HOLIDAY ABROAD - SUMMER 1947 - A SHORT STORY

The cool air of a very early morning penetrated the compartment, and I was glad of my warm clothes in spite of the crowded nature of the train. I was nursing my rucksack – already growing quite a heavy baby – but I could just manage to peep round it and glimpse the terraced slopes of the Rhine valley. The early sun picked out in sharp shadows the precarious dams holding back the earth. They appeared like vast irregular flights of steps leading up over the hills. The pinnacles which had defied terracing even, were crowned with the ruins of ancient castles, dignified in their decay. How different, I thought, from the ruins of the great cities we had passed through. Man was so utterly ruthless and barbarian in his destruction. But time was a real gentleman; he at least asked permission before gently and politely setting his contractors to work ... there was plenty of time to think, on this journey.

The Rhine moved swiftly on its way – self-absorbed. It had seen many trains; it had seen the terraces often enough, and the castles when they were young, and the cities before they were large enough to be destroyed. Later, I pulled out a packet of sandwiches and managed to guide them to my mouth. My crowded fellow-passengers were munching thick slices of heavy-looking black bread. Their cheeks were hollower than mine, I reflected. They did not say much to each other, and what they did say was mostly unintelligible. They did nor smile nor laugh much. They were not very polite.

So, these were the people I had come to help. I thought as I faced the hard stare of the young woman opposite. She seemed proudly contemptuous of my white bread and my healthy appearance. These then were the people for whom I was going to sacrifice my holiday in order to help them rebuild their land. I wondered what the young woman would have said if I had told her that I was going to spend my holiday clearing out rubble and helping to build up a children's hospital in this very city through whose comparatively unscathed suburbs we were now running.

Outside the station the trams were very full. Several very friendly offers of help in the station hall had suddenly melted when I made for a policeman to ask my way. After several trams and three quarters of an hour had gone by, I decided that British dignity and manners had to be left behind once and for all. The only place for a man with a large rucksack was obviously outside the tram. There were plenty of handles and knobs to cling to.

I had to walk the last quarter of a mile. The tram-lines terminated where a tangled mass of steel girders and concrete blocks indicated the presence at one time of a bridge. The road, or rather the narrow passage through the rubble, twisted among the still-standing shells of buildings. The East end of London in the Blitz flashed through my mind; the shriek and tremble and crash, and the awful fear of fire. I wondered if these wasted acres would ever be built up again, and if so, whether they might not perhaps once again be blasted in some future catastrophe. I reflected on the inexorable trend towards destruction and what the ordinary people were doing to prevent another war; what the busily queuing housewife could do, or the harassed menfolk, or those loafers on the station. I was certain I at least was doing my best by devoting my holiday to the cause of peace, by coming to this international work-camp. Here I would find passionate devotees of peace ready to join with me in studying the present-day problems of the world, finding solutions of them together and forming vigorous cells of resistance to the germs of war. At the same time we would be devoting some of our time to labouring in a practical gesture of reconstruction and reconciliation.

At each step of the way, the contrast between the ruined waste land leading to the children's hospital and the keen idealistic group of young men and women of every nationality whom I was about to meet, became sharper and more poignantly certain in my mind. My heart beat faster with excitement and anticipation as I followed the last sign-board pointing through an archway to the 'Internationaler Zivildienst' camp. There on the door of the only wing of the building still standing was the familiar shield - a large spade inscribed with the letters "P A X", superimposed on the two crossed halves of a broken sword.

The shell of the left-hand wing was propped up with scaffolding, whilst a passage had been dug through what had once been the right wing. Rickety rails led away through this gap to the unknown beyond. Behind the hospital an enormous windowless concrete building dominated the background.

