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The Imaginary Homeland

My memory of these years is like pools of thought which are sometimes connected to other pools. The only sense I acquired of the passing of time was from the birthdays that were celebrated around me, my own changes of age, and my schooling, in which each year was straddled by classes from September (according to the school year in Germany) to approximately June the following year.

I recall being really bewildered by the slow passage of time. I used to ask myself: 'How much longer will we be here? How much longer?' One day, asking that unanswerable question, I shinned my way up the smooth flagpole in Compound A in order to see beyond the camp. I had tried this before, but had only ever managed to get half-way up before losing my grip and sliding back down.

I stared out gloomily at the red dust of a sandstorm, from the direction where the town of Murchison was said to be. Once, in late summer, the smoke of bushfires had drifted over the camp, making us feel even more anxious and vulnerable.

During these seemingly endless five years, I passed from the *Kindergarten*, which volunteers had set up, through to the beginning of the fourth year of schooling. At first I was sent to *Kindergarten* for six months, delighting in the toy shop there provided by the German Red Cross. I enthusiastically sewed card pictures, threaded beads, and made puzzles and plasticine shapes in many colours. Some children preferred to play with soft toys or to dress dolls and take them walking in little prams. In the German way,

we were taught that everything was to be treated with respect, not to be handled with sticky fingers and, at the end of play, stored back in their allocated containers.

As the original German name implies, the *Kindergarten* is somewhere for children to be treated like plants, nurtured and domesticated. I started school at the age of seven in September 1942, again following the German educational calendar.

While we were at school, the adults were trying to transform their drab environment. Some of their creations were really wonderful. The arid surroundings of the huts were soon blooming with gardens and arbours. I can still see the feathery foliage of the tall stands of white and pink cosmos which our father planted outside Hut 1. We snapped open the mouths of snapdragons (*Levkeuen/Löwen Mäuler*, lions' mouths) without picking them. Rows of bright portulaccas grew on low banks, responding well to the sunny position. We collected their seeds in matchboxes and sowed them out again, eagerly awaiting any colours that might appear. Then there was the silvery-grey foliage of a bush known as *Wermut* (wormwood), which we young ones used to roll up in bits of newspaper and secretly smoke.

I sometimes lay stretched out on patches of grass in No Man's Land with my ear to the ground, listening for the earth's heartbeat. I would watch little insects in a world all their own, a layer below ours.

Our Army rations for our communal meals were delivered in trucks, and included tinned fish, corned beef and cheese and butter in low round tins. On some of them was a picture of a life-belt and a sailor in blue, who also appeared on Capstan cigarette packets. We caressed the shapes and coveted the colourful labels from tins of preserved fruit and jam. If we were lucky enough to acquire a few labels in so competitive a field, we cut out the pictures and pasted them up into new arrangements: a bowl of fruit, for instance, with pineapple, plums, apricots and strawberries, or a parrot on a branch gazing out at a sailor at sea.

Mother did not encourage this practice. She thought it uncreative and encouraged us instead to draw our own pictures. I was told that the camp had regular deliveries of 'bread enough to burn'—large rectangular loaves made from over-refined white flour which offended many a German palate. We longed to sink our teeth into earthy, crusty rye bread, liberally dusted with baked caraway seeds.

Plentiful fresh vegetables came in from the camp market-garden in which men like my father could work for a token wage. The money was enough to feed my parents' habit of cigarette smoking and to buy sweets for us from the tiny canteen that sold a very limited stock.

On winter mornings, on the bare wooden tables in the dining hall enamel bowls were lined up. They were filled with steaming, lumpy porridge. In summer we got the Weet-Bix I much preferred. The hot milk we children were given in the Army's tin mugs tasted so metallic that I subsequently shunned milk for most of my life. And many years later, during my first pregnancy, I suffered a nauseated reaction to the smell of aluminium inside cupboards. It was a whiff of the past, of those metal cups filled with that breakfast milk topped with the inevitable skin which I found so disgusting.

