am free to handle myself as my character dictates.

If I see myself as a plaything of circumstances, then I am agreeing with those circumstances. “I couldn’t do anything else.” This is where the freedom of being human comes in. It is freedom when I resist automatically reacting to circumstances.

I am responsible for myself, for my humanity. By taking responsibility for myself, I either give myself worth or detract from my humanity. Explanations quickly turn into excuses and alibis so that we don’t have to take this responsibility seriously. People are so creative when it comes to being pressed by their own free choice and responsibility. Are there any other areas in which more explanations and theories are produced – why it really couldn’t have gone another way?

Most of the SS men were very young – 18, 19, 20 years old. Look at their young faces! They conversed with us; talked to us. Later, this was forbidden. They were farm boys from the country, from Peißenberg, Pensberg, Miesbach, and other villages in that area. A couple of them explained to me that joining up wasn’t really their own decision. They had no real jobs, and there was no work in the mountains. They had been in church on a Sunday, or at some other activity at the church. Somebody had come up to them and invited them. “You have to do something for the Fatherland now.” They were up on the truck and on their way to Dachau before they knew

what had happened. They didn't know anything. They came into it the same way a cow would go to answer the telephone.

You also can't forget the unceasing hammering of propaganda in the newspapers. The types like Wäckerle kept at it. "Now you must all be heroes! You must fight against the enemies at home! Be hard, sympathy is weakness!" They got their uniform cap, and with that cap they were something. It was only later that these guards were selected with the view of placing the most sadistic in the camps.

In the beginning, they were peace loving people who were turned into beasts. They allowed themselves to be turned into beasts. But not all of them! There was supposed to have been one SS man who, for decades, came to the Liberation Celebration on the first Sunday in May every year.

Part of the camp guard was made up of people who had deserted from the French Foreign Legion. These were men like Kantschuster, Hofmann, and Eberl. They had been treated brutally themselves, but now they did the same things to others. "By us in the Foreign Legion..."

If the humanity was driven out of someone, they themselves allowed it to happen. Like a raging animal... I don't know, why do I think of bulldogs? Eyes of a killer, foam dripping from the jowls? Brutal chin thrust forward and the mouth...! Sometimes the criminals looked as if they sprang directly from the wanted posters. And yet, they are also very different from each other – one foolhardy, the other pure poison.

As he whipped us, Kantschuster kept saying that he wanted to "make us Catholic." Later he was supposed to have landed in an Execution-Commando somewhere in Yugoslavia. Later on, he just disappeared. Where was he hiding?

How did these criminals continue with their lives? Now, as “men of the world” how do they look back over the years?

The worst of the SS men were named Steinbrenner and Erspenmüller. Erspenmüller “fell” at the front in 1939. That was that for him.

Everybody called Steinbrenner “Murderbrenner.” He was a good example of this unnatural world. He strode up the camp street with his smoking pistol. He ran amok, shooting in every direction. “Murderbrenner is coming, Murderbrenner is coming...!” Everyone got out of his way, or they would have been guaranteed to have been shot. Afterwards, he would sit with the prisoners in the barracks and cry, “I don’t know why I do that.” Really, literally! People need to understand that.

Steinbrenner’s parents owned a reputable gun shop in Munich. He was a “well brought up” young man, tall, good-looking, with a kindly smile on his face. Now, with the power afforded an SS officer, he was out of control. He allowed himself to run out of control. Every murder was covered up by his superior officers. He had free reign. He appeared to me to be a baby, a big baby with a cap. He was a fool, evil.

I was actually able to convince him to go to my brother-in-law Otto Flechtner, who was a painter and a high level Nazi. Through channels, I had heard that my father had asked Flechtner to intercede on my behalf. I talked about this with Steinbrenner. Occasionally, some of the SS men would feel sympathetic towards the prisoners. In such a conversation, he once asked me, “How can I help you?” I jumped on this right away, and asked if would be kind enough to...

Steinbrenner answered, "Of course, that wouldn't be a problem for me." I was able to clearly explain to him what my brother-in-law should do, how he should proceed.

He went to see Flechtner on a Sunday morning in May or June. After greeting him, Steinbrenner told him that he was there on my behalf and wanted to explain what Flechtner could do to help me be released. It was like a lecture.