Evening meal was in progress. The small room was crammed full of people, and the noise seemed to be terrific. I was expected. A large young man who introduced himself as André came forward and we shook hands. I sat down next to him. He appeared to be the camp leader, and announced a "House Meeting" immediately after supper. I was asked to stand up, give my name and one or two details about myself.
There must have been about twenty people around those two small tables, and later André introduced me to most of them - all except those who were out in the kitchen washing the dishes: Yvonne and Yvette; Karl-Heinz and Hans-Peter; Niels and Ully; Karen and Karl - what confusion of names and nationalities. There was one extremely nice-looking girl, who, I gathered came from Finland.

Gradually my German began to come back to me. Everyone was exasperatingly matter-of-fact, and no-one seemed to think the presence of a stranger in their midst cause for the least bit of fuss. The evening went by in lively but mostly incomprehensible discussion. I gathered that someone or other had failed to chop sufficient sticks the previous evening, and as a consequence breakfast had been late, and work had started fifteen minutes after schedule. The "Entertainment Committee" were apparently asking the assembled company for a ruling, as they had been unable to agree among themselves whether to arrange the theatre party on Tuesday and invite the city replanning Director to Dinner on Thursday, or vice versa.

They sang a goodnight song, and then André led me to the bedroom - a long, narrow, very ill-lit room lined with two rows of double-tier "shelter" beds. The cylindrical hump of my palliasse looked dangerous, and I imagined myself trying to sleep on it, like a pea balancing on the back of a spoon. It took me the most of my three week's stay to wear a comfortable hollow in that palliasse. Sleep defied me. It was too dark to read. I was genuinely afraid that I would roll off my second-storey perch, but managed finally to shift my centre of gravity so that any movement would be towards the wall. I was feeling rather disappointed with the camp. Somehow I had expected something rather different - an atmosphere of white-hot enthusiasm; a sense of impelling urgency. Instead there seemed to be just a rather happy family of the most ordinary-looking people. Perhaps I was over-tired ...

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Yes, I must have been over-tired. Breakfast was over when I arrived next morning in the little room which served as dining-room, library, common-room, lecture hall and quiet room. It was Sunday, and some of the group had been to church. Two barefoot children, pale and thin, walked in, making straight for the kitchen. They retreated rather crestfallen. I asked them where they came from. They countered by asking where "Schwester Margret" was. Göte, the Swede, explained that it was Sunday so the "Sisters" were having a rest, and the "Brothers" were cooking the dinner. I should have said that the peculiar smell of burning from the kitchen confirmed this. Reinhard had by this time produced a biscuit and was busily feeding it to our two visitors. In his broad, and musical Swiss accent he was asking them how they liked their nice new electric-light bulb. "Kaput" said one of them shrugging his little shoulders, and they scampered off.

Reinhard explained to me that they had got to know this family who lived in the large air-raid shelter, or Bunker, in the next street. This was the enormous concrete building which I had glimpsed in the background last night. Several Saturday afternoons and Sundays Reinhard and some of the other volunteers in the group had devoted their spare time working in the Bunker, and they had become acquainted with some of the families who lived there. The work was very simple and consisted of picking out whole bricks from the piles of rubble outside the Bunker, cleaning them with hammer and chisel, and then transporting them to the top floor of the Bunker where a couple of bricklayers from the city were devoting their weekends to building partition walls. They too, like us from the 'International Voluntary Service for Peace', worked without payment. When the work was finished and window-frames had been put in, there would be an excellent day nursery for the two hundred children of the Bunker, where they could see the sunlight and escape from the eternal darkness of the catacombs below.

It was then I realised why there were so few electric light bulbs in our dormitory; no-one, least of all kind-hearted Reinhard, could bear to see families living in perpetual darkness, pierced only by an improvised candle or two.

He explained the fun they had passing the bricks from hand to hand in one enormous human chain from the street level to the top floor. The children enjoyed it emmensely, and even the young men and women of the rival youth organisations in the city came to join in, and forgot their political and religious squabbles for an hour or two. This week-end, however, they were all taking a well-earned rest.