Between meals when it was cold, we children sometimes melted blobs of cheese in jam tins on top of the small wood heater in the dining room and singed bread with toasting forks over the glowing coals through its open door. When it rained, between meals, we sometimes made cubby houses under tables and benches. These games depended on a lenient supervisor being on duty, because playing in the dining hall was usually forbidden.

When I think back on it, we were an ungrateful, critical lot. Generous Army rations were a privilege during the War, when Australian civilians were given the more restrictive civilian ration coupons. People in the camp also grumbled about styles of cooking. The roster ensured that there was a turnover of talent. Boiled cabbage cooked with a ring of oil on top of the boiler was subject to periodic attack from everyone but the Italian cooks, who liked it that way and refused to change. I loathed finding the odd boiled grub in my cabbage but my father was unsympathetic. 'It's an excellent supply of essential nutrition,' he said, encouraging me to eat it up. But I refused. After mother's intervention, he would relent.

There were many productive forms of entertainment in the camp. The younger girls and young unmarried women attended regular evening knitting bees. These *Heimabende* ('at homes') produced scarves and socks for German soldiers. During these evenings, older participants took it in turns to read a chapter from a book. Since we children were often present, I particularly remember a saga about a German coffee planter's family in East Africa, living at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro and plagued by locusts and marauding lions.

Part of these evenings was spent singing folk songs in harmony. Someone might lead with a guitar or piano-accordion. Mouth-organs and recorders were also frequently played. There was at least one piano in the hall in Compound C in which most of the communal gatherings and entertainments took place. There was also an older woman who gave readings in her own hut to well-behaved children. She read us fairy tales like those of the Brothers Grimm, which underpinned the social order, and those by Hans Christian Andersen which nourished our nostalgia.

At first, our school was conducted in the dining hall. I attended *Kindergarten* in Compound A. The first two grades of primary school were held in Compound C. I remember the excitement of learning to read and write there.

School was conducted in the German language, and followed a German syllabus. Trained teachers conducted the classes, helped by university students and educated adults who had some teaching experience. Starting school at seven, I was old enough to find this adventure one of the great experiences of my life. Literacy provides confidence, independence and entertainment. It is a door through which one discovers a whole new world.

The first element of that experience is lodged in my mind as a small angular mark, the letter 'i'. It was a symbol which stood for *Igel* (hedgehog) and was the first letter I ever learnt, before even 'a' for *Apfel* (apple). Like one of the beasts chalked in the prehistoric caves of Lascaux, the drawing of a hedgehog in my schoolbook reminded me what sound it was that the little scribbled 'i' represented, when we were asked to 'drill' the vowels: I, E, A, O, U.

That was the way we learned them, for simplicity. Later the sequence was replaced by a standard convention, following the alphabet.

The guiding idea of the camp was that learning was not simply a mechanical progression but a mixture of adventure and standard classical conventions. We were taught holistically, all subjects shown as being interconnected. My exercise books were soon filled up with writing and drawing. There was another one with numbers associated with problems to be solved from real life situations. Under the kindly and patient supervision of Tante Gudrun, our teacher, we were set solidly on the path of learning.

The excitement of being at school in the camp outshone the schooling I received later, when we were freed. It was as if in captivity our minds were released to fly like birds. This is a great tribute to my teachers.

The dining hall in Compound B was used for school years 3 and 4, and 10 was the magic age when we were permitted to take part in sporting programs. The attendant political endurance ceremonies, however, I found arduous. The schoolbooks I still have from that later period, 1945–46, after the War had ended, reveal how foreign we were to the country in which we were stranded. Even those teachers who had come from Palestine, in their lessons known as *Heimatkunde* (social/heritage studies, or knowledge of the homeland) taught us about Germany and things German, even though no one in the camp had actually lived there for any significant period.

Our structured learning was also very competitive. As soon as a child had completed her ‘mathematical’ problems, she was permitted to leave the room and go out to play. I suffered because of my lack of commitment to another lesson, the art of embroidery, which annoyed that queen of all seamstresses, my mother.