Flechtner's reaction was like a spotlight on this time. My brother-in-law, the husband of my sister Margaret, looked at Steinbrenner and asked: "Are you an SS man?"

"Yes, of course. At the camp."

"Let me warn you. If you make another attempt to work against progress, I will denounce you. This time I will let you off with a warning."

Steinbrenner came to me in high temper, red with anger. "You really set me up!" It is astonishing that he didn't kill me!

After 1945, the following was written in his files. "Steinbrenner, Hans...arms dealer, Catholic...last residence in Dachau...member of the Nazi party since 1933...financial affairs – no liquid funds or savings...volunteered for the SS because of his inner convictions."

Much later after the camp time, he became a very religious person. Can you understand that? It seems to me that I once heard he had slowly shrunk, collapsing in on himself.

He couldn't change his past or bring any of the dead back to life. All he could do was join something else. Was there a big hole in him, an inner hole that eliminated the possibility of strength? It would have been educational, to be able to look inside this criminal.

Then there was Carl Friedrich Wicklmayr, the SS man. Yes, that Wicklmayr, who stood guard in front of the cells of the famous Hans Beimler and the Communist, Sepp Götz. He was a student and wanted to be a journalist. He really didn't fit in that well with the SS. Among them, he found no intellectual connection. He sat and read at the end of the corridor, where the sun would shine in. It always gave me a weird feeling to pass him. Somehow, one could look at him and see his guilty conscience. Did he feel comfortable in his own skin as a henchman? He was already a henchman at 23 years old.

He was always trying to engage me in conversation. He seemed to regard me as a fellow student. He showed me what he was reading, and talked to me in familiar terms. I vaguely remember him telling me that I was on his list of prisoners to be shot, but he felt too much of a kinship towards me to shoot me.

I started the conversation by asking, "What are you reading?"

"Spinoza." And then he asked me what I knew about Spinoza.

He had nobody among the SS that he could talk to. He really was a poor devil. Such a man was among the guards, among the devils. Wicklmayr read Spinoza, who was Jewish! The absurdities of this world! What was so important to him in Spinoza's philosophy?

He guarded prisoners who spent weeks and months in complete darkness. And how they were beaten! He couldn't have missed seeing that. If they ever got out of there, their appearance was so changed that nobody recognized them. Was Wicklmayr involved in this himself? Was it really so important to him that "men's wills are not free" as Spinoza maintained? Was he trying in this way to reconcile his actions with this thoughts and conscience?

When the “most important” prisoner, Hans Beimler, escaped, they all went berserk. Did Wicklmayer feel that he was a failure, because he didn’t prevent it? And Wicklmayer murdered Sepp Götz the day after this occurred.

I don’t want to imagine how he did it, and what Götz must have suffered beforehand. Wicklmayer, who was a guard in the camp only from April until May in 1933! In this short time, “Wicklmayer received the order to shoot Götz from Commander Wäckerle. He was never told the reason. Upon being so ordered, Wicklmayer went into Götz’s cell, drew his pistol, and shot Götz while he slept...in May, 1933, I have forgotten the date; Wicklmayer murdered the prisoner Dressel, again by command of Wäckerle. He overpowered Dressel, drew his knife, and ripped open his viens...He is supposed to have carried this out by himself.

Wicklmayer confessed that he had murdered the amputee Nefzger upon the command of Wäckerle. On a date which he couldn’t remember, probably in May of 1933, Wicklmayer also received orders from Wäckerle to murder the prisoner named Schloss. He...tied a rope around his neck and strangled him. Wicklmayer also confessed that in May, 1933, he shot the prisoner named Strauß when he was ordered by Wäckerle to do so...to prevent an escape attempt. After completion of the deed, he presented himself to Wäckerle to report that the order had been carried out. This is what was reported in his indictment 15 years later! Five murders!

Why did Wicklmayer desert the SS after this happened? The desertion – what does that signify?

After 1945, when I was a lawyer in Munich, various people came to me for representation. Steinbrenner, the “Murderbrenner,” also came. He wanted me to defend him. I didn’t accept his case. It would have been unthinkable for me to defend such a man.