With the departure of the two children, silence descended upon the room and the three men resumed their letter writing. I wondered that there seemed to be so little privacy in the camp. I found it a numbing thought that one would have no private life, and began to doubt whether I could stand it for three weeks. These were apparently the only few spare hours the volunteers had to themselves, and they appeared to spend even those few hours at week-ends working within the Bunker folk.

Outside in the dusty courtyard I found an extra-outsize ladder, which ran from the ground to the top of the scaffolded building. I clambered up and stood surveying the scene. The Bunker filled one side of the picture. The sun, shining brilliantly gave the surrounding ruins a flat appearance, like a drop-curtain. Ruins look particularly incongruous in sunshine. Churchbells were crowding the air, but there was no sign of life in the street below, except for occasional wisps of smoke rising from the middle of a pile of ruins, and indicating, I learnt afterwards, the presence of a family living under the ruins in a cellar. Sunday dinners were being cooked there.

I measured the pitifully small amount of work which had been done by the twenty volunteers on this children's hospital during the three weeks they had been there. A casual observer glancing over the area would scarcely have noticed any improvement. I descended the ladder with a heavy heart. The problem of reconstructing this area was a miniature of the insoluble problems of the world at large; no matter how hard one worked oneself, one was only scratching at a little pile of rubble.

In the afternoon we went swimming. This involved taking a short-cut across the railway, and then about an hour's walk until we reached the city woods. Many other people had felt the need to wash away the dust of the hot city. On the way back I found myself talking to Karl-Heinz. He was a native of the city, and since his discharge from the army had resumed his profession as a journalist. In the course of his work he had become acquainted with the energetic Pastor Gräber who was in charge of the Protestant relief work in the city. The latter had implored him to appeal for help in rebuilding the St Mary's Children's Hospital, and Karl-Heinz who had worked on an "Internationaler Zivildienst" work-camp before, had put the request before the German committee of that organisation. They had accepted the work, and had asked Karl-Heinz to prepare the camp. He pointed ruefully to his broken shoes and said that they were very familiar with the streets separating the various city administrative offices, and they had peeped very frequently at the innumerable officials who demanded certificates for this, licences for that, and dockets for the other. The most difficult thing at that time of the year had been to get straw for the beds. I shuddered, thinking of my dangerous hump.

He praised Pastor Gräber for his organising ability and for the way in which he had arranged that the camp received heavy workers' rations. The Protestant Relief had agreed to pay for all the food and insurance costs. But Pastor Gräber had been unable to keep his promise to get all the cement and wood which the building needed - even he had failed to do that - and that was a measure of the phenomenal difficulties which beset the assembling of building materials. Thus the building had not gone ahead as fast as they could have wished. Not that there was any shortage of work. Indeed the paid workers from the city who were doing the skilled work were complaining that they had too much to do. There had been great difficulties the first week between the volunteers who were doing the unskilled labouring and whose idealism was forcing the pace, and the skilled workmen who had their union to think about, and their traditional pace. Besides they were not getting the food to do so much work, and they grumbled very much against the volunteers.

But as personal friendships grew up between the two groups, and common interests were found - a mid-morning sandwich was one of the commonest - both parties had compromised a little, the volunteers

worked a little more steadily, and the skilled workers a little faster. Architect Plumbeck had said that nowhere in the city was work progressing so rapidly.

