

OUR RETURN TO GERMANY

(Diary of Gertrud Peterreins nee Schlaht)

Motto: "*and in our hearts it always echoed*
- *at home, at home is still at home ! At home, at Home!!*"

Hoffnungstal near Odessa - 12 March 1944.

It is a cold, quiet Sunday afternoon. The mood of the people is somber - even though no one suspects that soon, perhaps in a few hours, we will have to leave our dear homeland. Often, naturally, it was talked about but we never believed that it would ever come true. And when it comes... how unbelievably hard the word 'packing' will hit us. Will we have to believe that it could become reality? Perhaps it is only a bad dream? No, no, it may sound harsh but considering the current situation, it seems to become reality.

127 years ago, when our ancestors emigrated from Germany to Russia, they surely did not think that their great grandchildren would ever return to their old homeland.

Under difficult conditions, they built the first huts of clay in the bare steppe land. With generation to generation the village came to prosper more and more. Life was wonderful but hard times were to come to all. The most terrible time, the times of the Bolshevism and the Soviet system, was overcome. The village is able to recover from these many misfortunes over and over again, and to continue to grow. Should we leave it in the midst of this prosperity, this wonderful growth? Could you understand to have to leave your homeland, farm, house and belongings? Unless one experienced it, one could never understand the meaning of turning your back to the homeland. Some Germans may say: 'it was only Russia'. Even if it was only Russia, it was where my cradle stood, my shrine; that is where I want to be buried, and there lay my deepest roots. Each corner was known to me and now to leave it all, where one shared happiness and sorrow with the loved ones.

Monday, **March 13, 1944** - 3 AM in the morning, the order came: Pack everything - Alarm scale 4. At the first moment, we thought to have fallen from the clouds. But we were to be strong and calm, regardless how difficult it would be. We started to pack. packing did not come about as fast as it first seemed it would. We really had to get busy to get all that stuff together. We were to go by horse and wagon to Galatz at the Danube river, and from there load onto ships and travel on the Danube river to Vienna. From where will we get the horses? We do not have any. Father is a teacher, we are not farmers. We inquired with the mayor and were told: " Be patient, everyone will be taken care of. All are coming, no one will be left behind". At the same time it was announced that the elderly, the sick people, the handicapped and women with children will be transported by the First Aid Personnel of the Main headquarters, with medical attention. We also had old grandparents. Grandfather, 82 years old and grandmother, 79 years old. It would have been impossible for the old people to withstand travel in those (Panje) wagons.

Tuesday, **March 14, 1944**. Our departure was delayed again, but the happiness won't last long. We quickly slaughtered our pig, so we would have food along for

the flight. We also killed many chickens and fried them and mixed them into lard filled crock pots.

Wednesday, **March 15, 1944**. Today the order was "pack". It has to be and must be that we have to leave our homeland. The weather seems to be against us too. The rain just pours. We received a wagon and 3 horses from our barracks (SS - Command agency). Now we had more work to do. We had to take our house's roof and put it over the wagon. We just about froze our fingers off since it started to storm and snow in the afternoon. It was terribly cold. Day of departure is not yet known.

Thursday, **March 16, 1944** Today we have to bring all the people that are to travel with the First Aid transport to the train station. That meant to say good bye to our old grandparents. The roadway to the train station in Wesjoliy Kut was terrible, mud so deep reaching up to the axles, but we made it. The train station was crowded with people. I took my grandparents there, registered them, and said my good by. At home, plenty more work was waiting for me. As soon as I arrived at home we had to start loading the wagon with our belongings that we wanted to take. It was really a job. Late in the afternoon, some that had fled from Neu Berlin arrived. We became real afraid, hearing of the stories they told. The roadway has to be terrible and many threw away of their belongings already on the first day.

Friday, **March 17, 1944** - Today the order came to be ready on March 18, 1944. In the evening was the last meeting. Every one came to hear what our commander had to say. Each of us had to say good bye to our homeland, from all dear that we have here, and our dead one's graves , we have to leave behind. From all that was build by us grandchildren for generations. With heavy hearts and somber mood we left the meeting. What else though could we do? No one wanted to fall into the hands of the Bolsheviks again. We had endured bolshevism for twenty four years and did not want to endure it again. We took all our good memories to accompany us.