One of our marvellous teachers, the enthusiast Tante Lilo (Aunty Liselotte Wagner) introduced parent guest lecturers into the classroom. Lilo admired learned men and my father accepted her invitation to tell us about engineering. How unexpectedly proud I was to discover that my father had a genial rapport with other people’s children! I had always thought that my parents were different, something a number of inmates from Palestine had told me, with some distaste. How my heart glowed when my father came one day to explain to us in class how red and green railway signals were used to regulate the safety of trains and their cargo. He also described some of his adventures supervising the construction of tunnels and bridges. He dramatised the big questions: would the two sides meet in the middle? He made these boring technical matters fascinating. My father became a hero to the fourth-grade boys and I was treated with deference for a few days by those who otherwise would tease me by pulling my plaits.

Both our schooling and our social life turned our minds to a *Heimat* (homeland), which most of us had scarcely visited and were perhaps never to see. Perhaps the exaggerated nostalgia of the people in the camp can be explained by the need to preserve an identity at odds with a foreign land, especially as we had no idea what lay beyond our prison.

In later years I found a text from the Bible which brought inward tears to my eyes: *By the waters of Babylon I sat down and wept, and thought of thee, Oh Sion.*

When I later reached out to a Jerusalem that was the spiritual home of both Christians and Jews, I realised I was revisiting an emotional experience, travelling over the same road but through a different country. In the camp, my *Heimweh* (longing for home) was directed at Germany, a place I had only visited for the briefest few weeks. I knew it was a green and pleasant land. My mother's stories of home were reinforced by the rhetoric of our teachers. An imaginary Germany pushed my vivid experience of Iran into the background.

In the school exercise books still in my possession are long German narrative poems copied in the fine, elongated Gothic script I learned. On those pages are depicted deciduous trees like birches, beeches, elms and linden, together with a family of evergreen pines. Each separate genus of tree is defined by leaves, flowers and fruit, and by the basic architecture of stem and branches, while a tree in leaf has a canopy that is peculiar to its own family. Thus we absorbed the basic principles of science without being consciously 'scientific'.

In a drawing that has sat for 50 years in my exercise book, a German fox sits by a lake ready to pounce on a family of ducks. On another page, wild strawberries grow in clusters of decorative leaves. An eagle, a hawk, a swallow, a woodpecker and other birds from the northern hemisphere are caught scanning the horizon of their future. Another page about Germany's mythological past depicts an earth wrought from fire. There stands the great Tree of Life, with the three *Nornen*, the women who spin the web of life, the past, the present and the future.

Elsewhere, the names of each day of the week are given their Norse derivation. My classmates are listed one by one and explained. Herbert = leader of the *Heer* (army), Irene = lover of peace, Helga = supervisor of healing, are three samples. We were taught to admire rather horrid Nordic heroes of the military caste, with morals no better than the devious and aggressive Greek gods.

In one of these exercise books I have kept there is some evidence of political indoctrination. But there is more about German identity in a general sense than about its specific Nazi affiliation. And that's the way I remember it. Our school was not a vehicle for indoctrination. Rather,

that took place through the youth movements, at political rallies and in the playground, where what the parents of some told their children acted on the others by a kind of osmosis.

In school, the swastika symbol of the Nazis nevertheless appeared on the front of textbooks and in the corner of our school reports. For us as children it had no sinister connotation. It was as free of taint as the flag to the Australian children of the time, who saluted it every morning before going into their state school classrooms.

I can still read in my nine-year-old hand that ‘Words that make us brave’ are *flag, hero, Hitler* and *Hitlerjugend*. Anti-Jewish and pro-Aryan sentiments, if they figured at all in school, have escaped my memory. I probably suppressed them after the War.

I was told then that anti-Semitism was a force to be reckoned with in the camp. I had developed a habit of explaining my conduct with excuses—probably in self-defence, since I was beaten so often—so it is likely that I was as much a participant as others. But I do not recall it. Since I do not make a habit of forgetting unpleasant things I have experienced, I either had no conscience about such villainy or I was not engaged by it.