Margret, who had joined us in our walk back from the lake, observed that Hildesheim, her native city, was leading the German cities in its reconstruction work. It had done more to repair its ruins than any other city, and it had been as badly damaged as any of them. I asked about the extent of the damage in other cities, and they were only too willing to give me the figures - they were not quite sure about some of them, whether Freiburg, for instance was 72% or 68% destroyed. They asked me how destroyed London was; Whether there was a branch of the 'Internationaler Zivildienst' in England; whether I had taken part in an international work-camp in England, and so on. I pointed out that it was a condition of service abroad that one served first in one's own country. Margret was anxious to know if the women on the camps in England worked outside as well as in the kitchen. Yesterday had been the first time she had been allowed to work on the "site". The other "sisters" had all had that experience, but she, as "head-sister" had had too much to do indoors till then. It was all very well talking about delegating responsibility, she said, but you just could not let everyone into the larder; there would be nothing left in a couple of days. The newspapers had already announced that there would be a cut in the meat ration in the next rationing period, and they had not been able to buy any fat anywhere for a week. I edged in a question about food, and Margret said that they had had gifts of extra food for the camp from CARE packets from American friends. She said that Switzerland had helped with milk powder, Denmark with cheese, and Holland with potatoes for the camp. It was all thrown into the same pot with the rations drawn for the German volunteers. The result was that the volunteers from abroad had a ration below that to which most were used, and the German volunteers had a ration higher than usual. We made a practical test of this statement a few minutes later, over a very good meal cooked by Alun, who came from New Jersey, and Gerlof from Utrecht.

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Next morning we were wakened by the sound of a melodeon, quite well played; it was daybreak and cold enough to warrant another two minutes in bed. Standing in the queue for the wash-basin, I regretted those minutes, and made a mental note to get out of bed at once the next morning. I appreciated, too the reasons for not shaving before breakfast. The warning peal on the frying-pan rang out long before I had found my working boots, and I experienced a strong feeling of public censure when I finally appeared at table, late. Each meal was preceded by a moment's silence, and breakfast had the added dignity of a short quotation culled from some famous author, or a short passage from some relevant book, read by the leader for the day.

There was a "rota" system for this changing daily leadership, drawn up by André. He also produced diagrams indicating "early rising" duty and dish-washing duty. There had been some criticism of this at Saturday's house-meeting, as some people felt that it should be left to the individual conscience of volunteers to compel them to take their turn in these duties. But it was finally decided that we were not condoning dictatorship when we submitted to André's authority, and his little diagrams saved us the embarrassment of wondering if we should really volunteer this time or not, and at the same time enabled us to plan our free time.

After the silence, the leader for the day wished us a "good appetite" and we fell to. A plate of porridge, a couple of slices of bread and a cup of ersatz coffee were soon disposed of, and the next job was the sweeping of the rooms and the cleaning of the wash-room. Furious activity followed, until a quarter to seven when the frying-pan clanged again, and those of us who wanted to, assembled for a period of about ten minutes' quiet. In fact, everyone seemed to want to join in; and it was a surprise for me to learn later that there were theists and atheists , communists and Quakers among our little group.

48 03 19 - 1 05

I found Karl-Heinz introducing me to Gerhard, a short man, rather older than the rest of us. He had quite grey eyes. Karl-Heinz indicated with an air of tolerant good humour that Gerhard was a Berliner, though he couldn't help that. He was in charge of the work. He invited me to take a shovel and join the rubble-clearing squad. We deployed ourselves over the heap of rubble, Felix picking out the whole bricks, and

handling them to me. I had to hand them to Karen, who was responsible for pitching them to the brickcleaning squad. We worked with a will in the cool of the morning, and soon the cleaning squad were begging for mercy. Relaxing our pace, Felix told me he came from Göttingen where he had started studying after his release as a prisoner of war. He had been an army officer and had spent most of his war service in Norway. It was a lovely country, Norway. Had I ever been there? He was looking forward to going back there again. Such wonderful people. He had heard that there was a chance of international work-camps there.

I had, as a matter of fact, heard of an international work-camp in northern Norway - in Finnmark - indeed it was my friend Stan, who on returning from there last year, had put the idea of devoting my holiday to such a work-camp, into my head. Many an evening we had sat together, and Stan never tired of relating his experiences. He always waxed very wroth against the terrible scorched-earth policy up there and I asked Felix what he thought about this. Felix was convinced that it had been necessary in order to stop the Russian advance. But every house destroyed, every bridge blown up, every telegraph pole and every fencing post even, sawn down and burnt? I asked. Felix said he did not know about that.