Saturday, **March 18, 1944** - We got up at 5 AM. The last few things were loaded onto the wagon. There was a beautiful sun rise just as if the sun never wanted to greet us for the last time in our trusted homeland! During the night there was a freeze making the roadway a little easier to travel on. The order came to harness the horses. In our hearts the question kept repeating: "Do we really have to go - go far away and leave our home?" There was not much time to think about it. One more time, for the last time, each went to the barns. All animals were let out, the chickens, pigs, sheep, cows etc. all that could not be taken. One more round through the house, opening each cupboard, saying good bye to all he things that served us for all these years. All was still in its place. From the yard we heard the order to leave. One last look and gone for ever...heavy hearted, with tears in the eyes but strong in body and mind, we left the house and the yard. However difficult it will come, we cannot complain. God will take care of us. We cannot let it get us down, we have to be brave and strong. We started leaving.

We went up the Dobler hill, from the top every one looked back at the village just one more time. How beautiful it lay there surrounded by the hills. To look one more time at the Church, the schools, our house. How beautiful it all was standing there in the glow of the rising sun. And that... we have to leave?!!, the last glance! One step forward and it all disappeared from our eyes.

The sun rose higher. The ground thawed. It became more and more difficult to travel. Mid-way we rested. We had to say good bye again, to our fields, the gardens, the vineyards and the meadows. Then we moved on. With greatest

effort, we were able to advance and finally at late afternoon arrived at Seebach (Oserowo). Today, we would not travel any further. The inhabitants of this villages had gone already. The houses stood open and we occupied them. Here, we also found out that our grandparents were still at the train station. Right a way, we went there to see them again. They were already loaded onto the train. It was sad to see so many people on the train.---regardless, all acted strong and believed in a reunion in Germany. Now, we had to go back to our trek. In the evening beds of straw were prepared. The first night we did not sleep in our beds, guards were posted.

Sunday, **March 19, 1944** - Early in the morning- at six AM we were leaving. Travel was very bad - very many stones lay on the road. One wheel on our wagon had been weak from the beginning. The many rocks brought on an earlier breakdown than expected. The wheel broke a few kilometers from Klein-Neudorf. What now? Not far away was a small Russian village. We went there. We can thank the Ukrainian police that we got a wheel again, because people hide them. One can surely understand. The wheel was put on and on we went. Late in the afternoon, we arrived in Klein-Neudorf. Here also, everything was empty. After the horses were taken care of, we went into the house. There were chickens in the yard. Some of them we killed and made a good chicken soup . The wine we found in the cellar tasted great, especially the white wine. We went to bed early. Erna and I held watch from 2 -4 AM.

Monday, **March 20, 1944** - travel started at 6 AM in the direction of Adolfsthal. The weather was not bad and the sun meant it well. At 2 in the afternoon we arrived in Adolfsthal. The village was filled with soldiers. We hardly found room. I even had an argument with a lieutenant who thought we could not get through anymore. Late in the afternoon our command party arrived . We talked to the trek leader A.L who gave us encouragement. We begged him to take two packets of ours and put it on his wagon, since our wagon was overfilled. How happy we were to ease the load a little. Then we did not yet know that the Russians were only 20 kilometers behind us. We did not sleep good - we were crowded like sardines in a can.

Tuesday, **March 21, 1944** - At 5 AM in the morning we moved on. It was still pitch dark. We traveled in the direction of Tiraspol, where we arrived in the afternoon. We were to rest here but the Russians were close behind , we had to go on. We drove the whole day long. It was terrible - the horses did not get fed nor watered - and ourselves, we could not eat because of excitement. Everything was so overloaded that we advanced very slowly. We still had to cross the Dnestr river. It was a wooden bridge and very narrow. It was dark when we were crossing the bridge. Cars kept coming toward us and the horses got spooked, They had to be led. Finally, at ten at night we arrived at Thiginia (Benderi). It was dark. We were gather at the market place. It started to rain. It was terrible. Nowhere could we find shelter. We did not have room in the wagon for all. It was a terrible night.

