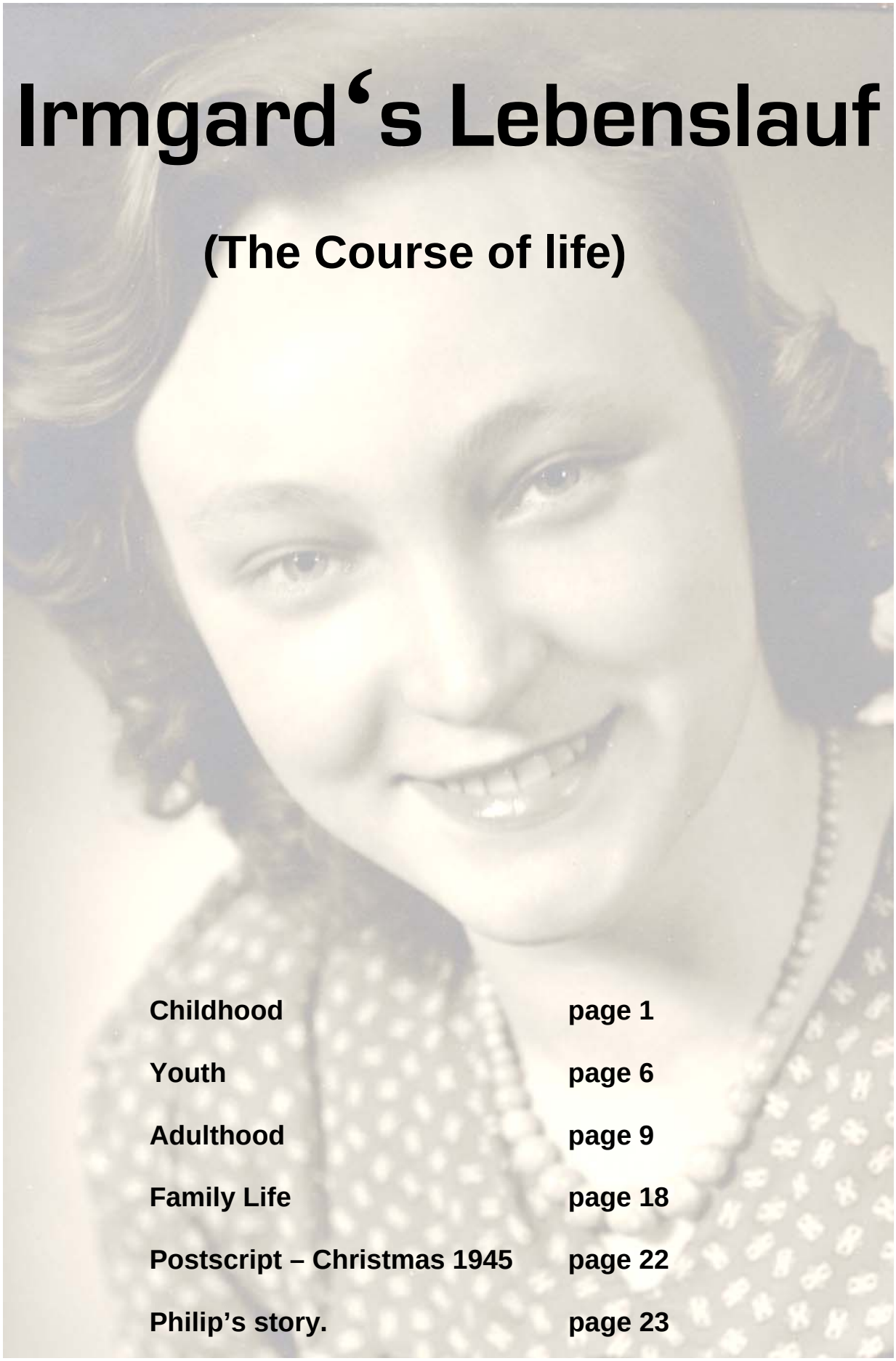
Irmgard‘s Lebenslauf

(The Course of life)



Childhood

I was born on 23rd June 1924, Irmgard Edeltrud Hampf, in Oberglogau, a small town in Upper Silesia. Everyone called me Irmi.

I am the third daughter of Karl Hampf and Maria nee Jarosch.

My parent's wedding picture, 1920

My parent's first child was Inge, born on the 7th March 1921, followed by Erika, born on the 25th February 1922.

Erika and Inge, 1923

When Erika was about 4 years old, she contracted meningitis and unfortunately did not survive. She was a lovely little girl, full of fun. Her little white coffin was put in our living room and lots of people came to bid her farewell.

I do not remember the occasion as I was less than 2 years old and I spent a lot of time at my mother's sister (Walli). Walli wanted children but did not have any, so I made up for it.

On the 5th September 1926 my parents had a fourth daughter, Vera. My little sister was only 6 months old when my mother, who had complications after a gall bladder operation, died. I was only 2 ¾ years old at the time.

Our poor father was left with 3 little children and he sorely missed my mother who was a very accomplished and efficient secretary as well as a good mother. A maid and a nanny were employed to help look after us. My father was a central heating engineer and had an installation business for central heating, bathrooms, boilers etc and undertook various jobs including plumbing and lead covering on roofs (churches). He employed several apprentices and specialists.

The family home, photographed in 2004.

My Aunt Walli asked my father if she could look after me since he had enough worries and could spare one of his little ones. So I stayed with her and her husband for a year and a half. Just over a year following my mother's death my father married again and soon after came to take me home to grow up with my sisters. Our "new" mother was very nice and we liked her very much. We called her 2nd Mutti. I remember my time at Aunt Walli's and the return home.