In the sandpit we made relief maps of geographical features, naming the ranges and the rivers flowing into the sea. Sometimes they demonstrated an exact place on a map of Germany. Meanwhile in class we were asked to recite, word-perfect, one of the long poems we had transcribed and committed to memory. Among the ones we were given were those by Schiller characterised by his concern with liberty and justice and the notion that hope springs eternal: *Noch im Grabe baut er die Hoffnung auf* (Even in the grave he still builds up hope). Heroic words these, well suited to military goals and an attendant sense of civic pride.

Well after the War had ended, and not long before we were released, at the beginning my fifth year in school, in September 1946, my Lutheran missionary teacher, Mr Streicher, taught us about prehistory. He spoke of the great *Völkerwanderung* during the first millennium. It was a way of introducing us to the German tribes and the origins of their societies. But he also extolled the movement of nomads as exemplifying the energy for which Germans are noted.

From another perspective, I might have learned—but not from him—that the wandering tribes were a pack of vandals, looting and pillaging as they went. Nowadays one can make a comparison between the rampages of Vandals, Goths and Huns and the thuggish looting and killing that was perpetrated by Nazi gangs in a so-called ‘civilised’ society.

Herr Streicher was fervent about the German past, but he also talked about God. This may or may not have been forbidden earlier at the school. His experiences in New Guinea gave him a keen sense of the lives of the swamp dwellers of prehistoric Heidelberg and for ‘primitive customs’. He had us enthralled with his tales from New Guinea, such as the cunning ambushes of the Kukukukus (Highlander ‘pygmies’) and their repulsive mortuary customs, which, according to him, obliged a close relative of a dead person to drink his juices.

Herr Streicher no doubt exaggerated to gain our attention. A Kukukuku custom related to this story was, however, around 1954 identified by scholar doctors as a cause of *kuru*, the deadly laughing disease. Streicher had not invented the whole thing.

The word *Vaterland* (fatherland) was used a lot in the camp. It has the connotation of a strong base for the roots of an oak tree, of a land defended by one’s people, the place from which one’s paternal lineage comes. It is a much colder word than the one preferred in the English language: motherland, the land of my mothers. Ironically, of course, Britain at that time was the country most associated with the use of nannies to raise children in well-to-do homes. But then, one has to be careful of giving words too much weight. Sometimes they merely present an aspiration.

The associations with motherland are of nurture, empathy, soulfulness. Nazi ideology was forever praising the *Vaterland* and we were supposed to build up an attachment. Something of that hard-edged, competitively thrusting energy certainly clung to us Germans as a habit of behaviour. We took it into the future and had to curb it in situations in which it was of little use.

I see my personal background as determined more by the women of my mother’s family, from whom I gained my basic direction in life. ‘You and your cursed romanticism, with which you have afflicted your children!’ I once accused my mother. For if romanticism nourishes the soul, it goes along with a need to discover ‘the absolute source’ of all things, as mystics have taught us. My mother’s traditions and the German fairy tales share

this need for certitude. The classic British children's stories, like the stories of Alice in her Wonderland and Winnie the Pooh, are more like games to a child nourished on continental romanticism. They are too cerebral, too detached from our nostalgia. They appeal to a child's reason.

The stories of the Brothers Grimm that we were told in school have been passed down through the generations. They are like crucibles of the traditional values of western European societies, tested over the centuries by trial and error. Many of them have a strong ethical and moral base. They extol the virtue of hard work and describe the conflict between good and evil. They speak of belief in the supernatural, and the power of witches, giants and trolls, which may be friendly or hostile to humans. They deal in in transcendental possibilities: that lives are not tied to ordinary experiences and ordinary time and that death is not necessarily the end of life. Some stories support a notion of a correct blood line. Stepmothers, for instance, are inevitably hostile.

The other stories we were told were Hans Andersen's. From them, one gets an overall impression that life is fragile and brief, pleasure passes and nothing really lasts. The poor are not compensated on this earth. Such realism has its valuable messages. Life cannot be depended upon to provide security. One must focus one's mind on why we are here on earth.