Wednesday, **March 22, 1944** - In the morning at 8 AM, we left Thiginia. We had to cross a ditch full of water and we thought that everything would break down. But we were lucky. The weather seems to want to get better - but too often appearances are deceptive. In the afternoon it started to pour again. Totally soaked and half frozen, we arrived at the overcrowded village of Sauschahi, Bessarabia. For the night we had to find a spot and after a long search we found one. My brother almost got run over by the horses while searching. The horses were exhausted and just did not want to move anymore. My brother went to the team and calmly talked to them - he was leading the team and I was encouraging

from behind them. My brother slipped and fell directly in front of the team of horses. To save himself, he rolled to the side and he looked as if he had taken a mud bath. One can see how that could be since it had rained for a few days and there were no solid roads. After we found our stay, we had to find shelter for the horses. It was hard but through negotiation, our nurse Erna found a small barn. I, of course was very happy about that, since it still poured out like out of faucets. The night was terrible. We were squeezed as herrings. Even though we had heat , our clothes did not dry. With so many people there it was impossible. My rubber boots were full of mud and I had to wear my fathers. The same night our team leader E. W. became ill.

Thursday, **March 23, 1944** - We did not think that we had to move on today. But at 7 AM, we were leaving. The roadway was terrible. On top of that it grew colder and colder. The mud stuck to the shoes and the clothes were wet - it was just awful. We hardly were able to move forward. At 5:30 in the evening, we arrived at Ewgeniza. This village was inhabited by Bulgarians who showed us good hospitality. They cooked supper for us all. We even had good wine to drink, which warmed us up. Tonight we slept well for a change.

Friday, **March 24, 1944** - As we were leaving at 6 AM in the morning our host sent corn for the horses with us. We even received mulled claret to drink before we left. It was very good and stimulating. Even the road was better. At 10:30, we arrived at Beresina, where we were sheltered at the home of a Russian woman. It was nice and cozy there. By coincidence, uncle Br. And family from Glueckstal happened to come here. In the afternoon , we went to the mayor and received the first mail. I had a letter from J. I was so happy. A lot of us had to sleep in one room, but it was warm and we slept well.

Saturday, **March 25, 1944** - At 11 Am we moved on in the direction of Tarutino. The road was awful, up hill and down hill. Just short of Tarutino we had to climb a large hill. We came upon a load of onions. We were given some of these onions and since we were so hungry, we started eating them without even bread. Never did an onion taste so good. We could hardly believe to ever arrive at the village since it took so very long. Finally we did get there. We found shelter in sort of barracks, which had windows, but no glass. And there was no heat either - it was so cold. Our command agency was in Tarutino. We went there and there were again letters for me. It was a beautiful day. For supper we wanted to fix a good noodle soup. For that, we needed a stove. That was simple, we dug a hole in the floor and put the Kettle over it, thus a stove. The night was awful, it was icy cold in that big room. But this night passed too.

Sunday, **March 26, 1944** - we were supposed to leave real early, but it did not come about. The trek from Glueckstal had to leave first. Of course our mayor was up bright and left early - he must think he would reach Germany a bit faster that way. Finally we got to leave at 10 Am. We had to climb a steep hill and the ground was soft mud, so that we had to help push the wagons so the horses could make it. Quite out of breath, we reached the top of the hill. Our leader had encouraged us along the way. It was like that until we reached Postal. There the command party went ahead to find quarters for us. There it was for the first time we really could wash up good. It was wonderful. There was even heat in this house. In the evening we received milk and coffee. And after supper we wrote letters. Also we slept real well.