Vera and I were sent to a kindergarten, which was run by nuns. I was a very pale and delicate child and did not want to eat but somehow I managed to survive.

Irmi, Vera and Inge with "2nd Mutti" 1930

In 1930, when I was 6 years old I started school (in Germany all children start at 6). Primary school was a segregated one with old-fashioned teaching methods such as "only speak when you are spoken to". Depending on the teacher, a smack with a ruler or cane for laziness or misbehaviour was not uncommon. I remember a smack across my hand because I did not answer a times-table quickly enough. A year later, a medical examination revealed a small shadow on my lung. I was sent to a children's recuperation home in the mountains with lots of good air for 6 weeks. I was very homesick there but it must have done some good.

After my return I remember countless sessions at our doctor's surgery lying under an ultra-violet lamp. Two and a half years later I had to go to another home, also in the Riesengebirge (The Giant Mountains) with good, mountain air. There were many children there and we had a good time. I don't know how much good that had done me, but I remember Mutti buying me a complete new outfit to go there, and that probably had the desired effect. I spent 6 weeks there. A small scar, which remained on my lung, is still sometimes making me cough, but a specialist recently assured me that it is harmless.

In summer we had long holidays, about 8 weeks, and before the holidays started we used to carefully watch a thermometer which was placed outside a school building. When it reached a certain temperature (I can't remember, 28 or 30 degrees C I think), lessons ceased and we were all sent home. In the summer holidays I remember going with my sisters, an aunt and 4 cousins to a nearby river. We took a picnic and bathing costumes and enjoyed playing in the water. Although we saw water rats and other creatures at times, it was a great adventure. My aunt had brought a lot of white linen (sheets, table cloths etc) which she spread on the meadow and kept sprinkling with water when they became dry, thus bleaching them snowy white by the sun.

At home, I remember on very hot days Mutti dampening lots of sheets and hanging them in front of sun-filled windows and repeatedly dampening them, thus keeping the rooms cool (air conditioning?) Later on, when I was 11 or 12 a beautiful open air swimming pool with play areas, a café, lawns for ball games and sun-bathing area was built in our town and we spent most of our summer holidays there, having bought a season ticket. We never went away in our holidays.

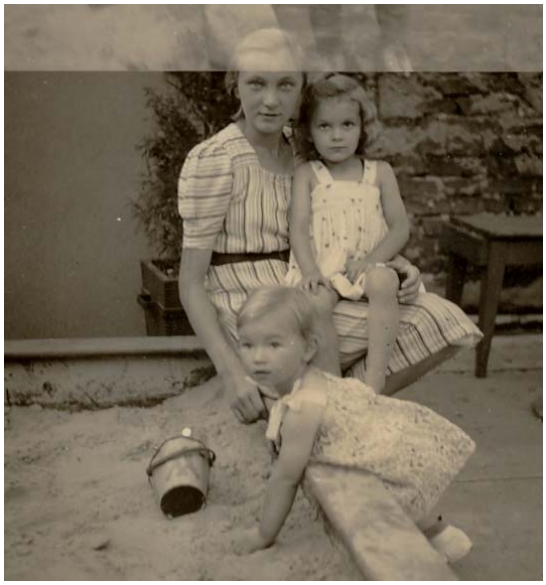
In winter we spent our spare time skating on the lake in our park. The pond had to be frozen a certain thickness and then it became a business proposition. A caretaker was installed who sold tickets, there were benches for us to sit on when putting on our skates, there were coat racks for garments if one became hot with the exercise and there were illuminations for the adults to skate in the evenings. I remember getting very very cold on occasions and arriving home crying, but a cuddle from our nanny, a dripping sandwich and a hot drink soon put me right again.

When I was 11 or 12 we also started skiing. Father Christmas very kindly obliged with skies and suits. My father was a very accomplished skier and the only holidays he ever took were in winter when he travelled to a high range of mountains called Altvatergebirge. At home our family spent the majority of winter Sundays getting up early and, having prepared our gear & rucksacks the night before, catching a train, travelling 3 or 4 stations along the line before taking a bus to the foot of a mountain called Bischofskoppe. There we put on our skis and walked steadily uphill, enjoying the winter landscape, the sunshine and the invigorating clear air. About half way, after 2 hours, there was a hunter's hut, where a lady always had some milk ready for us. On we went up, up and up (there were no lifts in those days). Finally, after about 3 ½ - 4 hours we arrived at the mountain hut (more of a restaurant). Inside there was a wonderful atmosphere. It was warm, comfortable chairs and someone on the harmonica playing jolly and traditional tunes. There we had an excellent dinner - we were very hungry after our exertion! Then we had a good rest and afterwards we went to the back of the hut where there was a nursery slope. There we practised a bit and fooled around until it was time to go home. Just as the upward trot was gentle so was the downhill journey. The 4 hours we spent going up were now rewarded by the 40 minutes coming down, right to the spot where the bus waited to take us home. Dead tired but happy we fell into our beds. I must admit there were times when I would have preferred to stay at home on a Sunday but it became enjoyable again later on when I was allowed to bring a boy friend.

