AND NEW LIFE BLOSSOMS
FROM THE RUINS

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This book is dedicated to Brigit, my beloved wife and comrade who edited it with patience and care. She supported me with good advice and enriched this project with critical questions and suggestions.
JORG JANSEN

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A Boy in Germany 1939 to 1949
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Prologue

Suddenly it was gone, swallowed. We did not comprehend what happened. Brigit asked me one morning in her usual way what I had dreamt during the night. I started to tell her about an unusual occurrence in the laboratory, when I stopped in mid sentence, and we both stared at each other. We could not believe it. Since our wedding in January of 1961 I had always answered her question with: “We were with masses of refugees in a big railroad station;” or “I could not find my family in some vast school building.” We and family meant the Jansen family in the year of 1945. The war, the bombs, and the fleeing had always populated my dreams. And now in May of 1967, suddenly, these haunting images had disappeared. We concluded after lengthy soul searching that my old dream world had finally come to an end with the purchase of our first home in La Jolla in Southern California. A stable life had begun, and the “flight” was over after more than twenty years. Already before our marriage, I had begun to tell Brigit about my turbulent life as a boy and I continued with my stories for many years. She and our friends asked me again and again to put my recollections of those eventful years on paper. But I had to retire before I could muster time and effort to write it all down.

The driving force behind this book is my desire to tell the story of those years of my life that left a deeper impression on me and probably contributed more to the formation of my character than anything else. I want to relate this formidable experience not only to my nieces, nephews, and their children and friends, but also to all young people who may never have learned about that war or may not realize what modern wars can do to the individual and to mankind. What happened almost seventy years ago could happen again, if we do not watch out carefully. The next time it would be catastrophic. I am relating my experiences from my memory and thus from the point of view of a young boy who spent his everyday life in the middle of a disintegrating world. To put my reminiscences in context, I filled in the relevant historical events and, occasionally, thoughts from my later life. Considering how Germany managed to destroy its health and wealth twice in the same century, one wants to despair even today. Brigit and I have often compared our two countries: Here Switzerland, a
small country without any mineral resources except for salt and rocks, maintains and enlarges its wealth through hard work, saving and improving its standard of living. And there Germany, a large country blessed with mineral resources, a flowering industry and agriculture, and a strong economy; it manages twice to gamble away everything, including its solid reputation in the world and a fine legacy of culture, arts, and science, just to lose it all in quick succession, dragging half the world with it into the abyss.

It all began in September

As usual, my father turned the radio on shortly before twelve noon. A voice announced the time, and then the signal from the observatory in Hamburg sounded: "Beep, beep, beep." At the last beep it was precisely twelve o'clock. Papa and Opa had already pulled out their golden pocket watches, had opened the lids, and were ready. They either smiled with satisfaction or adjusted the very pointed second hand by a smidgen. -- Time was measured with this kind of precision in my home country. Opa had often told us how he had carefully compared his watch with the clock on the platform of the Düsseldorf Railway Station, so that he could raise his green wand at the precise moment, and the train would leave on time -- . After this brief interlude both gentlemen usually listened to the short news summary, and the dinner could begin.

Not so this time! We swallowed the first words of our daily prayer, when the newscaster suddenly announced that the German troops had crossed the Polish border at 5:30 this morning. It was the first of September 1939 that would become a fateful date for Germany and the entire world. Shortly after the announcement we heard the voice of our venerated Führer: "My German citizens! After months of negotiations with the Polish government to obtain an adequate access to Ostpreussen (East Prussia), after never ending problems at the border, and with the increasing repression of the German populace in Poland, I had no other choice but to send our troops across the border. The Polish government simply was not willing to acquiesce to our legitimate demands. As of this morning the border crossings
have been opened. Our infantry, artillery, *panzer* (tanks), and airplanes are advancing on Polish territory. I trust providence that the German People (*das deutsche Volk*) will win this war in the shortest time and that peace can be restored in Europe." This rousing speech was followed by the national anthem *Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles*. (Footnote 1). Our family sat there, thunderstruck. Opa and Papa looked very serious, and Mutti commented that this war was absolutely unnecessary and a disaster: I have lived already through one horrible war during my life, and that experience is more than enough for me". Marlis and I, who did not understand the implications of the word war, waited for Opa to say his prayer so that we could finally begin our dinner.