Monday, **March 27, 1944** - At 6 Am in the morning we went on. It had gotten real cold. It was hard to walk. I could not keep up with the wagon. Mr. D. felt sorry for me and gave me a ride. It felt good to ride again. Normally we had to walk just about the whole time. We were five adults, My mother, Aunt T., Irene, Alfred and myself. Our father was not with us then. And we had to exchange drivers, but our mother had to drive all the time since she would not have been able to keep up. In the evening, we arrived at the village X. After searching awhile, we found shelter in a small hut made of clay. It started to storm. It was some night. I wanted to sleep on the wagon to be with the horses. But the horses were freezing and kept tearing loose and ran around. All I did that night, was to catch the horses. I was very glad when daylight appeared.

Tuesday, **March 28, 1944** - Again at 6 Am, we had to leave. Aunt Hilda had forgotten the top to the kettle and had to walk back. It became real cold. At 11:30 we arrived at Cubei. We did manage to find good housing for us and the horses. There were some German soldiers who helped us a lot. They took care of the horses for us and that was very helpful to me, since it was my chore to take care of the horses. Each of us were assigned a certain chore. My mother was responsible for the meals, she had to cook. My brother was in charge of the stove and had to gather the burning material and my cousin had to help. My aunt had to pack and unpack the wagon. I had to find feed for the horses and of course the water too. Often it was very exhausting.

Wednesday, **March 29, 1944** - Alfred's birthday. We congratulated him real early and again at 6 AM , we moved on. The road was hilly and also it was very cold. Little by little the sun came through the clouds. We were traveling to Vulkaneschty. Just before Vulkaneschty, we had to go down a steep hill. We never thought to make it down alive. At 1PM we finally had made it. Now we were looking for shelter but come on something else. Now what is it? We found wine, we were able to buy it in buckets. So we ran for our buckets. Mom was upset, since we ran after wine, instead of looking for shelter. We did find a room but the stove was not workable. The hostess was real nice though, she provided us with potatoes. We slept good all night. Aunt T. became ill there. We were quartered together with aunt N. and aunt H.

Thursday, **March 30, 1944** - We are still in Vulkaneschty. The commanding agents set up their tents real close by us. We found out that we were to stay here a few days. The weather is supposed to be nice, perhaps! We slept well. We even were able to wash up and clean up the wagon.

Friday, **March 31, 1944** - A really wonderful day. Aunt T. sews a dress for the hostess. Erna and I patched items. Fr. provided us company. Here and there we could read a bit. The sun shone beautiful and warm. We were deeply involved in our work when we heard: 'thank you my ladies.' And who was that? It was H. J. he took a picture. In the evening, at moonshine, we were singing and then went to bed.

Saturday, **April 1, 1944** - The weather changed rather drastically. It is all dreary. Today there was an accident. Eduard, the commander's driver and Erhard, his friend, played with a gun. It was loaded and suddenly there was a shot fired and Erhard was wounded. Right away, he was brought to the hospital in Galatz. A & H visited us for a change and helped chase away the blues. The weather grew worse in the evening - with rain and snow storms. During the night we heard lot's of motorcar noise.

Sunday, **April 2, 1944** - The weather got worse - damp and cold. Now we were freezing in our cold rooms. Against our hostess's orders not to heat , we went and got straw and made a fire. The stove heated up quite well and the room soon was warm. Around noon time, as we looked out the windows, we saw a row of cars with German soldiers standing around. Actually they were tanks. One soldier came in and asked if he could warm himself. Of course we permitted him to do so. He brought his radio with him. Now we had music. Later, the lieutenant also came. It was very cozy regardless of the stormy weather outside. At 4 PM, the soldiers made coffee and the soldiers' coffee was very tasty. The soldiers were happy to be together with Germans and spend a few happy moments.

Monday, **April 3, 1944** - Right after we got up, the radio was turned on. Wonderful music. The soldiers were to leave at 12 noon. We spent the time rather comfortable and we sang a lot. It was noon. The Lieutenant held a departure speech and it was very touching . All eyes showed tears. At the conclusion, we sang a few more songs: 'Im schoensten Wiesengrunde, Kein schoener Land, Ade Zur Nacht and 'Nun ade Du mein lieb Heimatland. Then we accompanied our guests to their vehicles.. The motors started and with 'Auf Wiedersehen' and waving good by , they left. It was nice. Will we see each other again?