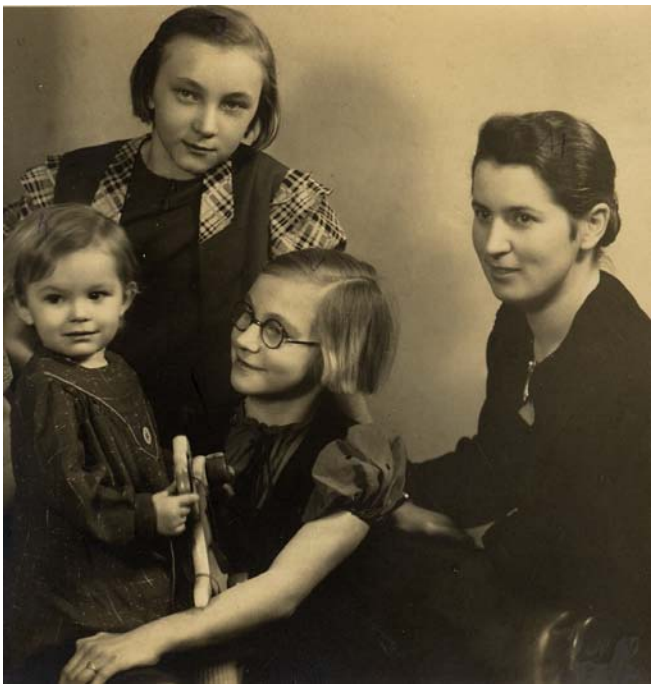
My Youth

After 7 years at the primary school I was admitted to a grammar school. It was really a school for boys in our town, but as there was no girl's school, a few girls were permitted to attend. I spent 3 years there, which was a very happy time. However, we had our worries.

Our 2nd Mutti gave birth to a little girl, Karola, on the 7th February 1935 followed by Helga (25th February 1938). A sixth daughter was a slight disappointment for my father, as he had always wanted a son who would be able to take over his business. However, it was not to be. We treated them like our dolls, only they were alive! I spent a lot of time in my summer holidays in our town's pool, swimming, diving, reading and sun bathing.



Irmi with Helga and Karola, 1939



Irmi, Karola and Vera with 2nd Mutti, 1937.

Later in 1938, Vera, who loved swimming and diving, complained of a pain in her hip. She was admitted to hospital, later transferred to a larger hospital in Breslau, the capital of Silesia. We visited her often. She was in great pain and could not be cured. The doctors were helpless. On the 2nd November 1938, my lovely little sister died. I loved her very much. She was brought back to our house and was laid out in our living room.

I kept sitting with her and could not bear to be separated from her. Many, many people were taking part or were watching the funeral procession. Her coffin was carried by boys who had been friends and wanted to do this last service. It was a long way, about ¾ of a km.

Like my sister Inge, I had piano lessons. At first my teacher did not live far from us and I used to go to her house. Then she married and moved away, but I still went to lessons on my bicycle, it was quite a long way. When the winter and the bad weather came, my parents did not want me to go that far so a teacher from my school was employed who came to our house. He was our music teacher and also taught mathematics. Through him I developed a liking for figures and became a star pupil in maths. But he became amorous and asked me to marry him. I did not accept and told him that I was too young (15 ½) and that I did not know what I wanted to do with my life. He was later drafted into the army and was killed in France.

My father thought I would be better off in a “girl’s” school and in 1940, when I was 16, I went to Hindenburg (a largish town on the border with Poland). I stayed in a boarding school, which I liked immensely but it was always nice to come home in the holidays. This school cost my father a lot of money. He was keen that I should go to university and study. I was away from home a lot and very early in my life and thus learned to become independent. At Easter in 1943 I sat my matriculation which enabled me to go to university.

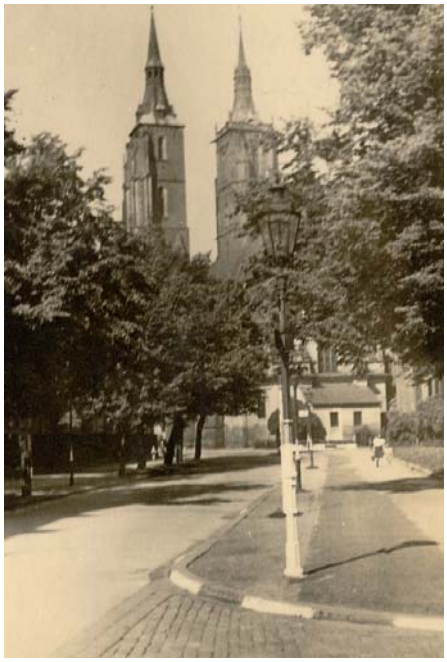
In 1933 Hitler came to power but this did not affect me very much. I joined the Hitler youth (which was similar to cubs and scouts). I enjoyed the meetings we had, we played games, learned folk dancing and went camping.

Ten years later, in 1943 and Germany was at war, I was unable to go to university before I had spent a year in the Land Army. I was sent to a camp near the town of Dresden, in Saxony. Here I stayed with 50 to 60 other young women. After an introduction we were sent to farmers to help on the land. One day I had to chop wood and when I wrote home about it, my mother said, “Oh, the poor girl, she has never had an axe in her hand in her whole life.”

The times were very hard. A lot of bombing was going on, mainly in the west of Germany, and many people lost loved ones or their homes. Many soldiers lost their lives in active service, among them my favorite cousin Hubert *(below left)* and my boyfriend Herbert *(below right)* who became a Lieutenant in a tank regiment.

Adulthood

In 1944 I was at last able to go to university to study dentistry. I would have preferred to have read medicine, but it took many years to graduate as a doctor. I went to Breslau, the capital of Silesia. I had a nice rented room and got on very well with my landlady. It was a lovely happy time with lots of friends, but it was all too short.



Breslau 1944. The university (left) and cathedral (right).