Only a year ago the German troops had occupied the *Sudetenland* that had been part of Germany before the First World War (Footnote 2). Hitler and Eduard Benes, the president of young Czechoslovakia, could not agree on an equitable future for the *Sudetenland* in spite of endless and heated negotiations. In 1919 the Treaty of Versailles had assigned the *Sudetenland* to Czechoslovakia, although the majority of the population was German. This unfortunate decision had remained a point of contention ever since. The fights between Hitler and Benes did not subside, until Roosevelt, Chamberlain, Daladier, and Mussolini exerted enough pressure on both parties that it came to the Agreement of Munich of September 30, 1938. The *Sudetenland* became again part of Germany. This event led to the complete breakup of Czechoslovakia: Slovakia and Carpatho-Ukraine left the union. However, in the end Hitler occupied all of it on March 15, 1939. Every move of Hitler led to new diplomatic skirmishes with Edouard Daladier and Neville Chamberlain, the prime ministers of France and England. They permitted the reoccupation of the *Sudetenland* and the annexation of Czechoslovakia as the last German expansion; but coupled with this, they guaranteed Poland's independence on March 31, 1939. The threat to the European peace grew inexorably at each step. A war with the Western Allies was unavoidable, if Hitler broke this last ultimatum.

It is true that the sudden beginning of the war caught the family by surprise; however, the political tension had existed for a long time and it had rapidly increased during the last few months. Hitler, and with him the German people, wanted to break the
shackles of the Treaty of Versailles by all means. -- It was illuminating for me to read, how Churchill describes in great detail the unavoidable consequences of that unfortunate treaty in his book “The Gathering Storm” -- . I have never forgotten with what overwhelming enthusiasm the citizens of Mülheim, my hometown, celebrated in 1936 the reentry of German troops into the Rheinland, which had been a demilitarized zone since 1919 as part of the conditions of the treaty. The Infantry Regiment 159 marched into our town with the old regimental flags, a military band including horses with kettle drums, and machine guns and canons drawn by horses. The streets were thronged by tens of thousands, the thunder of the hurrahs almost drowned the martial music. The regiment installed itself again in the old barracks across the street from us on the Kaiserstrasse. I remember vividly how full of pride I was during open barracks days, when we could visit the soldiers and admire their equipment. Even as a six year old I understood that we had become German again. Only a few years after the reoccupation of the Rheinland Hitler proclaimed the annexation of Austria, which was celebrated on March 14, 1938 with a triumphant parade of German troops through Vienna. Old Austrian flags, old German flags, and new Swastika banners all over the city. (Footnote 3).

Our family had just returned to Mülheim from a wonderful vacation in the idyllic countryside of Osnabrück, one day before the fateful first of September. My parents spent every year a month or so with us children in some vacation spot. These were mostly small hotels or resorts in a pretty countryside not too far from Mülheim, frequently in the hills of the Sauerland, sometimes a little further away. Summer vacations were always very exciting. They began months before, when Papa and Mutti made their plans. Catalogues and brochures were studied with a special eye on the price, because we could only afford one month of my father’s salary for vacations in a modest place. Once my parents had found the right place and had made a reservation, the joy and excitement of anticipation began. A few days before departure a large trunk and several suitcases were packed, and the baggage carrier took them to the railroad station in his two-wheeled cart. He dispatched them early enough so that everything would arrive before us. The departure day reached its high point when we all boarded a taxi for the station. A taxi ride was an extraordinary treat that happened only once a year. Marlis
and I talked about it days before and after. In the train we settled down comfortably in our reserved compartment and enjoyed the long anticipated train ride. During the trip, sandwiches and homemade lemonade kept us kids from starving. This summer we were going to spend four weeks in a little resort in sandy heather and pine country. The resort consisted of two dozen cabins distributed throughout the open forest. One main building contained a large dining room, kitchen facilities, and the office. Mutti never had to cook during our vacations, so that she could totally relax with us and Papa. Marlis was ten, I was eight, Sigrid two and Heidi almost one year old. Papa was already fifty two and Mutti forty because they had married fairly late in their lives. We all enjoyed these weeks immensely: Playing in the sand, running through the forest, hiking with the parents, swimming in small lakes and rivers and playing on several huge lawns with swings, seesaws, merry-go-rounds and fountains that shot water high in the air. Unfortunately, during these wonderful weeks the clouds of war got darker and heavier. We returned home on the last day of August full of worries and foreboding; and we were not alone. The train was packed with people who had decided to journey home earlier than planned because of the increasing political tension. In spite of it all, we celebrated Heidi’s first birthday in an overfilled compartment with everybody joining in; and we reached home not one day too soon.