Tuesday, **April 4, 1944** - The weather got a little better. We spent the day doing chores.

Wednesday, **April 5, 1944** - The weather is even better. It is about time. Today, we went and got the repaired shoes from the cobbler. Again, we cleaned the wagon, washing it good. The next few days troops , that were stationed in Hoffnungstal, is supposed to come through here. We shall see what they have to report.

Thursday, **April 6, 1944** - The day passed quietly. Tomorrow, the troops are to arrive. I am wondering. In the evening we had been at the command station.

Friday, **April 7, 1944** - Today we were to gather feed for the horses. But everything seemed to drag out. Then we met G. & Heinz, soldiers of the troops we were expecting. We were happy to see each other but they did not know nothing much good to report. After a long running around we finally got feed for our horses.

Saturday, **April 8, 1944** - Real early today , G & Heinz came to say good bye - Where will they all wind up at? Today, I was at the command base - we had to give our money at a collection post. Our money was to go into a savings. We were not to travel with lots of money.

Sunday, **April 9, 1944** - Easter and Rita's birthday. (a young niece) We got up early in the morning to prepare a Easter basket for Rita. I colored an egg, of course a raw one. How happy the child was as she saw the basket. It is nice to give a child pleasure. Then we baked some chrustiki. After lunch, we went to uncle G and aunt Mila to wish a happy Easter. There we had good wine again. At 4 PM we had to go home since we had invited miss Hild. for Coffee. Quickly we made coffee and set the table with our 'wonderful dishes'. It was nice anyway and everyone enjoyed.

Monday, **April 10, 1944** - In the next few days we are supposed to move on, however it is uncertain to where. It is terrible to live with such uncertainty. On top of that the closeness of the front. Live is getting harder every day. As we left home, we assumed only to have to use horse and wagon until Galatz. Now the situation looks dim. The Rumanians will not let us go through there no more. What else is waiting for us?

Tuesday, **April 11, 1944** - We are still in Vulkaneschty! It is terrible. Now we have to sell several of our things or trade things, to buy feed for the horses. Also, we need different things. And we also need Rumanian money. The Rumanians use our situation to their advantage and ask prices as they want. It is all so expensive. Treatment by the Rumanians could be better. But we are satisfied with our hosts very much. Our commander left for Galatz today, but he still has not returned. We wonder what news he will bring, good or bad. By chance we overheard at the command bas that Hoffnungstal is occupied again by the Russians. Now our homeland is back in the hands of the Bolsheviks. It is so sad, especially thinking about that spot of the earth. Will we ever get to see it again? Yes, these are questions, one can hardly answer.

Wednesday, **April 12, 1944** - the commander still has not returned from Galatz. Everyone is worried about him. Hopefully nothing happened, if he can't be with us anymore, things will be bad. But we want to hope still and cannot always think of the worst.. everything has to turn out OK. We are satisfied with the weather. Today, German soldiers passed through Vulkaneschty again. In the evening we stood at the gate and watched all the happenings. One soldier approached us and asked for the school house. We showed it to him. He left, came right back though without seeming to have done anything. He stopped talking to us and we talked about a lot, mostly about our homeland. We invited the soldier to eat supper with us. He was very happy and thankful for that. Aunt M and aunt H. went to uncle G. to buy some wine. A soldier helped to carry the wine, he was a Swabian. So, we sat comfortably gathered and had a good evening. It was a nice change in our 'gypsy' life, which soon will not be enticing anymore. We heard music playing in the neighborhood and went there together and even danced a little.