Mrs. Wicklmayer came to my office again and again. This faithful Mrs. Wicklmayer! She didn't come to ask for anything; she came as one who has been beaten. She came somehow as a woman who has lived through a terrible time within herself.

That calmed me. Just her appearance. She was so faithful. She said her husband was in terrible need. Couldn't I help him?

I wasn't really sure. Should I take on his defense? Finally, I agreed. Frau Wicklmayer was like the Madonna. Let's say she was loyal and Madonna-like. She had given in to her fate, very enduring. Despite this, how strongly she advocated for her husband! There was no doubt that she saw something in her husband that was worth saving. She didn't have to say how important he was to her. I figured it out; she believed in her husband.

When you notice that someone believes that there is something in a person, something which you can't see, can you believe what they are seeing? Can you believe in this love? Do you have the right to say, "There's nothing to save" when they still see it?

The woman touched something in me. I believed in her love. That was simply it. Her love was so plain that it drew me to him – to Carl Friedrich Wicklmayer, who was perhaps a five-time murderer. It touched me to see that, despite this, she believed in him. That is why I took her suffering, and her request, seriously.

You notice when something is important to someone. They have seen something important, even when it is hidden behind incriminating knowledge and failure.

That's why I could defend him. What do I mean by "I could?" I had to defend him.

And why did she come? Why didn't he ask me himself? Did she believe in something that Wicklmayer himself no longer believed in? He appeared to me to be very disturbed, there in the psychiatric asylum. Jail – asylum – jail.

“Regarding his suicide attempt on August 30, 1948, while in prison in Garmisch, he admits that he lost his nerve after opening his veins. He admits he often wishes he were dead. Further, he admits that he hears voices that admonish him, for example “you dog,” and then later say something pleasant. He points to a tree outside the window, in which he sees a dark, sinister figure if he looks at it too long. He doesn't say anything about Satan; that is not part of it.”

He said to me, “I don't know how I was able to do those things.” Was he simply divesting himself of the responsibility? Spinoza's “humans-have-no-free-will?” Or perhaps, “Wäckerle said I should, so I had to?” Wicklmayer surrendered his free will to Wäckerle. It was his choice to do this, wasn't it? Was he just pretending to be crazy?

It seemed that he dug deep into his conscience. He attempted again and again to talk to me. He attempted to free himself from his burdens, from his pangs of conscience. “I shouldn't have done that” I heard him say over and over. What an inner affliction he bore! I didn't want to change places with him. I vaguely remember that he took the blame for some things that he really had nothing to do with, perhaps to punish himself. It could have been that he “only” murdered Götz, and not the others.

Would you say to Wicklmayer, “You murdered by your own free will!” Would you hound him to his limits with arguments about free will? Perhaps even hound him to suicide?

I don't believe you have been able to it as he crouched before you. You begin to understand all the circumstances that made him into a murderer. The difficult situation that he was raised in, there in Lower Bavaria. Obey, obey, and obey. What is a young man of 23 supposed to do when so many around him are saying "you must obey, you must follow orders?" There was the constant poking at the French, against the southerners. The continuous bellowing of "The way the Germans were treated in the Treaty of Versailles is unjust!" And then the schools produced only dogmatism and fanaticism.

Suddenly you understand how someone gets sucked into it. Disoriented, anchorless; giving more credence to human bondage than human freedom. Then the boundary is very blurred. The knowledge of what it means to cross the boundary is very blurred. "I can't step over that line, I can't do that." It can be very blurred.

I thought that I had to take such a person seriously, taking all of his circumstances into account. I had to take into account how he was raised. I had to do this so that he could make a new place for himself among these new circumstances.

So that he wouldn't be hounded to commit suicide. I smoothly brought Wicklmayer the distance with thoughts of freedom. A sixth death. Five murders, and now the axe would fall. "Freedom" and "responsibility" served as the guillotine.

Suddenly, something occurred to me. As I thought about freedom, I had to suddenly be so free myself that I could relinquish the precious thoughts about free will. That was suddenly the problem that I faced. Could I be so free that I could have no, absolutely no, preconceived notions? Could I go so far as to even deny "freedom" as an absolute? Could I take a criminal, and all the circumstances surrounding him, seriously?