When war broke out the next day, we learned that we had to obtain rationing cards at the office of the new Department for Wartime Rationing in the big government building at the end of the Witthaus Strasse. All foodstuff with the exception of fruit and vegetables became rationed. Everybody received monthly rationing cards for which one could obtain groceries according to age and occupation. All edibles were measured in calories which were tailored to specific needs. I still remember that the allotment varied from 1800 kilo calories for the average consumer to 4000 kilo calories for a miner or a worker in the steel industry. We as children received extra milk. Scientists, engineers, and similar professionals were allotted 2500 kilo calories, etc. Everybody complained and tried to hoard extra food in the last minute; but in reality we never suffered from hunger throughout the entire war. Certain imported fruits like oranges or bananas gradually disappeared; lard, sugar and meat were reduced; coffee, cocoa and tobacco products shrank to very small quantities; but
surprisingly, there was always enough food on the table until the last day of the war.

Fear of the war and unhappiness with the government became considerably more pronounced, when on the third of September the newscaster announced that England and France had declared war on Germany as they had threatened five months ago. My parents and their generation remembered vividly the first world war with its terror, hunger, death and aftermath. They saw already a replay of those horrible years, only this time worse. Posts were installed in our basement to provide extra support for the ceiling of the laundry room, our air raid shelter, because we feared potential air bombardments. The attic had to be emptied of all combustible material because of the danger posed by incendiary bombs. We also carried water and sand upstairs. My mother fashioned light-tight curtains from heavy blankets, which she put up in front of all windows so that absolutely no light could be seen from the outside. All street lights were dimmed; and the lights of cars, motor cycles and bicycles were covered with slotted lids that allowed only a small beam of light to pass downwards. This barely illuminated the street in front of the drivers. At night pedestrians were in as much danger as cyclists or cars, because it was pitch-black when clouds covered the sky. To avoid collisions people wore large fluorescent buttons; and street light posts as well as building corners were marked with fluorescent paint. As the most fear inducing precaution we were all fitted with gas masks, because the government expected gas bombardments from the air as a continuation of similar practices in the trenches of northern France and Flanders during the last war. Fortunately, the warring parties did not again resort to this ghastly form of warfare. As it turned out, we did not experience any air war for a long time to come.

Life goes on in spite of War

With the exception of these measures and the food rationing, life for us kids continued as before. After a short hiatus of a few weeks school started again, and, as usual after long vacations, we children barely remembered anything from the time
before. I was in third grade in the Hindenburg Schule, behind the Oppspring down in the Rumbachtal. It was named after Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, the hero of the First World War, who became Reichspräsident in 1925 (Footnote 4) It took me half an hour to walk to school, mainly through the Oppspring, a huge park with forest, meadows, frog and duck ponds, and walkways with benches for the older folks. I attended the Hindenburg Schule now after I had spent my first two years in the Troost Schule near the river Ruhr that flows below the hill called Kahlenberg, where our family had built a home three years earlier. At the beginning I had hated the thought of having to leave my mother and going to school. Even the beautiful traditional Schultüte filled with sweets and other goodies could not console me. In those days it was the custom to give pupils on their first day a Schultüte, a large conical cardboard container, beautifully colored and stuffed to the top. It turned out that my school fright and worry about leaving Mutti did not last very long. I got used to the other boys and girls in our class in a hurry. I guess that both, Marlis and I, were not accustomed to other children, because the Kaiser Strasse, where we had lived before, was a very busy street, and we were kept inside the apartment or in the yard. I started to enjoy my new life in school with all the other children. Of all the subjects I liked Rechnen (arithmetic) the most. The walk to school took only twenty minutes and the last portion of it went down behind a local quarry. When that steep slope was covered with ice in the winter, we slid down on our satchels. What great fun; but you had to remove your slate (writing tablet) before, because it could not handle that kind of abuse.