Thursday, **April 13, 1944** - Early this morning our acquaintance came to see us again. He relieved me of part of my chores, especially the feeding of the horses. He also help with fetching the water, because we had lots of laundry to do. We washed his things along with ours and as thanks he gave us three sets of leather soles. It was a nice present and will be of use to us sometime. In the afternoon we looked at photographs from home. He thought our home was so much like his. He told us about his life. His wife and daughter got killed in an air attack in 1942. That was sad and hard to bear. After supper we wanted to sing again. The Swabian and some comrades came by and brought an old accordion. We sang and played all kinds of folklore songs. It was touching. We were all moved. Our acquaintance had to leave and is really hard for him, especially while we were singing Daheim (at home) We sang so many old songs that evening and it would have been even nicer if we could have been doing that at home. It was not meant to be. And yet we helped ourselves over a lot of difficult hours by singing.

Friday, **April 14, 1944** - At 10AM the order came that we had to move on a 2PM. We were to go to Polinei. Now, everything was quickly packed again. Our friend helped. He also mad a chain and gave us several tools. Also Major M came to see that we had all we needed. He brought us sugar and a blanket and different other items. We already started to leave at 1PM. When we arrived in Polinei, we found a place to stay. We were pleased but it did not last long, since the Rumanians wanted us out of the village, even though the villages was almost empty. That was something to look forward to! It started to get dark. We did not make it all the way out of the village. There were ditches over ditches and we did not want to risk to lose our wagon. We stopped at a clear spot. Many from Hoffnungstal were there. We unharnessed our horses, fed them and ate supper. After that we

prepared for our night camp. That was a night. We could not think about sleeping - it rained and we were glad when morning came.

Saturday, **April 15, 1944** - We had to move on to get out of the village. We rested just outside the village to await new orders. What else will come? The weather is bad. At 10 Am we were moving on going toward Moskoway. Rita became very ill along the way and almost died. There was no doctor. We believed almost that she would never open her eyes again. But thank God, she made it. Shortly before the village, we had to pass over a high mountain. The third horse had to be unharnessed and I was leading it. Erna and Dagi lead the others. My horse tore lose and I had to try to catch him. After a long chase I did. Erna had a hard time with her horse, but she was able to manage with great effort. Dagi though was out of luck. Her horse tore lose and kicked her in the left eye. It was pretty bad. After we found a place to settle, we went to look for our sister, nurse Erna. We had to run for seven miles to find her, and naturally she came with us right away. She had to immunize Dagi and bandage the wound. . She promised to come back the next day to check. We slept pretty good, Alfred watched the wagon.

Sunday **April 16, 1944** - Today the Rumanians celebrate Easter. The weather is wonderful, everything is green and it is so quiet and peaceful as if there really was peace. Since we did not travel today, we rested up on a meadow. From our hosts we received cake (Pascha). During the night I had to sleep outside. Around 10:00pm bombs exploded near us, it sounded like thunder. It did not last long and I slept well anyway.

Monday, **April 17, 1944** - Today, the trek from Grossliebental came through. We met aunt Rosa and the children and we were able to talk to them for a little while. They were going to Kahul to cross a bridge there. What is supposed to become of us now? When can we leave? It is about to drive us crazy. The treatment by the Rumanian authority side is really lacking. But there is nothing we can do. Dagi is still in bed (on the wagon) but she looks a lot better. Rita is completely well again.

Tuesday, **April 18, 1944** - Today's order - back again to Vulkaneschty. Nuts!! But we go, there is no other choice. We did not get there though only to Caranos. Here the Rumanians stopped us, they won't let us go any further. Soon we had to stop here and stop there, bouncing back and forth as a ball. We felt like fools. Erna and aunt T. rode with the army car to Vulkaneschty to find out what is going on. We slept in the wagon and the night was very cold.

Wednesday, **April 19, 1944** - We are still setting here on the meadow and are not allowed to move on. Absurd! I wanted to write to J. but because of all this excitement, I could not. At 1:pm we received the order to move on. Every was happy since everyone wanted to leave quickly. There needs to be some strategy again with this traveling. In Vulkaneschty we looked for aunt T and found her. 4 km outside of Vulkaneschty we spent the night in the woods. Before bedtime we had a nightcap of Apricot liquor. During the night our horse got lose but I was able to catch it again. Even at that we got some sleep but it was really cold.

