

Out
of
Step

First they came for the Communists,
But I was not a Communist so I did not speak out.

Then they came for the Socialists and the Trade Unionists,
But I was neither, so I did not speak out.

Then they came for the Jews,
But I was not a Jew, so I did not speak out.

And when they came for me,
There was no one left to speak out for me.

—Martin Niemöller

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Publisher's Preface

Imagine you are a German citizen in Berlin in 1940. The altar in your church is covered not with the usual paraments, the cross, the Bible, or the presence of the German flag, but with a sword, a standing copy of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, and the swastika. Your pastor is no longer allowed to preach, for the intention of the State is to have pulpits used for orations given by agents of the Third Reich. Hitler's ultimate goal was to replace all current religion with the ancient Germanic gods of Odin, Thor, and Freia.

By 1940, Hitler's grip on Germany was secure and he was reaching out to control the world. The genocidal movement on all Jews, the Final Solution, was in full force. Countless numbers of people, young and old, had already been sacrificed on the altar of purity and perfection. Meanwhile, there were small groups of resisters in Germany from a variety of faiths and denominations that struggled to survive and maintain their loyalty to a conscience of justice. The Confessing Church was a small movement of such people.

Gisela Harnisch was a teenage girl in Berlin during those years. Her father was Pastor Wilhelm Harnisch, who, with Niemoeller and Bonhoeffer, was an active member of the Confessing Church in opposition to the Hitler-supported Reich Church. Through Gisela's eyes and exceptional portrayal, we are given this view of a courageous family inside the Germany of World War II.

Publisher's Preface

As the world approaches the 60th year since the end of World War II, it is with deep pride that we share a part in the telling of another life-story by one who, at the time, was keenly aware and perceptive, and who now is still alive and part of us today. This is a phenomenal story, well told by one who, after the War, brought her talents to serve others in America.

It is through the memories and words of people like Gisela that some of us will remember and others of us will learn...so none of us will forget those who have no voice.

Richard DeForest Erickson
DeForest Press, Inc.

Paradise Darkens

1929 to 1931

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Our young years are our longest years, and mine happened to be rather turbulent.

I was a pigtailed four-year-old named Gisela, and it was 1929. The setting was a small, red brick village in northern Germany. It was nestled into seemingly endless pine forests that had clearings of purple heather, white birches, and an occasional stand of ancient oaks.

My home was a sprawling, light-gray washed farmhouse that had long been converted into the Lutheran parsonage. Dark green



Gisela

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wooden shutters shaded the many windows, and a small vine-covered veranda hid the front entrance. Little flower gardens flanked the five, worn stone steps, which led up to the veranda and the massive front door.

The entire house was of stone, with many cool, dark rooms. The guestrooms and the maids' quarters were upstairs, circling the huge attic. The attic smelled so sweet—in summer and fall of drying fruit strung up just under the ceiling, and in winter of freshly boiled and starched laundry that caressed your face if you walked on your toes.

The cellar, too, was dry and immense. Many shelves lined the thick walls. They were loaded with home-canned fruits and vegetables and jams from our gardens, as well as canned meats, which some faithful farm women brought us.

The house was situated just where the highway entered the village, where the road became cobblestone. The front windows faced the dark, comforting forest, while the rear windows, including those of the playroom, faced the backyard. It was the kind of yard one can visualize forever

through tears of hopeless longing for one's youth.

The yard was a hold-over from former farming days, and my parents' love for animals was reflected in the flocks of fowl roaming it: geese and ducks, chickens and turkeys. A long barn with many stalls and bins of feed corn and hay flanked the yard on the



My parents with Odina (Odi),
my older sister, in 1923

left, while the right was walled and lined with cherry, apple, and plum trees planted by Father. Oh how they bent in the late summer with fruit we helped to pick! And what a sea of blossoms in the spring! The little gate at the far end of the yard—where the teeter-totter stood—led into the park-like garden, complete with a brook that separated it from rows of berry bushes and strawberry and vegetable beds.

But best of all was the center of the yard, where a huge lilac bush shaded the fresh-water pump and a dog hut. The pump handle was a great tool to test my strength as I attempted to fill pails of water for the maids. And the hut was home to the beloved “Peter,” named after the popular card game “Black Peter.” And black he was, and huge—a giant schnauzer, and my friend. I sat next to him by the hour, running my fingers through his curly hair and keeping an eye on my little brother, Hans-Reinhard.

Hans was two years younger than I. Golden curls framed his angelic little face from where large, dark eyes watched you intently. He was my smaller shadow and followed me everywhere. I would always protect him, come what may! Or did I feel so protective only as we got older? But it seems to me now that I always needed his closeness, and that he needed my strength from the very beginning.