When the school district was changed in April of 1939, my friend Günter and I had to switch over to the Hindenburg Schule. From then on we were no longer in a mixed class but only with boys; and it remained that way until the end of my school years. My new teacher was Mr. Meyer, the archetype of the traditional elementary schoolteacher. He, as well as his colleagues, taught everything: The three Rs, local history and geography, botany, physical education, and music. I learned more from him than from a number of my teachers in later years. He was simply excellent; he was strict, no doubt about it, but he was also very just. Not only did he possess a broad field of knowledge, but he had also a singular ability to teach in a most interesting and exciting manner. I particularly liked our field trips
At least once a week we made an excursion into the Rumbach (a creek that flows into the Ruhr) valley or the surrounding fields, meadows and woods. Each time, depending on the season, we discovered something new of the flora and fauna of our hometown. Soon we knew the difference between rye and wheat, oat and barley as well as between beech, oak, linden and all types of fir trees. We followed the development of the blossoms on apple, pear, peach, cherry, and plum trees all the way to the ripe fruits; we experienced the metamorphoses of frogs, butterflies, moths, and other insects. In the classroom we sang to his violin, and in the school yard we had to climb up and down on poles and ropes and exercise on the single bar. I continued to enjoy arithmetic as in the Troost Schule. I especially liked one exercise that he performed with us regularly. He started with a number that the class had to memorize; then he added a number, multiplied the result with another number, subtracted, divided, added, etc. I had always great fun, the faster and more complicated the better. You had to retain all the results in your memory and be ready with the answer as soon as he stopped. As a result of two years under Mr. Meyer an unusually large percentage of our class passed the entrance exam to the Gymnasium (the secondary school) with flying colors.

Once a week we took soap showers in a large hall in the basement, stripped to the skin, including teacher Meyer. Today it may sound peculiar that we had a shower hall in our school; but the reader should know that in 1939 showers or bathtubs did not exist in most old houses and apartments that were built earlier in the twentieth century or before. Consequently, the school provided a shower opportunity for everybody. The school was also the watchdog for and dispenser of bodily hygiene. A nurse visited the class regularly to check for tuberculosis which was the biggest killer in those years. She would rub a small amount of a tuberculin protein derivative into the skin, and you had to wait for two days for a reaction. She inspected also our head and hair for lice. A dentist came once a year to check our teeth.

On the walk home through the Oppspring park after school, my friends and I had to settle sometimes an account with an adversary group. Typically the fight started with throwing wood pieces and stones at each other and ended up in a general melee of fist fights and wrestling, until victory was achieved or a truce was declared. Thank God, nothing beyond a few scrapes
ever happened. Did our parents have an inkling? They never said anything, unless I was late for the midday dinner, the traditional German main meal. We also engaged in harmless pranks. However, once we went too far. Conny Jentsch invited a few classmates to throw stones into windows in a new housing development that was being built nearby. Since his father was the chief architect of this very large project, Conny probably thought that he could and, of course, did impress us with this generous gesture. We fled the scene after a few windows shattered into pieces and sweated blood that we might be discovered. Luckily we got away, albeit with a very uneasy feeling. Never again!

When the frog ponds started filling up with tadpoles in the summer, I collected a bunch now and then, took them home in a water jar, fed them regularly, and hoped for the metamorphosis into frogs. It never happened, until Marlis and I discovered one day that they needed land to become frogs. We quickly built a terrarium from sand and water and, voila, we were successful. Sometimes we brought home toads that we kept in our sandbox in the garden. Unfortunately, these toads always found a way over our sand walls, which we had carefully erected, and they were never seen again. We never owned any larger animals like cats, dogs, rabbits or chickens. That was not allowed in my mother's house, neither during the war nor during the really hard times thereafter when rabbits or chickens would have greatly improved our diet.

