

Transition from War to Peace

Devastated Europe: Our German Relatives and Friends

During the war, the Red Cross had conveyed factual messages about the well-being of families -- but without any personal information. In January 1946, we were able to establish for the first time direct contact with Göttingen and heard about Olga's childrens' home in Eddigehausen. Simultaneously, the tremendous devastation in East Germany became apparent and we learned that our old home had become the refuge of our East-Prussian relatives, who had fled the Russians.

During the next two years, all our spare money went into parcels providing food and some necessities for our German relatives and other desperate people. In the end, we had about 92 different families and institutions on our mailing lists. Daggie was untiring in this effort until, after about two years, requests started coming in for luxury items such as cameras. Then we knew that the task was done.

Vacations: The Log Cabin in Passaconaway

In the winter of 1946, I tried to keep in shape by skiing with Charles Kingsley, who had bought a little house on the Swift River in Passaconaway, NH. In that way I again met Cliff Pratt, at whose cabin I had spent a night during my winter mountaineering trip in 1938. Cliff showed me the old hotel which had been transformed into a forestry school and told me that the hotel had been a summer haven for asthma sufferers.

Since Daggie suffered from asthma and the children -- especially Arndt -- were very sensitive to poison ivy, which did not grow at that altitude, I became interested

in that area. One day, while skiing through the woods, I came to a bend in the Swift River where there was a marvelous view toward Mount Passaconaway to the right and Mount Chocorua to the left. Returning to Cliff's cabin, I asked him: "Who owns that site?" "I" he said -- and indeed he had just bought the last 60 acres of non- National Forest land in the valley.

I told Cliff about my childhood dream of having a log cabin and he told me that he had always wanted to build a log cabin as it should really be done. Before our discussion ended, I was the owner of three acres of land at the spot I had chosen and Cliff was to be the builder of a log cabin -- with me and our two oldest boys enlisted as handymen.

Daggie was slightly aghast when I broke the news. Not being a wilderness type, she would have chosen a little city-type house with telephone and other amenities. In addition, she knew that we had no money. But freedom from asthma was a drawing card. And I assured her that I would earn the money through consulting. Cliff had estimated the total cost as about \$3000 (about my annual salary at M.I.T.). It actually became about three times as much.*

Building began in the spring of 1947. Cliff hired a farmer who had been a bulldozer operator at Guadalcanal in World War II to push a road through the woods to the site. The route chosen was long in order to open up the rest of Cliff's land and so the "von Hippel Road" came into being. Three other helpers were engaged and Peter and Arndt stayed and worked with Cliff during their summer vacation, while Daggie, with Frank, Eric and Mai stayed at the Kingsley cabin. I taught a summer course at M.I.T., consulted for I.T.& T. and others, and commuted to Passaconaway every weekend. (See Figures 66 and 67.)

The tallest spruce trees near the cabin site were cut, peeled by the boys and me, and dragged by horses to the site. The length of the logs determined the size of the cabin. Cliff and his helpers flattened their top and bottom sides and stacked them up -- building a hoist and scaffold as the cabin walls rose to a full two-story height with a loft above. Once, when I had just arrived, the scaffold railing gave way and Cliff came down, head over heels, swinging his hammer and swearing like a trooper. Fortunately, his injuries were slight and work continued.

Frankie and I drove oakum into the seams between the logs, sealed them with "Webtex" caulking compound, and shellacked the whole interior. To get materials was a major problem at the time, but the M.I.T. carpentry and plumber shops -- friends through our shared wartime experience -- gave invaluable help in locating

* According to the Consumer Price Index, \$10,000 in 1947 dollars was the equivalent of about \$48,000 in 1985 dollars.

supplies. That winter, we found a wood burning kitchen range that had been discarded by a farmer, and dragged it into the cabin by hand-drawn sled.

The work was finished during the summer of 1948. As the last touch, Cliff built a wonderful fireplace in the living room, using rocks hauled in by the family from various brooks. Each brook provided its own characteristic stones -- ranging from flat plates to banana-shaped rocks and big blocks. The top of the chimney was built up until a proper draft was achieved and the year of completion was written into the wet cement on the top. Running water was added by locating a well with the help of a "water-witch"* high above the cabin in the National Forest. I located some army bunks for the boys' rooms and Cliff built the remainder of the furniture for the cabin in his carpentry shop, using peeled spruce poles of various diameters. Finally, in the fall of 1948, we were at home in "Passa." Cliff and Mabel Pratt remained our friends for life (see Figures 68 and 69).