Thursday, **April 20, 1944** - At 5 am in the morning we were moving again heading toward the Danube river. The weather got better, it is nice and warm and the Danube looked so wonderful ahead of us. At 5pm we arrived at the village Kartal. This village lies directly at the Danube river. We were finding shelter with really nice people. Slept outside during the night.

Friday, **April 21, 1944** - We are still here. When we are to move on is still uncertain. We are supposed to be shipped across the Danube river and then travel

to Belgrade. 700 more km , if that is true. Is that possible? It is an eerie idea. Today we were pretty busy, we washed clothes and took bath to get rid of all that dirt. Tonight, Alfred had to sleep outside.

Saturday, **April 22, 1944** - We had to get our wheel re-ringed. That was a hard nut to crack. Nowhere did a smith have any coals. We had to sit around all day. After a lot of begging , we finally got it done. We paid for it with one of Alfred's shirts. As soon as we got back with the wheels, we had to harness and leave the yard. The village Kassel was being sheltered there now. Now, we had to find a place again. We finally found a yard that did not indicated of having any refugees, we just pulled in without asking. During the night I had to stand guard at the wagon. I heard a moaning. What could it be? It was our horse Red (horse) having a foal. All additional growths was supposed to have been taking care of but I could not harm that cute little thing. We named the foal Heidi.

Sunday **April 23, 1944** - Erna's birthday. We congratulated her real early with a little song. The day was right beautiful. Aunt H. and I went again to sell some of our things. The evening was right nice too. We sang a lot. Alfred had to sleep outside.

Monday **April 24, 1944** - Something woke me already at 4 am and I went outside at once. Oh, goodness! Our two horses were gone - what are we going to do now? We still had one horse and the foal. We reported the theft to our team leader. We looked all over the village but there was no sign of the horses. We even reported the loss of the horses to the command agency. They arranged for a search as well but to no avail. So the day passed with excitement , but we did have a little sunshine, I got 6 letters from J.

Tuesday **April 25, 1944** - the first thought while waking up was 'the horses'. We went and searched again - but no horses to been found anywhere. What are we going to do? How are we going to move one? Theses were questions we kept having in our minds. In the afternoon we went to the command agency to inquire about the horse situation. The commander was in good mood and had coffee made. While drinking coffee, we had a good conversation. We were to get new horses if ours were not fund by morning

Wednesday **April 26, 1944** - Again, everyone looked for our horses - but to no avail - they stayed disappeared. We can thank our host for that...he most likely flogged them somewhere. During the night that the horses were stolen, he had prepared to go fishing. Alfred possibly slept a deep sleep and he could easily have taken the horses with him. Today, the first wagons went across the Danube river. First over a bridge, built by German pioneers, the on a ferry. We went back to the command station because of the horse problem. The trek leader of the Kassel community received the order to provide us with horses. First, he refused, then he brought one stallion. After a long hard fuss, he gave us a second horse, another Stallion. We could barely handle horses - but to handle two stallions? We complained to the commander and one stallion was exchanged . Thank Goodness, we had horses again. We tried to get acquainted with the technique to cross . We became acquainted with some pioneers who helped us with ropes and other things. In rained during the night.

Thursday **April 21, 1944** - This morning the crossing of the Danube river started. In order of Colony and groups. Our Trek leader Mr. L is from now on our constant companion. A German soldier from the Ostmark is accompanying us across the Danube river. He helped to hold the horses., the shied a lot because of fear of the water. He was especially interested in our foal Heidi. He gave us his address and

asked us to inform him. It rained. We drove through Isaccea. We spent the night in (x). We were well taken care of and the horses were under a roof and we slept well during the night. Now we were in the Dobrukscha.

Friday **April 28, 1944**. - I never thought that we had to leave already today. But it had to be. We kind of had lost ourselves. In leaving we started feeling all right. The roadway was very bad. The Romanians did not permit us to travel on the Chaussee (main streets) so we had to do with side roads. Uphill, down hill, and often we thought we had to help push the wagon. It rained constantly. We are in Cuicoova as soaked through as could be. There, we noticed, that we had lost our keys in all that excitement. Aunt Tina and I slept outside, but rather badly. We received straw for the horses. It often is a big problem to find feed for the horses.