We settled down to the salvaging of the bricks once again. I asked Karen if she had ever been in Norway. She said she was Norwegian and had been a refugee from Finnmark, and was now living in Stavanger. She talked quietly about the resistance movement and we both listened fascinated, until Gerhard called us for "second breakfast".

A light breeze had arisen by the time we started again and it blew the dust into our eyes and hair. Soon we all began to look like very dirty millers. The brick-chippers had plenty of work to keep them going, and we three began shovelling the smaller rubble and dust into the tip-trolley. It was hard work, but we kept at it, and only paused to look at each other and laugh with the joy of accomplishment after each trolley-load had been pushed along the rails and shot into the tipping place - a cellar, about fifty yards away. We began timing each load against the number of bricks which the chipping squad had cleaned, and in our eagerness, had a catastrophic derailment which would have put our whole average back had not the chippers jumped to the rescue and lifted the trolley bodily back on the rails again.

I had felt for some time that it really must have been lunch-time, and began to feel very weak. Karen and Felix must have noticed the symptoms, for they leaned on their shovels and began a rapid exchange of arch remarks about the stupidity of England and the English. Felix played up well, and I had not the ghost of a chance to say a word in defence. We all collapsed in helpless laughter and the frying-pan rang out calling us in to dinner.

In the arch-way through which I had entered on Saturday night there was a stone fountain set into the wall. By some miracle it was still running, and we were glad to be able to wash our hands and freshen our faces. At dinner, incredible quantities of soup were consumed. I found my own capacity was limited to one large plateful, but there seemed to be no limit to the capacity of my fellow-workers. By three o'clock, an ominous empty feeling reminded me that soup does not go very far, and by five I felt a most inefficient worker, and was very glad that I had only to transmit brick after brick from the hand in front to the hand behind me. Rarely had I heard a more welcome sound than the call to stop work. My eyes were burning with the dust, my throat parched, my hands sore, I was hungry beyond believing and physically very weary. In the evening there was a discussion led by Alun: "Is Christianity practicable?" All my efforts at concentration failed me, and the voices swirled unintelligibly round me. I awoke with a start, but cautious observation proved that the discussion had become so animated that no-one had noticed my lapse - no-one, that is except the round-faced Ully, who gave me a broad sympathetic smile. I crawled on to my bed and drowsed over, to the melody of the goodnight song.

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48 03 19 - 1 06

Karl-Heinz' version of the previous morning' melodeon, was an extremely full but unmelodious voice. He may have been a good organiser, but he was no Caruso. However, the fact that he had conquered the kitchen fire, and had been up at least an hour, gave him the maddening air of having the right to be cheerfully superior to all of us. Waves of sickening fatigue rushed over me, and I felt very sorry for myself. I rallied with yesterday's resolution to get to the wash-room early, but already that round was well and truly lost. Felix saved the situation by leading me by a secret route to the fountain in the

courtyard. He said the others were fools not to have found that way. I said that I thought he ought to have shown them.

André announced that we were to have a visit from Lise Ceresole on Wednesday. A ripple of excitement and joy went round the room when André explained that she was the wife of the late Pierre Ceresole, the Swiss civil engineer and staunch pacifist whose inspiration had created the first international voluntary work-camp. His recent death had been a sad blow to the movement at a time when it was gaining new momentum after the second world war.