Passa became a beloved retreat where the boys grew up as woodsmen and developed their individual outdoor skills. Even at Christmas time, we came up in adventurous trips to Conway and then over the snow-covered dirt Kankamaugus road, which at that time ended in an old logging-railroad spur at Sabbaday Falls. (See Figures 70-72.)

I wrote parts of my books in Passa and our children became self-reliant outdoor-people. While they were students in high school and college, Peter and Frank joined the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) Trail Crew and, in their fourth years, led it as "trailmasters." Arndt spent one summer working at the AMC Lonesome Lake mountain hut. His love of the outdoors later led him to settle in Alaska. Eric developed extreme mechanical ingenuity in inventing labor-saving devices; and, for Mai, Passaconaway has become a second home.

In the long run, Passaconaway proved to be a failure only for Daggie. Her letters to her friends were enthusiastic about Passaconaway for a number of years but the loneliness and responsibility of caring for five children by herself when I had to be away became a burden and her asthma returned. Daggie was wonderful and courageous; she skied with us to the cabin in winter snowstorms and once drove home with us in a hurricane. We adventured to Europe together via Iceland and went hiking in Norway. Did I overstrain her? I do not know.

* The "water witch" held the two ends of a freshly-cut forked stick of witch hazel and walked around the hillside above the cabin until he felt a downward tug of the tip of the stick that indicated the location where the well was to be dug.

A First Post-War Visit to Europe

The Laboratory for Insulation Research had grown by leaps and bounds. Researchers from many nations began to join us, including from former enemy countries such as Japan. We therefore enjoyed a United Nations type of atmosphere. The population of the Laboratory grew from about forty to about eighty. About sixty Ph.D. theses, forty-eight Master theses, and a very large number of Bachelor theses were completed.*

My dream of uniting all of science and engineering in the task of molecular designing of materials and devices therefore began to turn into reality. My first book, *Dielectrics and Waves*, was almost finished and a summer-session course on "Dielectric Materials and Applications" was planned for September 1952.

The children were growing up happily. Peter and Arndt were undergraduates at M.I.T. -- about 21 and 20 years old respectively. Frank, 14 years old, was in the Cambridge School near Kendall Green in Weston, where our friends, Hans and Herma Biermann, had previously taught the older ones. Eric, 11, and Mai, 7 years old, were still in the Weston public schools. The whole gang was a joy but much work -- especially for Mother -- and we could not contemplate a visit to Europe until Ursula, the second oldest daughter of my brother Ernst, arrived in the spring of 1952 to augment the family.

In June 1951, my father died in Göttingen. We had hoped so much to see him once more. Tante Bezi, his second wife, had taken care of him wonderfully but was now quite exhausted. We therefore invited her to visit us in the summer of 1952. Shortly thereafter, however, she fell ill, and Daggie and I quickly made up our minds to visit her and our other relatives in Europe.

Since I had to be back soon, we traveled by air. In those early post-war years, this was still quite an adventure: We flew with Icelandic Airlines, taking off from Boston and stopping in Gander, Newfoundland, the last refueling stop for airplanes on their way to Europe during World War II. On its flight to Canada our plane lost a stabilizer. We therefore had to wait in Gander until the counter-plane from Europe arrived and our crew borrowed its second stabilizer for the transoceanic crossing. No arrival times were guaranteed but the low altitude flight without pressurization gave a wonderful close-up view of the ocean, the islands off Newfoundland, Greenland and Iceland. There were whales, birds, and ice galore.

* The details concerning the organization and activities of the L.I.R. -- from April 1947 to November 1965 -- are described in 34 unclassified semiannual Progress Reports and one Final Report.

The food was excellent, and passengers and crew were soon united by a bond of friendly exchange of ideas and information.

In Iceland, we had a rest stop of one day to overhaul the plane. This gave us a chance to see Reykjavik and to become intrigued by the facts that there were neither chimneys nor dogs. The former were not needed because the town was heated by hot water from the volcanic underground. The latter had been abolished after an outbreak of rabies. Also, there were no foreign visitors -- only some American troops located at an airbase far outside the town. Toward the south, we saw beckoning high volcanoes covered with ice. Obviously, this was an island to be explored more closely on our next trip.

To see our old home country again was a great shock. In Cologne, the cathedral was standing free against the sky -- perhaps as the Gothic masters had perhaps intended. All the surrounding houses had been demolished and children crept out of their cellar holes to play in the rubble. At the railroad station in Kassel, we saw a gigantic field of destruction. Not a single house stood and the view of the distant mountains was totally unobscured. About five hundred thousand people had lived here! In contrast, Göttingen was practically untouched.