The war had not touched Silesia, it was the north and west of Germany which suffered most. After a few months we all had to cease our studies and help in the war effort. I was sent into a factory where I had to pack items. It became known that I was able to use a typewriter, I had often practiced in my father's office, and so I was sent into the office instead of the factory floor. Later I was sent to work at the Labour Exchange.

Christmas 1944 and I went home. It was nice, as always, but the mood was strange everywhere. The future looked uncertain. On the 27th December 1944 I returned to Breslau and spent New Year's Eve alone in my comfortable room. And that was when any connection with my parents, be it by post, rail, road or phone, was severed. I had no idea what happened to them and they had heard nothing from me.

My landlady had left her flat in order to be with her husband and left me to take what I wanted should I want to leave. Russian troops were advancing and there were air raid warnings. In the middle of January the Russians came closer and Breslau was declared a stronghold. All women and children had to leave.

I packed my suitcase with clothes and left the flat. My Aunt Walli, who also lived in Breslau, refused to leave. I was on my own. After some time my case seemed too heavy. There was deep snow. I returned to my room, took a deep drawer and packed everything in that. I tied some string to one end and now I could pull my "sledge" easily. Then I thought again. The snow will not always be there and one does not get very far with a "drawer". Back again.

This time I took my suitcase, removed the non-urgent things and replaced them with photographs and documents. This seemed the most sensible thing to do and turned out to be of great help to me later. I found it hard to leave my accommodation not knowing whether I would ever see it again. On the approach to the station there were thousands of people who all wanted to travel westwards by train. The queue moved very slowly. One tried to get on any train as long as it went west. The trains were chock-a-block. It would soon be my turn. The noise of the Russian gun shots were getting closer.

The next train, which I managed to squeeze into, went to Dresden.

Dresden was a wonderful baroque city in the county of Sachsen (Saxony) and which had not suffered any war or bomb damage.

Dresden 1945 before the bombing.

I carried 2 addresses with me. One was in Berlin, that of my landlady's sister. The other one was of a friend of my father in Dresden. When I finally found their address I was welcomed with open arms and made very comfortable. The papers I had from the employment office in Breslau I presented after a few days to a similar place in Dresden. I was sent to an office in the main street in the city and had to do clerical work. A friend from the university days in Breslau gave me his parents telephone number and said I should visit them should I ever be in Dresden. So I gave them a ring and asked if I could see them on the 13th February. They could not make it that day and we arranged a meeting for the following day. But it was not to be.

Fate was on my side for I shall never forget the giant bombing of Dresden on the night of the 13th February 1945. Had I visited them on that night I would not be alive. The friends I was staying with lived in a suburb outside Dresden and we watched the raid from their garden. Dresden was totally destroyed on that night. Had this happened during the day I would have been burnt or asphyxiated. The street where I worked was very narrow and people went to the cellars to escape the bombing. But the fires were so fierce that they took up all the oxygen and people could not breathe. The town was burning for several days. A couple of days later my "aunt" and I walked into the ruined town to see if we could find my other friend's parent's home.

But it was a sad picture. Nothing but rubble and in some places notes pinned to the rubble asking for people or saying, where they were. I don't know what happened to the people I was to visit.

A few days later a postcard arrived. It was from Mutti who asked our friends whether they had heard from me, as they did not know where I was. Mutti, together with my sisters, Karola and Helga, had been transported with thousands of other refugees from our hometown to Austria, where they were given some sparse accommodation. Mutti wrote her address on that card.

I did not even bother to reply. I packed a carton with my things (I had lost my suitcase in the bomb attacks) and hoped to get to that little place called Goisern in the saltmine area in Austria. I caught a train that went via Prague in Czechoslovakia to Austria with numerous stops because of air raids. After a lot of enquiries and changes I finally got onto a local train which took me to Goisern.

The same day, just a few hours before I arrived, Mutti's parents had also arrived. Having seen the misery of a refugee's accommodation they decided to try to go back home. But they did not get there. They were put into a Czech camp, which was worse. They decided to return to Austria. Then I arrived! You can imagine the buckets of tears that were shed on this re-union. Since the accommodation was inadequate I got a little room in a neighbour's house. I then tried to get some work, as without work, there were no ration cards.

There was a German military hospital in the locality that had a separate dental centre. I went to see the Chief Dental Officer, told him that I was a dental student but had to interrupt my studies and that a job as a dental assistant should be of benefit to me. He was very kind (his wife also came from Silesia) and employed me instantly as his assistant. I gained a lot of practical experience in contrast to the formal theory I learned at University. I soon made friends with some other young people and enjoyed life. One girl in particular, about my age became my best friend. Laura came from Upper Austria and stayed in a neighbouring house. After the war (June 1945), she went back home and I never saw her again. When I enquired her mother wrote to me telling me that she had been shot dead by the Russians, after a dance.

There were still some bombing raids and I remember one occasion where a horse drawn column with provisions was attacked very nearby. It came to a halt, some horses were killed and there were a lot of provisions to be had. Nobody was in charge. The soldiers tried to make their way home. I and many others took some bags and went to see what we could salvage. I came back with tins with meat and other food, which was very welcome in our diminished store cupboard. Someone saw to the horses and I think that was the only time I ever ate horsemeat.

The war ended in May 1945 and the Americans occupied the part of Austria where we stayed. The Austrians who were keen to become Germans before the war now wanted to be Austrians again and evict the German refugees from their country. Mutti and my sisters were transported to Germany. I was still working at the dental centre and, as we now treated the people who came out of the concentration camps, our work became important, and we had to stay.

