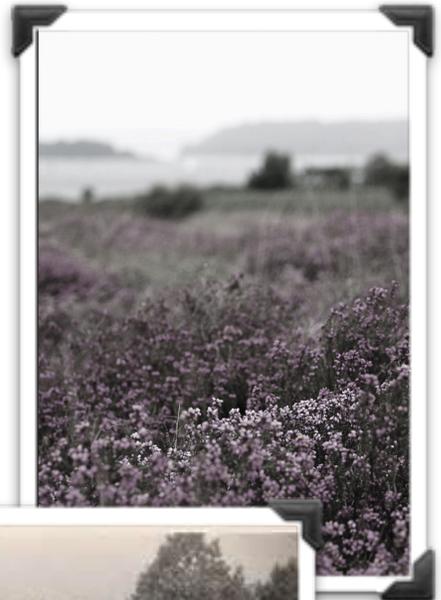


Marta

The country roads that wind up and down and around the hills and backwoods of Luckenwalde, Germany, are covered every spring in the Bugloss flower, deep purple blooms with friendly white centers against the deepest green leaves you've ever seen.

Especially in April, the air is alive with their scent and as a young girl, I would travel these roads, in the 1920s and 30s, on my black bicycle with whitewall tires and my girlfriends, Maria and Anke, riding closely behind. All three of us would be in our grey wool skirts and coats with our white blouses having just gotten off from school. We would throw our heads back, feel the sun on our faces and breathe in the beautiful Bugloss fragrance. The long winter was over and a summer full of riding bikes and swimming and boating on all the nearby lakes, beneath snow capped mountains in the distance—even in the summer months—lay ahead of us. Summers were so fun.



Not that winters weren't fun, too. They certainly were. In fact, from my father's home, a brown and white two-story chalet-like house he built in



1910, we would ski down our very own hill. The white hills all around were freckled with families skiing and sledding as far as the eye could see, and everyone was headed to the frozen lakes that were crowded with skaters dressed in colorful winter sweaters, coats and hats.

School in those days was difficult, with lots of work, but good friends always made the days full of laughs and secrets and the occasional passing of a note. When I got to high school, we were made to study four years of French and two years of English. I really disliked having to learn these subjects. What did I need to know them for?

Well, I certainly did need to know them in the years ahead, as you shall see.

In 1939, when I was 20 years old, a cousin from America, Bertrand Schmidt, who lived with his family in Elizabeth, New Jersey, came to Germany to study. He traveled to visit us in Luckenwalde and it was indeed a thrill to have an American, our cousin, no less, stay in our home. His German was very good and he told us many stories of his travels in Germany, but also what it was like to be an American. I couldn't believe that such a place existed. America sounded like a dream, where everyone gets rich and does whatever they want, and where you could get in a car and travel for two weeks in every direction. How I wanted to go there.

Well, before Bertrand would leave, my parents came to me and told me they had been talking to Bertrand's parents, and they had decided that it would be a great idea if I would travel to America with Bertrand on his return trip, where I would stay with his family and get better at English and learn the American life. I squealed with excitement.

In July of 1939, amid talk of some political unrest in Germany, Bertrand and I boarded the S.S. Berlin at Hamburg, and we sailed the Atlantic Ocean bound for the United States of America. Little did I know that when our ship pulled away from the mainland, upon my return, the world would be a far different place, and Germany would never be the same.



But all that was to come. For the time being, I was counting the minutes as we sailed. America seemed to draw me to its shores like a magnet, closer and closer as if I could feel the pull of the land of opportunity that I had read so much about. Of course, it wasn't all standing at the edge of the ship and longingly looking out. Bertrand's fellow students were also aboard and he was friends with many. Suddenly I had all these wonderful, smiling American university men and women who would come around and talk and play games and take strolls and tell jokes and smoke cigars. We had the most wonderful time.

The word was passed around that early the following morning we would be landing in New York City. I went to bed in my tiny cabin, but hardly slept for my pounding heart and a smile so broad it began to hurt. About 5 o'clock, I got up and got ready, put on my canvas hat and grey sweater and

made my way to the bow of the ship. Sometimes in life, you have to take credit for making a wonderful decision. Because there in the dawn light, Lady Liberty appeared holding her torch and I nearly couldn't breathe for the excitement. Tears streamed down my face as the skyline of New York City came into view with beautiful buildings

reaching into the sky and reflecting the morning rays off thousands of windows.