At work on the brick-chipping, I asked my companion, a thin, dark-haired young lad, whose face had a nervous twitch, if he could tell me more about Pierre Ceresole, and the early history of the movement, but he seemed more interested in switching the conversation round to the discussion of the previous evening. He said he was a Catholic. His name was Pieter, and his home had been in that part of Germany which was now Poland. He and his mother had had to leave their home at only two days' notice. They had managed to find a new home in a barn on his uncle's farm in Schleswig. Unfortunately the journey had been too much for his mother who had succumbed last winter. He thought that his father was still in Russia; though, since nothing had been heard from him since the capitulation, it was not certain whether he was still alive. Did I believe in God? he suddenly asked. He did. And he was going to make toys to send to some Polish children for Christmas. It was his Christian duty to show them that he had forgiven them. He became very excited and talked rapidly about sending parcels of toys through a friend of his who lived in Denmark and who would be able to send them on to children in Warsaw.

Göte who was stacking the bricks as fast as Pieter and I chipped them clean, said that he had been a relief worker in Poland and he wondered if the anti-German feeling there was not still so high that Pieter's gesture might be misconstrued as "conscience money" - as an attempt at too easy a way of expiating former German crimes. Göte agreed that one had to make a start somewhere, but as a Swede he would stick to his own judgement of the situation between German and Pole.

Irmgard joined us after "second breakfast". She was a plump and cheerful soul from Frankfurt and it did not take her long before she had us singing to be rhythm of the hammers and chisels. Soon there was a two-part canon going between our squad and the next, and a descant came floating down from the top of the scaffolding. She was a Red Cross nurse, and hoped to get married soon. No, she wasn't engaged yet, nor had she got any particular young man in mind, but that was a mere detail. Göte asked her whether she was not deterred by the fact that there were twice as many girls of eligible age as there were men in Germany. She only laughed and said most of the girls didn't try hard enough. She claimed she could have Pieter tamed withing a week, and poor Pieter by his blushes seemed very tamed already. She asked how old he was and he said that his twentieth birthday was tomorrow. This produced whoops of delight from Irmgard who shouted the good news to the rubble party, and the scaffolding, and disappeared into the kitchen to arrange a celebration for the morrow.

Pieter and I had to go and carry some lengths of piping up from the town in the afternoon; on the way he told me how he wanted to become a cabinet-maker and make beautiful furniture. He liked working out of doors, but hated farm work. He had been offered a job in a brick-works but did not know whether to take it or not. He was a mixed-up sort of lad; and he talked his heart out.

In the evening, the theatre excursion planned by the entertainment's committee turned out to be a concert after all; but we all had the feeling that our own spontaneous part-singing and canons on the road back home were almost equally high quality.

48 03 19 - 1 07

Wednesday was Pieters birthday, and he was guided to a special place at the breakfast table, decorated with flowers. A lusty "happy birthday" song preceded breakfast, and was followed by birthday greetings in eight different languages. Work continued on the rubble pile, which I should have found unbearably monotonous without such stimulating companions. I had not yet graduated to the actual building site. We stopped half an hour earlier than usual in order to allow for an extra special shave and to prepare the room for our distinguished visitor from Switzerland - Lise Ceresole.

She told us about the first international work-camp in a battle-scarred French village in 1920. Huts had been constructed for returning French refugees, roads repaired and trenches and shell-craters filled in. Lise then went on to describe the later calls for help in the poor Swiss villages faced with bankruptcy after their fertile lands had been flooded and left covered with rocks and boulders, and the ready offers of service which had come from people of good will from many lands. She told of the development of the work year by year in different countries as far apart as the depressed area of South Wales, and the earthquake region in India; how they had helped with relief work during the Spanish Civil War and during the recent terrible war, and how during the past year there had been more than forty camps in fifteen different countries.

Always the motive behind the volunteers had been to offer their service for peace; to make a sacrifice for the improvement of relations between the nations, and between the different classes of people, and the people holding varied beliefs within those countries. Their method was to unite by the power of deeds and not just by words. The volunteers offered practical help with their unskilled hands, performing the most elementary, and yet the most necessary work for the community which was in distress, and which could not help itself. They wished to show that the spirit of willing service and sacrifice so evident nationally in time of war, could be broadened and deepened in an adventurous international civilian service in peace-time. It was voluntary service for peace as opposed to compulsion for conscription; international civilian service, instead of national military service. Even in settled time with peaceful relationships existing throughout the world there was ample scope for their ideas, in pioneering work such as irrigation in areas of desert land, building roads and facilities in backward countries, constructing dykes and battling against coast erosion.