During winter we created Schlinderbahnen (ice slides), in the school yard and also in our street. We formed them by taking a run and then sliding over a stretch of hard snow as far as we could. Each time the track became a little icier and longer. Eventually though, we could not lengthen the Schlinderbahn, no matter with what speed we raced onto it. More often than not, you fell on your behind, and ended up with some nice bruises. We also used every opportunity to skate and to sled. The Kahlenberg Tennis Club nearby sprayed all its tennis courts with water and thereby created one very large and beautiful ice rink. We went skating there year after year. In one of the most exciting skating games we formed a chain of six to eight kids abreast, raced down the course until the kid at one end jammed his skates into the ice and let the entire chain swirl around, ready for the next run in the opposite direction. You really had to hang on to
your neighbor for the chain not to break, otherwise the outer kids would be hurled against the fence. In this manner we would skate back and forth and around, until we ran out of steam or the place got too crowded. When the chain broke on rare occasions and you were at the outer end, you could get badly hurt.

Frequently we went over to the Hockelbahn, a sled run in the Witthaus Busch, a park not far from home. It was very steep and long, almost all the way down to the river Ruhr. The run had a sizable jump, the Hockel, at the end of the steep section where a pathway crossed it during the summer. If you did not watch and balance carefully, you flew, sled and all, into the snow and sometimes into the kids who were trudging back uphill and did not get out of the way fast enough. It did happen that a less well built sled wouldn’t survive the impact and would fold not very gracefully under its rider. Luckily, Marlis and I owned “Davos” sleds, a Swiss product that could handle anything. The most exciting way to go downhill was with a train of sleds. We formed the train by sitting on our own sleds and holding onto the sled in front. If not properly done the whole train, on its way down, started to swing from left to right and back until some kid let go. Kids and sleds all over the place, what a thrill! Well, it is true that occasionally someone got hurt and suffered a sprained ankle or broken arm. We carefully avoided telling our parents, when an ambulance had to take somebody to the hospital. When it became dark and we were sufficiently frozen we trudged home, where Mutti put our ice cold feet and hands into a bucket of cold water and then vigorously rubbed them dry. I never forget how the thawing of my limbs tingled and tingled, and tingled. It often hurt so badly that I could have screamed; but, of course, boys don’t scream.

In the summer we played almost every afternoon in the street (automobile traffic barely existed in those days): Hide and seek, cops and robbers, hop scotch, jumping rope, a kind of volley ball without net, soccer and many other games including marbles and spinning top. Down in the bushes below Buchmüller’s house, we built little shelters with branches and wood scraps, where we could continue to play if a slight rain set in. Whom do I remember as my play mates? Kurt and Erika Verschoot, Hanna Jötten and her brother, Günter Rübel, Hans-Otto Bösebeck, Karl-Heinz König, Liesel Weissenborn, and some other children from the Dimbeck and Witthaus Strasse.
There was always something going on in our street. At times we would all go to the soccer field or the 400 meter track next to the Kahlenberg Tennis Club. There we competed with each other in running, long and high jump, and ball throwing. Somebody who owned a stopwatch measured our times for the 60 meter run. Running became my favored sport after I had seen in Leni Riefenstahl’s documentary how Jesse Owens broke all records in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. He became our athletic idol, and everybody tried to emulate him. In retrospect I am sure that Mr. Hitler did not like the idea.

On rainy days or during the winter months Marlis and I, sometimes with our friends, played, read books or made presents at home. However, we were only allowed to play after we had completed our homework. When we came home from school around one o’clock the family ate dinner, our main meal. After dinner Papa would return to his office which was located in our house next to the main entrance. Our next task was homework, which had to be done very thoroughly, because Mutti inspected it every day without mercy. Anything that did not meet her standards had to be corrected, or completely redone. She was a strict school mistress.