Five men were dead. There was no excuse for these murders. Despite this, you can see that it was a human who did this, who was forced to do it partly by the circumstances and partly through inner weaknesses. You notice that it helps him when you don't accuse him, but understand instead. When he says "I shouldn't have done that" or when he shows guilt, it means something. He shows that he accepts responsibility for his deeds and realizes that he also somehow performed them willingly.

That puts him in a new position.

His past conduct may have not been of his free will, but since he is now facing it head on, he can win his free will back.

Was it Adolf Eichmann, who said this as his last wish on death row: "Don't give me so much to eat that I have trouble finishing it?"

There the mother said, "Boy, clean your plate..."

There someone said, "Organize the transport of Jews..."

And what could I do now that, finally, Wicklmayer wanted his free will back?

I appreciated that Wicklmayer did not deny anything. It says a lot for someone to examine the extent of their deeds. How he murdered a weaponless amputee by slitting his veins. How he had to say to himself, "I did that." That shows what human freedom is on a whole new level. To look at such a situation and to say: "I shouldn't have done that. It is unforgiveable and I can never make it right."

Imagine having to live with that for your entire life! To be faced with that and to try to turn your life around. To have to die with that on your conscience.

When I began to defend him, we spoke to each other using formal terms. We had been on more casual terms before. I told him he did not have to be formal with me.

He was sentenced to six years in jail at his trial before the court. He was the only murderer I ever defended. “He was forced into this way of thinking” or “Our leader ordered, we followed” or “The big steam roller of the whole Nazi thing ran me over” or “I was just a part of this rotting world, I was helpless.”

I didn’t say to him that he also contributed to the rotting world. He was punished enough by his inner demons. They were terrible weights which he had to try to put behind him.

In the following years, his wife came to see me over and over. He had told her that she should thank me.

Before his death 35 years later, I got this letter out of the blue:

*Carl F. Wicklmayer*  
*May, 1984*

*Dear Mr. Bastian,*

*My heart is full. I must express these feelings. For decades, I have been silently thanking you for the unimaginable thing you did for me. I can’t compare it to anything else. That was a noble deed. You could speak of real Christianity. But these words are not good enough. Although I am an old journalist, up there in years, I do not have the words to formulate a letter that expresses what is in my heart. I try to guard myself from slipping into metaphors.*

*You made it possible for me to live. This I can say: I came to you with my hat in my hand, and you saved me. I could tackle everyday*

*life. My family blossomed. And, people were good to me. That shocked me.*

*I, along with my wife and my son, ask that you take our thanks and homage.*

*Carl F. Wicklmayer*

His deeds cut so deep, that he had to live in some type of mystical world. He no doubt wanted to do something important with his life. He attempted to live by some kind of ideals. They were the wrong ones.

Death sentence? Should someone like Wicklmayer have been sentenced to death?

I have always been against the death sentence. Decidedly against it. As long as a person is living, he can face his deeds head on. Being alive means being able to change. Do I have the right to take this chance away from someone? Is the one who sentences someone to death any better than a murderer?

Let's look at the Nazi criminals now, 50 years later. What did their crimes do to them? Look at those who are still stuck in the rut of "I had to...I couldn't do anything else..." Isn't that comparable to a death sentence, an inner one?

### **Release from the Camp**

One day District Leader Wagner came prancing through the door with his entire assault troop. Triumphant, with scars on his face. He was a member of the student corps. It still makes me sick to

think about this guy, Wagner. He was the one who came up with the idea of penning up prisoners in empty factory buildings.

There were about 40 of us in the room. He went directly to Freiberger, the carpenter, like a dog runs after its prey. “Ah ha, Freiberger, ah ha!” Imagine the triumph he felt when he saw his arch enemy there.

“Ah ha, Freiberger, are you still hanging around here?” He used this mocking kind of tone.

At gatherings before 1933, they had often clashed with each other. Wagner was most likely the constant underdog, in contrast to the certain, clear and convincing Freiberger. Yes, I did find him convincing.

“So, you have been in Russia!”

Freiberger softly answered, “Yes, I have been in Russia.”

“Ok, then you can tell us all about it. They have camps such as these in Russia as well, don’t they?”