I shared a room in the Bahnhofs Hotel with a nurse and a girl from Berlin who was the interpreter to the Americans. Before my family left, I arranged with Mutti a contact address so that we did not lose each other again.

Vati's brother, Sepp, lived in Brunswick and we agreed on his address as a point of contact. Vati had to stay in Silesia. All the men were kept back and were not allowed to leave so we had no news of him.

In January 1946 those of us who had stayed behind in Austria now had to leave as well. A bus was made available and we were taken to our destinations. On the first evening we arrived in Nuremberg, which was badly damaged. There were no hotels or hostels for us to sleep in. We were not allowed to travel during the night as a curfew was in force. The driver went to the police station for instructions. The police did not have any idea what to do with us until someone mentioned that there was plenty of room in the cells. We slept on straw mattresses, itched like mad and were glad when we could carry on the next day. But I can say that I have slept in Nuremberg's jail.

The next day I arrived in Brunswick. I went to my uncle's house but it was full with relations. Mutti and the children had been sent to a small village where they found some accommodation in a farmer's house. Because there were so many refugees coming from the east, the people in the west who still had homes had to give shelter. The accommodation was very cramped.

At about the same time, Silesia was occupied by the advancing allied army from the east. My father had to stay put, at least pro tem. Eventually he made the long and hazardous journey from Silesia to Brunswick, mainly on foot, and often moving by night. In the near anarchy and utter confusion of the early post war months, being an adult German male presented a danger to life. Not without difficulty, he made it and was eventually reunited with Mutti and his two daughters Helga and Karola.

After a few years in temporary accommodation near Brunswick, Vati, Mutti and my two sisters were housed by the German government in a local authority flat in Reutlingen in Baden Wuerttemberg (1955). My other sister, Inge and her family also relocated in the west and ended up near Frankfurt am Main, where they settled permanently.

After I arrived in Brunswick, I went to the local accommodation office and was fortunate to get a single room in a house with a very nice family. I tried to find work with a local German dentist but they were busy re-constructing their own lives and businesses and there were no vacancies. However, on my walks I noticed a sign saying: "54 Field Dental Centre"

I thought that this would be similar to what I had done in Austria, but in English. I had learnt English at school but now when it came to the test, it was sparse. I went to the centre and spoke to the head dental officer, Major Norman. He said, "Yes, I do need someone, but I have advertised and this afternoon I am interviewing several young ladies for the job. If you could come back tomorrow morning I shall tell you what the outcome is." I went back there the next day. "Yes", he said, "You can start tomorrow". "Oh, thank you, but I cannot start tomorrow" I told him "as I have to discharge an obligation first for a friend of mine".

A post war good turn

When I was in Austria, all the German people had to be "de-nazified" according to American law. We had to fill in questionnaires about what office we held during Hitler's regime. Apart from the Hitler Youth and the Land Army I was not involved in anything and got the OK

A friend of mine, Karl Franke, who was drafted into the SS, was not so lucky. He was interned by the Americans, I don't know for how long. Before he left he gave me his watch, his papers, his father's address and asked me to deliver these items. That was why I did not start my work immediately. I travelled to Schleswig-Holstein (In the very north of Germany) where his father lived and practised as a vet in Husum. The railway system was very bad. A lot of railway carriages were lost through bomb damage. I did find a train, which went north to Hamburg. It was a cattle train, without a roof and many people squeezed in.

I did eventually get to Husum, I can't remember all the details, but I enjoyed the few days I had there. My friend's father took me in his little car on visits to the farmers in the area.

Food was very scarce in Germany after the war. The average amount of calories eaten was 800 per person (the normal average amount being 2800). Because this man worked with farmers he had no difficulty in obtaining food. It was a very difficult time. Many people took a rucksack or bags and went either on foot or by train to the country to exchange anything they had for food. The farmers were getting fed up with them, but managed to get a nice collection of all sorts of things. (Jewellery, linen, and anything you could think of). That was all right for people who had lived in the west and had not lost their homes, but all the refugees who had nothing left had to help themselves.

I remember going out at night in Austria with a bag and taking 2 or 3 pieces of wood from various houses where they were stacked. Some people went to the station and took coal. There was nothing in the shops. You could only buy your rations (butter, meat, potatoes etc.) and on occasion, not always that. If some goods had come in which were not rationed everybody queued up for them. Whenever you saw a queue you joined it, even if you did not know what was for sale.

Back now to Major Norman, the dental officer who took me on. I started working there, and that was when I really got to grips with my English. I soon learned the names of all the instruments and to react to requests from the boss. At lunchtime I was allowed to join the British staff in another house. That was very useful and saved my own rations somewhat. The British soldiers were all very nice and helpful and would not take liberties with me once I made my position clear.

The British Army requisitioned the house in which I had my room, and I was once again homeless. However, when I mentioned this to Major Norman, he got wheels turning, a letter was written to the German Head of the Council as urgent and hey presto! I was accommodated in another part of the town. As I was single, it was comparatively easy to find a room, rather than several rooms a family would need. After some time the dental centre closed and I was transferred to the dental department in 121 British Military Hospital.

It was a very nice German built hospital, which the British had taken over. My new boss was Captain Howse and we got on very well together. He was very sympathetic and often helped me. For instance one Friday I was going to visit a friend in Göttingen after my work. I already had my train ticket, ration book and some money in my handbag. While sitting in the bus going to work I suddenly realised that my handbag was missing. Someone had stolen it on leaving at the last stop. I had no hope of finding it again.