Inside the house, the whole family wore house shoes. Ours were placed at the back entrance where we had to put them on before we could set as little as one foot inside the door. Children never entered the house through the front door, always through the garden gate and back door. If we were ever caught with street shoes in the house we were scolded or lost one or the other privilege, even if we just had to go to the bathroom. I remember a few times, when it was simply too late to take our shoes off we rushed down to the laundry room in the basement and dashed for the obliging floor drain. Naturally, friends brought their own house shoes, which we reciprocated in their houses or apartments. -- When Brigit and I visited Japan in 1983, it did not take us long to realize, how much more advanced the Japanese were in these matters. Everybody, including the guests, wore slippers inside, not only in private homes, but also in hotels, temples, and even in the university buildings. One always found lots of shoes or slippers in an entrance area which was one step lower then the adjacent corridors. If you went to the bathroom you changed yet into another set of slippers of a loud color, like green or orange, so that they would not be mixed up with the

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We only had to help in the house each day after supper, when Opa, Marlis, and I washed and dried dishes. This was accompanied by singing songs that all three of us enjoyed. Mutti did not ask Marlis and me to handle other chores, because she always employed a young woman as help in house and kitchen. For a while she had even two girls when Sigrid and Heidi were very young. -- This was possible because of a social program that the government had started years ago. According to the socialistic principles of the Third Reich, after all it was a “socialistic” Reich, girls over fourteen who no longer attended school had to spend a year in social services. That included helping mothers with many children, working on a farm, or in a hospital, etc. -- I would like to remind the reader at this point, that in the thirties of the last century a family with four children was highly unusual in Germany and, for that matter, in most of Europe. All my friends came from families with one or two children; three were already very rare. The population of the industrialized European countries had stagnated already before the First World War. It actually declined even further during and after that horrible cataclysm because of the enormous war losses, the ensuing economic misery, and the complete lack of new housing. Nobody desired more than one or two children. However, Hitler and the Third Reich needed more children in view of the planned German expansion to the East and associated potential wars. That led to a host of programs to foster larger families. My mother, for example, received the Deutsche Mutterkreuz (German Mother’s Cross) after the birth of Heidi. I still have a photo where she proudly wears the medal, sitting in our garden, together with my father. I believe that she was very happy with so many children.

On Saturday or Sunday afternoons our parents frequently strolled or hiked with us through the Witthaus Busch, along the Ruhr or into the Rumbachtal. When we returned, Mutti always served coffee and a cake that she had baked the previous day: Streuselkuchen (a cake that was sprinkled with crumbs of sugar, butter, cinnamon, and ground almonds), Guggelhupf (bund cake), Marmorkuchen (marble cake), and all sorts of fruit pies with whipped cream in the summer. The coffee was made of roasted barley because we children were not allowed to drink real coffee; and real coffee was highly rationed and therefore saved
for adult visitors. Sometimes we went on longer hikes over the Auberg, or to Mintard on the other side of the Ruhr, or to the Icktener Bauernhaus, or all the way to Kettwig on this side of the river. From there we would return with one of the white passenger boats that cruised up and down the river. As a destination for these hikes, my parents picked always a garden restaurant, where we could get coffee or hot chocolate and cake, the typical German afternoon fare. Since we had to use rationing coupons for the cake, as soon as the war began, Mutti took frequently her home-baked cake along. The restaurants almost always had swings, merry-go-rounds, or seesaws in the back on grassy grounds. We children got excused as soon as we had eaten the last piece of cake, so that we could enjoy what we had been looking forward to. I liked these family outings very much. We could walk or run in front or behind our parents or we could hold their hands. As long as Sigrid and Heidi were babies, Marlis or I could occasionally push the baby carriage as a special treat. Sometimes Mutti would start a song and we all would fall in. She knew a lot of songs from her years in the Wandervogel (migrating bird) after the First World War. The Wandervogel was one of many youth organizations that blossomed probably as a reaction to the misery of the war and the following hard times. Young people like my mother and her friends hiked through the forests, fields, and meadows of the German countryside singing and playing their guitars, which were adorned with colorful ribbons. I read recently that the Hitler Jugend, Hitler Youth, absorbed after 1933 many of these and similar youth organizations into their ranks, some voluntarily, some under pressure. Young people continued to hike through the country singing the same songs, however, with a new complement of military and political songs, and sometimes in uniform.