Freiberger said, “Yes.”

“Then you can explain to us about the differences between them, if indeed they exist. Are there differences?”

“Yes, Sir, there are differences.”

“Tell us what they are. Explain these differences.”

Freiberger answered: “The people in the concentration camps in Russia must work. We must also work here. The difference is that in Russia, the prisoners are paid. We are not paid.”

Just imagine – he dared to say something like that!

Wagner turned beet red and turned on his heels. He didn't know how to answer. The blood froze in our veins. When he said that, we thought: "It is finished now. They will come to get him and beat him to death." I don't know what happened to him later. He was in the camp for a long time.

Wagner, the monster, turned around and threw himself in my direction. I was sitting in the back in kind of a corner. Naturally, I had to stand up, with my hands on the seams of my pants.

"What's your name?"

"Bastian."

"What's your job?"

"Law student."

"Why are you here?"

"Yes, I would like to know the answer to that myself."

He faltered.

"Ah, ha. What are you reading?"

It was Hamsun, Knut Hamsun, "The Wanderer Trilogy."

"You are reading Hamsun?"

After thinking through my options, I answered, "Yes, he is one of my favorite authors."

For the second time, he was speechless. He jerked his thumb towards one of his men and said, "Write down his name."

At that, my heart fell to the floor. However, after I was released from the camp, I thought to myself, "perhaps I owe my release to Hamsun," as odd as that sounds. When Maria was fighting to free me, it appears that Wagner remembered this incident with Hamsun. He probably was surprised that a communist would be reading Hamsun.

"The Wanderer Trilogy" was covered in red cloth. Maria had sent it to me in the camp. This environment created by Hamsun basically still attracts me – to look behind the activities of daily life at the important emotional happenings behind them. Once I began reading it, I couldn't put it down. I couldn't stop reading it, but I also couldn't stop thinking about it.

There I was reading "The Wanderer" when all at once this monster, with his face covered in scars, was heading for me. It was if I had been punched. I had just been reading the stories where I could see what humanity was, what it meant to be human. Hamsun doesn't provide the interpretations; you have to figure them out for yourself.

The door opened. This monster came walking in.

My release was as groundless as my arrest had been. Maria had been successful, or perhaps it was Bartolotto, my Italian professor. I'm sure my father was not involved. From Greece, he had hired a lawyer, a bad lawyer, who proceeded to take legal action. He would have done better spitting in water! As if it had anything to do with the legal process! My father had no idea what was going on, with him being there in Greece.

Upon my release, I had to sign a paper stating that I would not tell anyone about the things that had happened in the camp. That was implemented by the Nazis right from the beginning! That is why people always said of those who were released from the concentration camp: “When they are released from Dachau, they don’t talk about it or explain anything.”

Very quickly, the name of Dachau, the SS’s first concentration camp, came to represent the more than 2000 camps which followed.

Wearing the same pants and shirt as I had arrived in, the others and I climbed into the truck. On this September day, I was free.

## **Free!**

....and lost. We were transported to Munich, to Stiglmayr Platz. Do I finally have my freedom? No, the scent of freedom that you could sense when your feet were bound, was gone. You are nothing. You are standing on the Stiglmayr Platz, and you are nothing. You can’t get your bearings, freedom is not there. You stand there like a dog, which perhaps can wag his tail just a little. You think, “Should I call someone?” Do I even have any change to make a call? Can I manage that? That is reality.

You feel anxious about taking the next step. You don’t know where to start.

I went to see Maria in Döllinger Street. I was self conscious and smelly, a disgusting scent. When you come from such a camp, you bring with you certain disagreeable smells. You think there is something disagreeable about you. You feel soiled.

Maria was astonished, overjoyed – finally free! She had been afraid that she would not see me alive again. I sensed that this fear had run deep in her. She knew me. She knew the kind of person I was, and that I could have resorted to suicide. Women notice things like that very quickly. She was also quite sure that those who ran the camp would murder me if they could.

There were people who realized this as early as 1933. After all, it was in the paper every day: “Shot while trying to escape.”

Now she was happy: “You exist, you live, you are!” She wasn’t interested in hearing about how things had been in the camp or how I had survived. The essential thing was that she had me once again.