When I told Capt. Howse about it he “organised” some food for me (bread, etc) and smuggled out of the hospital a large amount of cigarettes, which I could then sell for food (on the black market). It was strictly forbidden to take any goods out of the hospital (that is for the Germans who worked there) and often one’s bags were searched. So that was a great help for 2 or 3 weeks worth of ration cards had been stolen, apart from the money I could ill afford to lose.

My work consisted of assisting my boss in his work, i.e. handing him the right instruments, mixing fillings and sometimes carrying out the work of a dental hygienist as well as keeping the record of work in the books, arranging appointments, answering the phone etc.

All the patients were from British serving units who were stationed in the area. From time to time British soldiers were sent to help us. There were dental mechanics, corporals and privates who were doing clerical work, kept the appointment book up to date and assisted the dentist at his work. One day a nice looking corporal appeared Philip Shepherd. I liked him, because he was kind and very polite and when we conversed a little we found we had lots in common. He read a lot of books. We became very friendly and enjoyed each other's company. He was posted to another part of Germany but after a time he came to visit me over the Easter holidays and we had a pleasant time.

Then that year (1948) the dental department closed and I was transferred to another unit but this too was threatened with closure and I looked around for something else. I went to the Labour Office and made inquiries. I was asked whether I would be interested in training as a nurse in England. I agreed but was soon informed that there was no longer a vacancy. Disappointed I went back to my room. However, three days later I received a letter telling me that a few women had withdrawn from the scheme. I think their mothers did not like to be so far away from their darlings!

The following excerpt is from an article in **The Times** appeared on 5 August 1948,

"In view of the increasing demand for nurses, the Ministry of Labour is bringing over as an experiment 50 German women who have volunteered to train as nurses."

And on 19 August 1948 an article in **The Times** said,

"The first party of German women to arrive in this country for training as nurses left London yesterday for a three weeks' course at the reception centre set up by the Ministry of Labour at Colwyn Bay. This party numbers 50, and if the experiment is successful, many more may be brought over to ease the increasing shortage of nurses. After the course they will be assigned as student nurses to hospitals which have agreed to cooperate in this scheme."

And so it was that on 15 August 1948 we arrived at Harwich. We first spent three days in a hostel at Hyde Park Corner in London and with £1 pocket money and the West End shops within easy reach the world was our oyster. After three weeks at Colwyn Bay we were divided into groups and sent to four different hospitals. 15 went to Manchester, 10 to Dartford (Kent), 10 to Joyce Green near Dartford and 15 came to Oldchurch Hospital in Romford. We were to draw our destination out of a hat.

I had Phil's address in Romford and he was demobbed at around the same time. I asked if I could go to Romford, since I have "distant relations" living there. That was a white lie that paid off. The organisers were only too pleased to have some nurses sorted out and offered that I could take 2 friends with me, Sybil and Angela. That was a great help and I did not feel as homesick as I would have been otherwise. These were hard times, but also very happy ones. We made many friends and Oldchurch had become our home. The training was very strict but we were proud to have stayed there. After three years many left for Germany and "the world" but some of us remained.

Family Life

Phil and I decided to get married and we had a very nice wedding service at St. Edward's Church in the market place in Romford on 10 May 1951.

Mr. Philip Shepherd
Miss Irmgard Hampf
have pleasure in announcing their
Marriage
at St. Edward's Church, Romford, at 3 p.m.
on 10th May, 1951

29 Hill Grove
Romford, Essex

Our wedding reception was plain. Rationing was still in force but some neighbours did some baking and prepared a nice reception.

Since we could not buy a house and flats were scarce, Phil's parents kindly offered us accommodation in their house. We shared the kitchen, but otherwise all was done in the one upstairs room. It was bedroom (a put-u-up), dining room (in the alcove), office and later a nursery.

On 28 February 1952 our first son Desmond was born.

In 1955 we managed to have a small bungalow built in Rayleigh (for £1500!) and we enjoyed 5 idyllic years there.

On 27 April 1957 our second son, Gordon, was born at home. The delivery was straightforward but there were complications immediately afterwards. Fortunately these were recognised by the midwife, Nurse Millard, who called our GP, Doctor Nicholls, and even though it was a Saturday evening, was able to come round, and possibly saved my life.

On another occasion while still at Rayleigh Desmond fell ill. I took him to the doctor, a less experienced GP and he diagnosed a tummy upset. However, Desmond's condition worsened and I summoned Doctor Nicholls. He looked at Desmond and said, "That is no tummy upset, it is pneumonia." I became very worried and he gave me a prescription for Desmond. As Desmond was very ill in bed and baby Gordon was in a pram in the next room, and being alone in the house, I could not leave them unattended. Dr. Nicholls very kindly offered to stay with them while I ran to the chemist for the prescription. That same evening we could see a big improvement in Desmond's condition. I am forever grateful to Dr. Nicholls for all that he did.

As the bungalow was rather small, In 1960, we moved into a 3 bed-roomed house in Chadwell Heath. This was our home for the next 16 years.

The garden backed onto the A12, a very busy and increasingly noisy trunk road. So in 1976, we moved to Brentwood.

Christmas 1992

We are still here, 30 years on (2006). Our time in Brentwood seems to have gone faster than ever, due possibly because I have been even busier. In 1967 I had started work as a translator in the Customs & Excise Translation Service. Soon after that I also began teaching in a language club in London and at evening colleges in Dagenham, Redbridge and Brentwood. In 2006, I still have 2 small classes at home, one in the afternoon, the other in the evening.

On Saturday/Sunday 15/16 August 1998, seven of us German nurses got together and we celebrated in style the 50th anniversary of our coming to England. We visited Oldchurch Hospital in Romford where we trained as nurses, and on the Sunday our menfolk joined us and we all had lunch at the Artichoke in Brentwood.