And then there was my sister, two years older than I, named Odina, or Odi for short. She was pushing her doll carriage close by me. I hated that doll. It had real hair, its long-lashed lids opening and shutting on its porcelain face as one laid it down and sat it up. It also had dresses of lace. I had only gotten a *Käte-Kruse* baby doll, stuffed and painted, for Christmas, while Odi danced around the tree with her new lady doll.

Grown-ups always told me not to be envious of my sister’s things. They said that some day I would catch up

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Hans age 2, Gisela age 4, Odi age 6

with her and get all nice things, too, with new clothes instead of her hand-me-downs. But it seemed to me that I never, ever caught up with her, and that she was always brighter and more popular, too. Perhaps a second little girl like myself had to have been a disappointment to any family that longed to have a boy. Always my envy mixed nastily into my love for her.

We usually had two maids carrying the brunt of our large household and the many guests and animals and gardens. They also saw to our childish needs. They were simple and warm farmers' daughters, who often held us close when we felt sick or frightened. I felt that they loved me best. Perhaps my sunny, trusting nature made them feel special in return. I learned early that it was much easier and more fun to be with less-educated people than those in my family. They did not expect one to be continuously witty and on one's intellectual toes: they simply accepted one and expected little more than smiles. In that class-

conscious society, the “lower class” was always the much more appealing company to me.

I remember that one of the maids took me home with her once to another village. She bought me a lovely dress and taught me how to be the flower girl at her sister’s wedding. Then one of the most embarrassing moments of my life occurred: I tripped on the aisle, right in front of the bride, and all the flowers spilled out of my little basket. I remember thinking that surely the whole congregation would hate me forever—but the entourage just stopped a moment, and I was gently picked up and saw only smiling, friendly faces, and no one ever spoke of it to me.

But I must return to the lilac bush. Mother is calling us into the house for dinner, which was always served at noon. She was a stately, beautiful, raven-haired lady. Though her hair was tied in a severe bun at the back of her head, she fashioned ringlets with a hot iron every morning. They covered her forehead above her large, dark eyes. Cheekbones, nose and mouth were chiseled to perfection. She walked so upright, with a whale-boned corset tightly hiding all curves under flowing white summer dresses and severe, black winter suits.



Gisela with
Father's hat & cane

She was a complex human being with an extremely brilliant mind. The oldest of five children, she had to be very responsible at an early age. Her parents were deeply religious, and her father was an incredibly bright man. He

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My mother as a bride,
about 1915

received his doctorate in economics at an early age, taught for a few years and then became director of a string of paper factories that he partly founded himself. He located and managed them in Holland, Italy, and even in Russia. His wife, my beloved grandmother, had been the prettiest girl in her hometown, though she never reached intellectual heights. She had a heart of gold, and put up patiently with the numerous moves and many household difficulties in her life. My mother learned and spoke fluently four languages, to which she added Latin later on. She taught math to her little brothers, and she was fully expected to take over her maiden aunts' private *lyzeum* (school) as director and owner some day. She was one of only a handful of female students at various famous German all-male universities, braving the students' hostility and her professors' mistrust.

She earned her doctorate in natural science despite all obstacles, even after two of her three beloved brothers had been killed in World War I. Only as an adult did I realize how hard it must have been for her to give up all dreams of

independence and further research, and instead to become a devoted pastor's wife, dedicating her life to him and his work, becoming a shadow to a great man instead of becoming great herself. Mother hid her brilliance, and only availed us of it years later when helping us with our homework.

Yet there was another, darker side to Mother. Somewhere in her family there had to have been a streak of paranoia. She exhibited some of it, but luckily not as much as her younger sister, Annie. Annie had become a professor of mathematics but had suddenly begun to beat up her students. Aunt Annie eventually had to be institutionalized for life. My mother's sudden outbreaks of hostility to us and to Father, her constant accusations and suspicions of thievery, her suspecting Father of unfaithfulness...I shied away from her hectic, unforeseen embraces. I loved her, but I feared her, also. Yet her commitment to Father's struggles, especially against the Nazi regime later, where it took the courage of a lion-hearted human from both of them, she time and again regained my respect and admiration.

Mother met Father while he, too, was working on his doctorate in natural science at the university in Halle. With his usual bravado, he had entered a huge cage full of rats when Mother first saw him. She begged him to get out of the cage before he got bitten, and he laughed and said he would do so if she would promise him a kiss. I doubt if she kissed him—she was so prim and proper and had turned away dozens of students and teachers who were fascinated by her beauty and brains. But so they met. His decency, good humor, wit, and deep faith drew her to him. They became engaged.