We went to bed feeling proud of our membership of such a movement, and conscious of the responsibility each one of us had towards the ultimate success of our work.

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It was my turn to "early rise" the next morning, and I felt the importance of the task weighing heavily upon me. However, things went very well to plan - the fire was alight, the coffee ready and the bread out, all in good time. Karen had promised to get up extra early so that we could play reveille together on our two flutes. I hoped it sounded as good as we thought it did. Work continued on brick-chipping, in spite of a dull morning and an afternoon of rain. In the evening the City Reconstruction Planner visited and befogged us with facts, figures and diagrams. The only ones which I remembered, and probably inaccurately at that, were that if a thousand tons of rubble were moved a day, it would take twenty years to clear the city; and that if the present rate of house-building were maintained, there would be sufficient houses in about 160 years' time.

Friday it was far too wet to work outside. The girls busied themselves patching old clothes which were meant for distribution among some refugee families of Pastor Gräber's. Some of us started on firewood, and attacked with saw and axe the pile of half-burned pieces of useless timber which had been salvaged from the rubble. Three sturdy men had gone for a dreary trek into the city to fetch our rations. Karl, who was a student of law and who came from Nuremberg, was pulling at the other end of the saw opposite me. We naturally began talking about the famous Trials, and then battled fiercely over the rights of the British and American governments in international law, and finally came on to the fundamental basis of law. Here the saw stuck fast, and refused to go another inch along the crooked path in which its neglectful masters had been guiding it.

So it was Lyeska, the charming Finnish girl who solved our problems by ordering us to squat see-saw-wise at either end of the timber we had been sawing. She then lifted out the saw and, in handing it to Karl, said that she felt the only fundamental basis of law was the simple respect and sympathy and love of human beings for each other.

The day worsened and rain began to drip through the dining-room ceiling. Round-faced Ully took the situation in at a glance, and he disappeared outside; there was a look of concerned determination on his face. A short time later the dripping ceased. Ully was our most skilled man –

a builder and brick-layer. He could speak neither German, English nor French, and yet a very strong friendship grew up between us. He used to smile when we had finished mixing a successful lot of mortar; but he was quick to forestall disaster with a skilful thrust of his shovel during the tricky process of mixing. He pretended to load the hod as full for us when it was our turn to carry it up the long ladder as for himself; but I noticed he did not pack our loads as firmly as his own. That simple action spoke a depth of sympathetic understanding far more eloquently than any language. Later on when we were working together on the second floor, I noticed that he always contrived to be there ready to help at that awkward corner where the wheel-barrows just needed an extra bit of caution and that extra bit of effort. We missed him sadly when he had to go back home to Denmark at the end of my second week's stay. His cheerful round face and helpful smile had been a reassurance to all of us in our moments of depression. He had been our most popular volunteer even though he had been able to say scarcely a word. His language had been his work; his words had been his actions. Even Irmgard was subdued for a day after he left.

That second week was for me and for all of us, a particularly happy experience which went by all too rapidly. I graduated to the building side of the house, practically killing myself the first day, carrying bricks up the long ladder. It was indeed a question of balance and taking things very slowly. There was the interesting speculation as to how many bricks Willi would need in one spot, and the secret joy and triumph when that calculation proved correct. Willi was one of the professionals from the City Building Authority. No-one but Karl-Heinz could understand him when he spoke in dialect. One evening I accepted Willi's invitation and visited him and his wife in their home. They had no children, which was a blessing considering the size of their single room.