These tales come from a period in which monarchical government and the arbitrary rights of an aristocracy were the established political order. They nevertheless present strong themes: standards of justice and concern for the poor, for instance.

Tante Lilo's teaching turned us into enthusiastic students. Nothing in my later schooling matched her ability to enthrall me. She showed us the joy of knowledge acquired purely for its own sake. She always provided a context to render meaningful what she taught.

My brother Peter hated being separated from our parents, and at first used to run away rather than go to kindergarden. We always knew where to find him, however, carefully hidden under the dangerous communal wood heap. He was bright, we said, but preferred to hide his talent under a pile of timber. Christianity was systematically ignored in our school syllabus. Music was not. Tante Lilo taught us all to sight-read music towards the end of our fourth year. Musical talent was displayed in a number of

performing groups. The German Red Cross supplied recorders, some string instruments and piano-accordions. Some instruments may also have been brought into the camp.

Children also performed in plays, often with the adults. There was special children's drama using favourite Grimm's fairytales presented as shadow plays, behind large white sheets (*Leinenwand Theater*). Once we performed for the wedding of another teacher, Tante Gudrun. We wore wreaths of russet chrysanthemums in our hair, formed a guard of honour and danced during a performance in German of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. We were Puck's elves to the music of *Anitra's Dance* from Grieg's *Peer Gynt*.

I relished this artistic life. I used to run to the hall for orchestral and chamber music performances. My parents encouraged my interest. When my mother asked me what attracted me so much, I once answered with natural simplicity: 'Oh, I do love it when the trumpeters pour out the spit from their trumpets!'

Nationalist ambitions, I think, inspired the vigorous school sporting program. Tante Lilo's partner in this was Eva Ruff, a youth leader in love with folklore, who was a skilled player of the piano-accordion. She taught us folk dancing and gymnastic exercises to music. We performed these during the celebration of commemorative feasts.

It was obvious to the authorities that an interest in sport kept us healthy, and a sports ground was eventually added to Compound C. It was securely fenced. Towards the end of our imprisonment, upper primary and high-school classes became permanent fixtures in the new huts erected in this sports ground annex.

Everyone from the age of 10 who had real athletic ability was recruited to be trained as if they might become a future Olympic champion. Every day we set out on our long early morning runs, boys and girls at separate times. We ran several times around the barbed wire fence when the gates between the three sections were open. This was followed by calisthenics and gymnastics.

We participated in every kind of competitive running, pitting ourselves against imaginary world records for our age for sprinting, hurdles, broad-jumping into sandpits and high-jumping over a pole between sticks, with the intervals marked with nails. I learned to rattle off the names of German

Olympic champions and the records they had broken. I was to learn later that children in other places, like the Australia beyond the fence, had similar sporting ambitions. So competitive were we that the *Palestinänsler* camp leader once wanted to show off his 10-year-old daughter to the Australian camp commandant by having her sprint against me.

The imaginary backdrops to our efforts were the great German sporting festivals of Nazi inspiration, a mixture of Greek Olympic and Nordic mythology. They were full of gods and goddesses with burnished spears and impenetrable shields, their fair hair braided, and their banners flying.

Three young men came briefly to the camp. One of them, an accomplished sportsman who had trained German runners for the 1936 Olympics, offered to coach me as a hurdler. My parents thought better of it. They had me taught the violin instead.

In those times in Germany, emphasis was placed on art and craft education in schools. I still have a craft teacher-training book which my mother was able to take when the camp library was broken up at the end of the War. It shows how women were encouraged to do woodwork of all kinds, making wood-cuts for printing, cake moulds, dolls' houses, small theatres, flower presses, picture frames, book-ends. They were encouraged to learn how to weave, work in leather and bind books.

Such skills were all tried out in the camp, and some in the school. I'm sure they helped to make imprisonment much more bearable. Today in the Tatura Museum you can find a collection of handwoven clothes, leather bags, wooden clogs, bound books and journals, posters for theatrical performances, handmade toys, scale models of camp huts and much more. They are displayed with the many written records from the camps.