The first person we met on arrival at the "Hohe Weg 2" (now Hermann Foege Weg 2) was our venerated Professor Nohl -- warmhearted, lovable and impressive as always. In silent disgrace during the war, he was now wonderfully active, reorganizing social services and rekindling our old Youth Movement spirit in the School of Education.

Our old house was filled to the rafters with refugees -- mostly from East-Prussia -- and Tante Trudel's* house was similarly crowded. Not far away, sister Olga and her nice coworkers were bringing up about forty children who had fled over the boundary from Russian-dominated East Germany. Olga had moved them from an old Army barracks below the Castle Plesse to a children's home in Mariaspring near Göttingen. Here, as a celebration of our reunion, Daggie and I gave a splendid children's feast that became a legendary memory among that generation.

As I have recounted previously, we also visited my beloved old grammar school teacher, Herr Engelke -- who died a few weeks after our visit.

We visited my brother, Fritz, and his family in Freiburg, got to know his children, and were spoiled by his lovely wife, Bertel, "who cannot be intimidated."

We also visited Mother von Ritter in Lugano and met Marianne's brother, Max, and his family. I had had contact with Max before concerning a strange affair. He

* Tante Trudel was the widow of father's brother, Eugen. Uncle Eugen had succeeded our grandfather as the Professor of Ophthalmology in Göttingen.

had been the representative of the Red Cross for German prisoners of war in Russia and had on his staff a Russian emigre. He fell in love with the lady and wanted to marry her. Returning at war's end to Switzerland, his group was routed via the Black Sea. At the boundary his fiancée was taken out by the Red Guards and incarcerated as a "White Russian." Max wrote me in desperation. I succeeded through the State Department in Washington to get her released and they were married. But somehow Mother von Ritter told Max's new wife so much about Marianne: her loveliness and heart-warming talents, that she developed an inferiority complex. I had a moving reunion with Mother von Ritter and her children, but got such a chilly reception from Max's wife that we soon left to meet Curt Bondy and his friend, Walter Herrmann, who were vacationing in a sanatorium not far away.

Curt had become Professor of Psychology¹ in Hamburg. He was a wonderful friend, as always. He had succeeded in saving many Jewish children by educating them as farmworkers on the farm, "Gross Breesen," and sending them out to a variety of countries.* The Nazis closed this escape hatch in November 1938, when they arrested all remaining men over age 18 at Gross Breesen, Curt included, and put them into the Buchenwald concentration camp. There they proved an unexpected embarrassment: they were so strongly united in a Youth-Movement spirit of courage and mutual helpfulness that they upset the whole Nazi scheme of intimidation. In a move of frustration -- and possibly admiration -- the Nazis released them in December 1938. A few of them went to Holland. The rest went back to Gross-Breesen from which most left for various destinations during the following six months. Curt took some of these, via England, to the U.S.A. where a Zionist group provided a farm (Hyde Farmlands Project) near Richmond, Virginia. We stayed in close contact while he was there., During the war, a number of the boys served with distinction in the American army.**

Curt's friend, Walter Hermann, had been a member of our Gilde on the Johannis Church tower in Göttingen and was now the director of a youth prison near Braunschweig. At his invitation, I gave a talk to the prisoners in what I thought was German with a quite unexpected result. The prison newspaper reported that they had understood the language of the American professor very well

* It was very difficult for ordinary German Jews to obtain immigration visas to most countries during that period. Bondy therefore exploited the fact that immigration quotas for farm workers were generally unfilled.

** Werner T. Angress has written about Curt Bondy and Gross Breesen in his book, *Generation Between Fear and Hope: Jewish Youth in the Third Reich* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

and that the U.S.A. was obviously a wonderful country: "If you don't like your governor, you shoot him down." Obviously, one never knows the echo one creates while telling stories.

Flying home from Germany we took Tante Bezi along for an American vacation and stopped in London for a day to meet our "African cousin," Eric von Hippel. The son of my father's brother, Richard, he was initially very nationalistic, but our resulting falling out when I married Daggie had been remedied.

Eric had emigrated to East Africa in the 1920's to work on a sisal plantation. He subsequently married a daughter of the king of Toro in Uganda* and developed a method of catching crocodiles that the natives could use. Eric later became concerned about the precipitous decline in the crocodile population of Lake Victoria and started to breed a smaller crocodile with a softer skin on a farm in the "Mountains of the Moon" not far from Lake Victoria. When this enterprise flourished and he had several children, the tribe of his wife moved in, according to the African custom of sharing. After some time, he persuaded them to leave² but, later, Eric's wife returned to the tribe with their youngest child.