As our life continued quietly at home the war developed with all its might outside the country. Poland was overrun in four weeks during the Blitzkrieg (lightning war) as it became known later. The Polish army was no match for the highly motorized German troops. The Poles defended their soil bravely with all possible means, including cavalry squadrons against Panzer regiments. All in vain! The guarantors, Britain and France, did not have a chance to mobilize and send help in time. However, Stalin took the opportunity to invade the eastern part of Poland, thus splitting the country in two with his confederate Hitler. Already
before the *Blitzkrieg*, on August 22, 1939 the foreign ministers von Rippentrop and Molotov had signed the Non Aggression Treaty with the explicit aim "to destroy the British Commonwealth". It included a secret clause that allowed the Soviet Union to annex Eastern Poland and the Baltic States Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in case of a German-Polish war. Thus, between Russia and Germany, a new border was drawn through Brest Litovsk. Only twenty years after Poland had been resurrected in 1919 as the result of the Versailles Treaty and President Wilson’s new order of Europe, it now disappeared again. Once before It ceased to exist as the result of the Congress of Vienna in 1815 after a number of divisions between Russia, Germany and Austria in 1772, 1793 and 1795. Hitler converted the German part into the “*General- gouvernement Polen*”. As I read many years later in the historic literature and especially in Mitchener’s “*Poland*”, the Poles suffered more under the war than any other nation in Europe. An important part of Hitler’s policy of expansion to the East had been to convert the Polish people into servants and slaves of the Germans. The implementation of that policy was ruthless and thorough. First the intelligentsia was suppressed or eliminated and all institutions of higher learning were closed. Then the population was stripped of their civic rights, which allowed the occupiers to treat them in most inhuman ways. For example, if a Pole committed an act of sabotage or, worse, killed a German soldier, the whole family was rounded up, driven from its home, and sometimes executed as a warning for everybody else. Cases have been reported, where the population of an entire village was killed and its houses destroyed. The Nazi government was intent upon demoralizing and subjugating the Poles and especially the Polish Jews.

After the victory over Poland our family like everybody in Germany hoped that Hitler’s goal had been accomplished and that the war would be over, so that normal life could be resumed. I discovered recently that Hitler did actually make a peace offer to the Western Allies on October 6, 1939. However, it was roundly rejected by Chamberlain and Daladier. We will never know whether Hitler really wanted to quit or whether this was just another of his ploys. Thus the war did not come to the hoped-for end; but it came to a pause, and for some time it looked as if both parties did not know what to do next.

Our family got quickly used to the new lifestyle that
included rationing cards, war propaganda, blackouts, and preparedness for air raids that did not come. The most important change in Marlis' life occurred when she entered the Lyzeum, the secondary school for girls. I was as excited as she because I was eager to know what one learned at the Lyzeum and in a broader sense also at the Gymnasium, the secondary school for boys. Marlis practiced and demonstrated words and sentences of her first foreign language, English, which made her very proud and me quite envious. Naturally, I wanted to learn it as fast as possible too. -- It is not a surprise from a geopolitical point of view that in 1937 the German government substituted English for French as the first foreign language to be taught in school. Even Hitler had recognized the importance of that language for the future of Germany. Both my parents had still begun with French, and I believe that my father knew only French. English had replaced French already around the turn of the century as the diplomatic language because of the rapidly growing Anglo-American influence in the world. Now belatedly the German schools followed suit.--

I remember another geopolitical, or should I say modern, adjustment that was made during the first war years. We had learned to write in the traditional German script, that was known by the name of Sütterlin. In 1941 we had to change and learn the Latin script which was then employed by all western nations. Again, the National Socialistic Government had decided to adjust to the rest of the western world. From then on we used the Latin script in school; and my father used it at work as was expected from all German civil servants. Only Mutti continued to use her old German script until the sixties. I always enjoyed reading her letters in her beautiful precise handwriting, slightly inclined towards the right with strong up and down strokes. My sister Marlis and I can still read and write the old German script, but Sigrid, Heidi and also Brigit have difficulties with it. Soon it will be forgotten altogether.

Six months later the hope for an early end to the war was shattered. The Führer had decided on a surprise attack on France. Listening to the news on May 10, 1940 we learned that "the German army had crossed the borders to Holland and Belgium". I was impressed how upset Opa, Papa and Mutti were. They remembered, as in a recurring nightmare, how the war with France had started full of glory in a very similar way only 26 years