Phil and I have had many nice holidays. First, with the children, in England and in Germany, where my parents still lived.

Later Phil and I had walking holidays in the Lake District and elsewhere with the Holiday Fellowship. However my favourite holidays were spent in Austria, in the winter to go cross-country skiing. For Phil, that was a new experience. We went there every January for over 20 years.

When Michael (our elder grandson) was old enough we took him to Austria. He enjoyed it. A few years later it was his brother's turn. Richard too enjoyed the skiing and charmed all the ladies with his German phrases. I am pleased Richard is learning German at school.

We stopped our skiing holidays in 2001, being well into our seventies by that time. This meant that Emily, being so much younger, unfortunately has not had the alpine experience, which her older brothers have enjoyed. But no doubt she will have other pleasures in life.

Before I finish I just want to say something more. When one learns anything new there are normally plenty of instructions to follow. Unfortunately there are no instruction about how to bring up children and it is a case of learning as one goes along. I might have made some mistakes. If so, I hope that Desmond and Gordon will overlook them. I have always tried my best and love them dearly. Also Phil and Toni and my grandchildren, Michael, Richard and Emily.

The End.

Irmgard Shepherd, 2006

Postscript

Set out below is a true story which my brother-in-law (Inge's husband) wrote in response to a German local Newspaper on 13 December 1995.

Christmas 1945 – Who Remembers?

As a young family when our son Jochen had just become 2 years old, we had to leave our hometown Oberglogau. This was in February 1945, the last month of the war, and became poor overnight. After many journeys and searchings we finished up in emergency accommodation, a sports hall, in a small town not far from Fulda. It was not until November that year that we found shelter with a retired couple in a small village in that area. Christmas was not far off. In a nearby forest a small Christmas tree was obtained and decorated with tin foil strips in place of normal decorations.

In our room the emptiness was yawning and the Christmas tree stood all alone and lost. Darkness set in. There was a knock at our door and in the frame stood a 7 year-old boy with a large loaf of bread in his hand. He wished us a peaceful Christmas, gave the bread to my wife and said, "So that Jochen will not go hungry at Christmas"

Our room only dimly lit by a 25-watt bulb suddenly became bright. This was the poorest but also the loveliest Christmas. In hindsight it also became the saddest of all because a few days later, this boy was caught stealing bread. According to his mother, "The boy came from the poorest family of the village". He could not bear the shame of having been caught and hanged himself in his mother's house.

So our thoughts at Christmas every year go to that small village, and to the boy who made our Christmas so lovely when our need was at its greatest. Every year we hear his words, " So that Jochen will not go hungry at Christmas".

This is our lasting memory of Christmas 1945.

PHILIP SHEPHERD - his account

I was born in Barking at 4am on 1 May 1928. When I was six my parents moved to Romford, which then was very much a country town with a large livestock market every Wednesday. I went to St Edward's Church of England School, in the town centre, and remained there until I left at the age of fourteen.

Philip aged 5

and in 1933 after moving to Romford.

During this time (1937-38) I developed TB glands and was in the London Hospital at Whitechapel for six weeks. After I was operated on I had pneumonia and became a cause for concern. I pulled through but lost more than six months schooling at a critical time and as a result I failed the eleven plus.

I was eleven when war was declared on 3 September 1939. Although only a boy, I was sufficiently in touch with events from 1938 to recognise the gathering storm. The first eight months of the conflict became known as the phony war - virtually nothing happened in Western Europe.

But in May 1940 events began to roll. Belgium and Holland were invaded by Germany, the Germans broke through the Allied defences in Northern France, and within a few weeks almost the whole of Western Europe had been occupied by Germany - other than Britain. It was at this time of heightened crisis that my sister Joan was born on 30 June 1940.

Following the Battle of Britain in the late summer of 1940, the blitz arrived. (Blitz is short for Blitzkrieg - a German word for sudden or lightening war). London was heavily bombed and from where I lived in Romford we could see the flames and smoke from the damaged London docks. Many bombs fell in Romford and at the end of November 1940 a large bomb fell between our house and the road behind our garden. This bomb killed the parents of a school friend. Our house was badly damaged, I was asleep under a table in the dining room when the bomb fell at about 9.30pm. Arrangements were made for my mother, sister and myself to go to rural Nottinghamshire where my mother had relations. My father stayed in Romford with his sister.

There were no air raids in Nottinghamshire but my ten-month stay there further interfered with my education. In the village school there were just two classrooms for all the children from 5 to 15 years of age. Nothing much happened in the village, so I went to church on Sundays, as a choir boy in the Anglican church for Morning Prayer and Evensong and to the Methodist Sunday school in the afternoon.

Our house in Romford was eventually patched up and in October 1941 we returned home. By this time Russia, having been attacked by Germany, was in the war on our side. We in Britain might complain about how much we suffered in the war but it was nothing to compare to the horrors and devastation that occurred in the Soviet Union.

Because my parents were not well off, I had to leave school when I was fourteen and entered the Post Office as a Boy Messenger at the princely wage of 17s 6d (87½ pence) a week.

I supplemented this by having a paper round at a shilling (5 pence) a day. Delivering telegrams was sometimes a bit fraught as they brought news of some serviceman's death in action or having been posted missing. This gave rise to tears and sorrow.