When we met in London, Eric was bringing his other children to Devon, England to be educated in a Catholic school where the Mother Superior had taken interest in his plight. Afterwards, he returned to Africa, found his wife and also brought the youngest child to Devon.**

Tante Bezi had a wonderful time at Glen Road and also especially in Passaconaway. We built her a platform on a big pine tree on the bank of the Swift River near a deer crossing so that she could observe wildlife. The turmoil of our family life, with the children and Ursel, greatly agreed with her and she went back

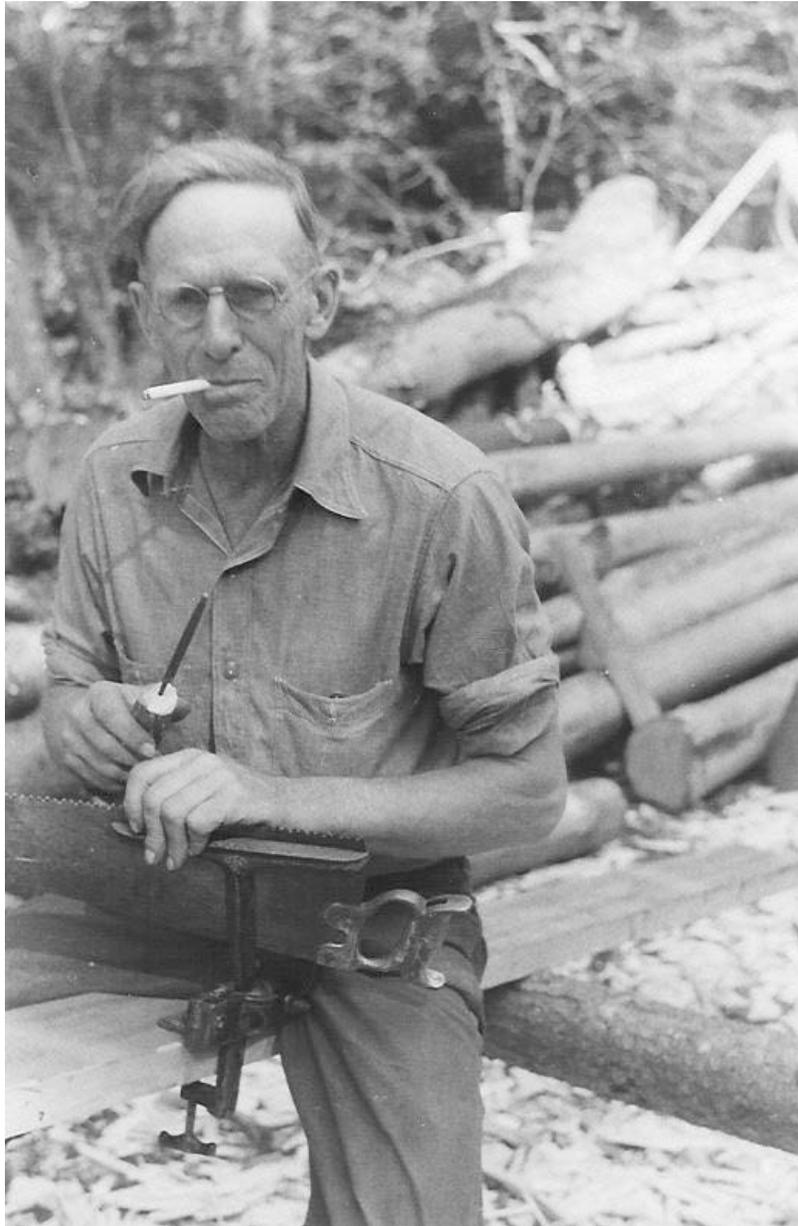
* Recounting his early disapproval of Arthur's marriage to a Jew and his subsequent own marriage to an African, Eric, in his retirement in Göttingen, remarked: "You've got to admit, I've come a long way!" He added that he had only found his own identity in Africa.

** According to Eric's son (also Eric), as of mid-1988, the elder Eric's memoirs were being edited for publication by Michelle Hagard of Cambridge, England.

to Göttingen in October, refreshed. She stayed in loving correspondence with us -- especially with Daggie -- until her death.



66 and 67. Peter (left) and Arndt (right) working on the building of the log cabin in Passaconaway.



68. Cliff Pratt, Master
Builder of the log cabin



69. Mabel Pratt with the Pratt dogs on the doorstep of their homestead.



70 and 71. The log cabin complete, Dagmar lights the fireplace and Arthur relaxes (1948)





72. The log cabin, late 1948.