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Everyone in the camp was working magnificently and the walls of the right wing were almost completed before Ully left. We began taking endless loads of a peculiar mixture of cinders and cement up the long ladder. This was the material for the floors and ceilings, and would save timber. By the beginning of my third week's stay we were taking up "tiles" for the roof — at least, brand new, brilliantly red-painted slabs of concrete, shaped like tiles. The weather was fine again, and the first row of tiles shone back warmly in the sun.

I was almost used to the long days of hard work by then, but my respect and admiration for my tireless companions knew no bounds. I felt I had made life-long friends with people who came from many corners of Germany, and of the world, and with whom I had shared the unforgettable experience of living and working together. This common bond of service drew us close together in our work hours, and extended its spell over our evening discussions, so that they were marked by an open-mindedness and a positive approach to the underlying problems, rarely to be experienced. Hans-Peter, the youth leader from Brunswick, confessed the day after our discussion on the East-West Relationship, that he had learnt a new technique, which he would take back to his discussion groups. He himself presented one evening a fine story of courage and tenacity in outlining the difficulties he had to face in attempting to solve the problems of Brunswick's vagrant or wandering youths. It was a problem which was not confined to Brunswick, he had said; and the loafers I had seen at the station on the day of my arrival sprang to mind.

All the volunteers from abroad, at one time or another gave talks upon their own countries; talks which emphasised to me my own ignorance of history and geography, and which all my German friends agreed, opened at long last for them the windows into the world outside Germany, and gave them a glimpse of new hope and new vision, for which they were so desperately seeking. Those, at least, were the words of a regular visitor to the camp, schoolmaster Blech. His grey head had seen two tragic wars, and experienced one terrible period in concentration camp. But he had retained this kindly manner, and he was the most beloved master in the "Schiller Street" elementary school. One of the last delights of my stay in the camp occurred the Thursday before I left. It was a special Saints day, and a public holiday. Papa Blech brought his class to the camp and they sang to us. How they enjoyed singing - how gently or how lustily - part-songs and canons, sad songs and glad songs! And how we enjoyed listening! Their

message went straight to our hearts and we found ourselves talking in whispers long after the children had filed silently out of the room.

The day of my departure had approached fast, and with it a stronger and stronger sense of regret and sadness that I must leave this family. Each member of the family had grown to know the others so well, and each would take back to his home country and his home town, a portion of the rich pool of goodwill which had been contributed by all. I had learnt that real peace did not mean the mere blending together of enthusiasts agreeing on a common policy, but the growing in harmony together, of the enthusiasts of the most varied policies, into a vital organism of individual, valuable cells.

I was afraid that it was going to be difficult to convince my circle of friends back home, and those in the Choral Society and the Rambling Club, that my holiday had been any sacrifice at all, when the only pain that really hurt and lasted was the pain of having to part from the camp. Least of all would I be able to refrain from relating my experiences to my youth clubs and classes, and I was sure I should finish up by trying to paint a word-picture of the new red roof of our children's hospital glowing in the setting sun - a beacon among the ruins and a monument to our honest endeavours - the sign-post to a new way, visible above the Bunker and over the waste land, even as I boarded the tram for my journey back home.

19.3.48

Basil Eastland

Die vorstehene Geschichte stammt aus einem unveröffentlichten Manuskript von Basil Eastland: "Germany - this was our life 1945 - 1948"

Der Inhalt des Berichtes hat sich mit Sicherheit so n i c h t zugetragen, er ist eine Mischung aus Dichtung und Wahrheit. In ihm sind verschiedene Erlebnisse - eine Bahnfahrt entlang des Rheins, eine Wegebeschreibung durch die Trümmerwüste von Mülheim an der Ruhr, der Wiederaufbau der Kinderklinik in Freiburg im Breisgau, die Lebensverhältnisse von Flüchtlingen in einem Duisburger Bunker, u.a. - zu einer "short story" zusammengefaßt worden, um (britischen) Lesern einen Einblick in die Verhältnisse in Deutschland und die dortige Arbeit des IVSP zu geben.