The war continued. Britain and Russia suffered further defeats, and then in December 1942 the United States entered the war. On the home front we were subjected to intermittent nighttime bombing until June 1944, when at the same time as the Allied landings in France, the flying bombs (also known as V1s or doodlebugs) were deployed against the south of England. These were soon supplemented by the V2 rockets. Both of these weapons were quite frightening and caused many casualties and much damage.

But being in my mid-teens I largely shrugged off these dangers and concentrated on cycling in the Essex countryside or going to the cinema (there were four in Romford).

I also had to get acclimatised to the increasing number of American servicemen in the area, chatting up the local girls and dangling before them nylon stockings, chewing gum and other items of transatlantic culture. (What did we say about them - 'over fed, over weight, over paid and over here'). There was also the American music, swing, jive, and the bands, the most famous of which was Glen Miller's.

During the war food was in short supply. Most things were rationed and eggs, bacon, meat, sweets and chocolate were luxuries. The tummy was always rumbling, furthermore, oranges, bananas and the like completely disappeared. My sister didn't see her first banana until she was six!

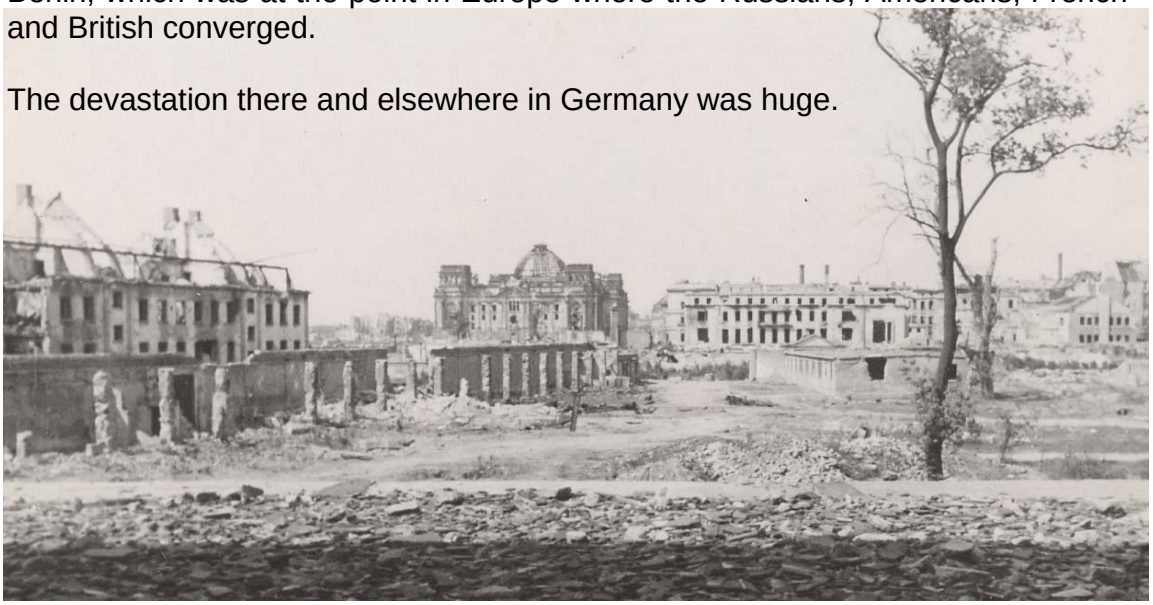
Throughout the war class and social differences were largely put to one side. There was a great sense of community and pulling together. This was good and was one of positive aspects of the war. In 1945 after the end of the war in Europe, a general election was called. As a reaction to pre-war poverty and unemployment, and the war itself, a Labour government was elected with a huge majority. The new Prime Minister was Clement Attlee, one of my political heroes. He had the daunting task of leading Britain into the postwar world, which he did to much acclaim. Amongst other things he brought a number of vital industries into the public sector and launched the National Health Service and the Welfare State.

But despite the war I had to have a view to the future. Leaving school at fourteen, I did what many working class young people did, I went to evening classes and studied. I took a Civil Service examination when I was sixteen, passed, and began my upward career in the Civil Service.

The war ended in 1945, when I was seventeen.

In 1946 I was conscripted into the Army and the following year was posted to Berlin, which was at the point in Europe where the Russians, Americans, French and British converged.

The devastation there and elsewhere in Germany was huge.



In January 1948, I was posted to Brunswick, and that is where I met Irmgard. She was working for the British Army in a military hospital.

I left the Army in late 1948. Shortly before that, Irmgard was recruited by the British as part of the first contingent of well educated German young women to train in England as nurses. Was it chance or fate that she was assigned to Oldchurch hospital in Romford for training?

From then on we had a gentle but developing courtship and on 10 May 1951 we were married in St Edward's Church in Romford. It was also the year of the Festival of Britain.

We have since been blessed with a blissful and invigorating married life and in 2006, 55 years on, we are still together, in harmony, compatible, jointly supportive and benefiting from each other's origins. Two sons, Desmond and Gordon, were born during the 1950s, and in 1955 we moved into the property market, buying a small bungalow in Rayleigh for just £1,500. In 1960,in need of a larger home, we moved to Chadwell Heath, with a further move in 1976 to our present home in Brentwood.

We learn lessons from wars and the lesson we learnt from 1939-1945 is that never again should the nations of Western Europe fight each other. Since 1945 we have come closer together in the European Union and I believe this deserves our support and participation, as does the United Nations, if we are to have a lawful and peaceful world, and not betray the many who lost their lives during 1939-1945. It is my view that we should be involved in events, have our say, vote at elections, be positive and not cynical, and support the Green lobby. The environment, and the future of our planet, is now the Big Issue.

Philip Shepherd
December 2006