Our children's games sometimes arrived like seasons. Someone would decide that it was the time for kites. Then every child got out an old kite or pestered their parents to produce one. When one child played with a top, everyone suddenly had to have one. These were carefully carved tops with nail-head tips, which we propelled along with leather-strip whips. We also had stilts on which we raced, jumping over puddles and culverts.

Out-of-bounds places were secretly explored in games of Hide and Seek and Cowboys and Indians, often under the huts, known by us in children's dialect as *Dach-dacherle* (rat tat tat). Crawling under there was dangerous, for poisonous red-back spiders clung to the wooden boards and props.

We played hopscotch, the German version of Oranges and Lemons and dug small pits for games of marbles 'for keeps', wearing our thumbnails down. Peter and I made earth-mounded alley slides, into which we poured water. Near my father's garden at Hut 4, he and I constructed an elaborate canal system around miniature settlements in which resided stick figure people. We knew not to intrude upon his fine stand of sunflowers.

Skipping-rope games were popular with girls, as was rounders played with a strong stick and jam tins as markers. We performed flamboyantly in the hope that our parents would pass by and witness a victorious home run.

Our children's adventure playground was also responsible for a lot of wounds and painful gravel rashes, which became infected.

While we played, the adults lived their own mysterious lives. In January 1945 my mother gave birth to my brother Herbert after that dangerous journey to Waranga Hospital.

Because it might have seemed strange to have another child during such insecure times, the boy was lovingly nicknamed *das Kriegskind* (the War child). He was such a beautiful baby that he became the focus of much admiration. Peter and I did not resent this. We delighted in the amusement Herbert afforded us, with his quaint and bright-minded ways. *Das Kriegskind* brought a new interest to our family. He lightened our minds. My parents also made some strong new friends through the attention people paid him.

A childless couple, Lydia and Fred Zachen, were prominent in the Herbert admiration society. Things became much more relaxed in Hut 4. The addition to our family may have entitled my parents to a third room, because we got one somewhere in late 1944 or early 1945. Our new living quarters seemed spacious.

My mother asked if she could introduce *Kinderküche* (infant meals) on a roster in the dining room. The answer from the camp leadership was an emphatic 'no'. Later, when other mothers of infants saw the wisdom of her case, she refused to join in. 'They can keep their stupid, cussed pig-headedness!' she exclaimed. But they begged her to show the way. She participated, she said, for the sake of her child.

My mother did not forgive easily and harboured grievances, a trait she has passed on to me. The opposition to her extremely sensible suggestion still rankled long after the way had been cleared for her project. She expected others to be as uncompromising as she was. It was an aspect of her puritan upbringing. My father, by contrast, never bore lingering grudges. You knew exactly where you stood with him. His fuse was short, but he soon forgave.

When Herbert was five months old, keeping my mother extremely busy with the daily washing of his cloth nappies, my parents nevertheless stood by their promise to me of a 10th birthday party. This raised problems. Which of my playmates would we invite?

Instead of allowing this to arise every year, my parents had always promised just one party, for the important 10th birthday. A large number of children could then be invited. Our usually strict father provided jolly leadership. He was full of surprises, even producing an impressive kite. Somehow my mother managed access to the communal kitchen and amazed us with her chocolate cakes decorated with elaborate, Austrian-style butter-cream piping.

Other children also had parties. The Schnerring family produced animals carved from carrots, capsicums, tomatoes and cucumbers. The games we played at these affairs are familiar across many lands. They included Blind Man's Buff, Pin the Tail on the Donkey and treasure hunts. Leap-frog and tunnel ball were also played during school sports classes, along with the usual individual competitions.

On ordinary days, when we were forbidden to play outside, we made our own cardboard-box puppet theatres. I recall devising stage sets and a string pulley-system by which the sun and moon rose and went down behind trees and mountains. There was also a spider which moved down its web on a thread, then up again.

As well as Christmas and Easter, nationalistic feasts of Nazi inspiration were celebrated. When the German officer POWs made gifts by hand for many of the inmates of Camp 3, I do not know what we sent them in return. One of the feasts we celebrated now seems sinister and frightening. During the winter solstice, bonfires were heaped with books and burnt. I think the books included those by Jewish authors.

Since I was a good jumper, I leapt over the flames with the older ones. Sometimes I thought: 'What if I fall into the burning coals?'

Reading material for every age group was sent by the German Red Cross to the camp library. I often had my head buried in a saga of adventure describing the migration of reindeers along the Baltic Sea, the life cycles of bears, the adventures of sea captains, or the gold rush that emptied Melbourne town of its population in the 1850s. One book stands out. It made me very uncomfortable with its spiteful, anti-Czech story. I shrank from its obvious manipulation of hatred. I knew what it felt like to be excluded from power.

Father had grown up with a love of brass music. The ceremonial Nazi parades were often redeemed for him by the music that accompanied them. Both my parents enjoyed the pomp of the colourful ceremonial processions of an older monarchical order. Mother also had a compassionate heart for what soldiering meant in defence of home and hearth, and for the self-sacrifice of men who gave their lives for the sake of their country. Father was a pragmatist. Some happenings one simply had to accept. That was life. At the time, I found a certain nobility in such fatalism. Later it was to irritate and worry me constantly.

At the age of 10, I saw my parents as an obstacle to my personal choices. My father was stern, and my mother often placated him on our behalf. Perhaps that way she also introduced a wedge between him and us. We regarded her as much more 'on our side' in most disputes. However, she could also be extremely obstinate. That's how I felt when I wanted to be with my peers in the Union of German Girls *Jungmädll* group.

At political gatherings we were obliged to stand perfectly still, nearly everyone rigged out in the prescribed costumes. Once we stood still for almost two hours while our leaders harangued us with torrents of words extolling the virtues of Hitler and his followers. Sometimes on these occasions one of us would faint from sheer exhaustion. Did they not know that Hitler was dead? Had the news not entered the camp? I recall a particularly well-attended and showy ceremony, at night in the open air in Compound C. There were flags and political emblems and people in uniform singing an anthem of which I remember the melody and the opening lines:

*In München sind viele gefallen,
In München war'n viele dabei ...*

(In Munich many have fallen
In Munich many were there ...)

This ceremony was staged on 9 November 1945. Why that date? For years afterwards, I did not bother to inform myself of the so-called 'Nazi martyrdom' it celebrated.

These events were part of a situation that in retrospect I consider dangerous and politically evil. I now know that this special ceremony was staged when the Australian authorities decreed that all emblems and symbols of significance to the Nazis were to be destroyed. I remember that ceremony as long, solemn and well-attended.

My need as a child to belong with my peers is a cautionary tale about the human condition. I am now wryly amused, not only by my 10-year-old innocence, but also by the respectful attendance of the Australian garrison. If our 'enemy' masters did not know, how could young children have understood its true meaning?

The pomp and bravura were of course a ridiculous mimicking of Hitler's performances and rallies 'at home'. All this one lacked was the presiding criminals. There may well have been bullying to force people in the camp to attend. I know nothing of any such goings-on. The nostalgia expressed for Germany by so many internees gave me a mental construct of a very green and artistic 'home' which I shared with them, and for which I longed with a burning heart. It was derived mainly from books and folk songs. So I suffered with the others the intense *Heimweh* (homesickness, a word which in its English translation does not catch the emotional yearning associated with the German). Religious literature speaks of the soul yearning for God. Our yearning for a Germany we had not known was a non-religious, but nevertheless overwhelmingly emotional equivalent; a pining of the heart.

At that ceremony, the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazi regime had yet to sink in—if indeed they were then widely known in Australia. People were wary of War propaganda from either side. All mail both ways had to move through military censors. The degree of ignorance during War-time confusion and secrecy is now difficult to imagine.

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