Saturday **April 29, 1944**. - Early in the morning we moved on. The weather had not gotten better. This type of life is just terrible. If the traveling would just come to an end! What else will come about?. The road was terrible and on top of that the constant rain and the mud. We are all wet. At 4 PM we arrived in Sarai. The hosts are friendly. I am so tired that I just want to go to sleep. We had the horses in the barn. Aunt T and I slept again in the wagon.

Sunday **April 30, 1944** - At 10 am we had to move on. After we traveled for a while, we realized that Albert's jacket was gone. He ran back. Even I stayed back and waited for him. But he did not find it. The hosts swore that they did not see any, such a mess! They lock everything in front of us but they steal from us as they can! Now we really stayed back. All the wagons had passed us. We just walked on. It again rained and we were wishing for the sun to shine - but what good were all the wishes, we had to walk regardless. Suddenly we heard a car. It was our trek leader. He had mercy on us and took us along. It helped us arrive at the same time as did the others. We found a stay with a Rumanian. He was mean. He tried to get our horse and foal for a butter sandwich. We had to seek protection from a Rumanian officer. The room we slept in was as crowded as herring that it seemed to drip harder inside as outside. *

Monday **May 1, 1944** - Early in the morning, we moved on. The rain stopped but it was cold and windy. We were to drive to Tschorna Woda . About 3 km from there we stopped in a village. But we were not allowed to enter this village. That was terrible! If only it was warm, then it would be half as bad. But we did not get discouraged. We set up the stove and we cooked, since we did not know when we would move on. In the evening, we looked for shelter where we at least could sleep. And someone had to stay with the wagon . The son and daughter of our hosts knew a little bit German. They served us pancakes. They also had a portable gramophone, which they played. We slept great.

Tuesday **May 2, 1944** - The day after tomorrow, we are to move on. Who wants to bake can. We also went to wash at the Danube river, because everything was dirty from the journey. We also cleaned up the wagon and repacked several things. It was a big task. Doing all that, we found our peas, and the next day we had pea soup. The weather today is even better than it was yesterday. I stayed at the wagon by myself. I did not sleep well.

Wednesday **May 3, 1944** - The weather was beautiful! Finally sun shine! We sold a shirt for 300 Lei, since we needed money. Had to buy nails for hoofs (horse shoes). We were to get food and also feed for the horses. Finally, in the evening the supplies arrived from Tschorna Woda. How interesting though, People and animals got the same nourishment - OATS. We all slept outside this evening.

Thursday **May 4, 1944** - We were leaving at 10 AM. It was quite a commotion. But thank God, we were getting out of this place. The weather was real good. We traveled through Tschorna Woda. In the evening we arrived in X. We slept in rooms.

Friday **May 5, 1944** - Today it rained again. After tomorrow it is to go across the Bulgarian border. How will the Bulgarians greet us? The road was a bit better today. In the afternoon we finally got sunshine. During this night, I slept again in the wagon.

Saturday **May 6, 1944** - We headed out real early. The weather today is beautiful. It also was nice to travel and finally we came onto a paved street. We thought to be able to stay in the city X but regretfully the Rumanians did not allow that again. About 3 Kilometers outside of town we had to stop in the middle of the street. Tomorrow we were to cross the Rumanian Bulgarian border. We had to get rid of the Lei and thus we drove back to town with our trek leader to buy food and of course, bread. The weather got worse - very windy. We slept in the wagon, but not real well, since the horses fought all night long.

Sunday **May 7, 1944** - Already at 6 AM we were on our feet. The wagons were decorated with green items, since everything had to look good. At 7:30 we crossed the border. In Sylistra, the border city, we were well received. The people gave us bread, cookies, fruit and what ever else they had to give. There were especially many onions to get.. The roadway is good. We traveled until Poljana. Here we rested. We slept outside, since the weather was good. The crossing of the border also was filmed.

Monday **May 8, 1944** - We stayed all day in Poljana, since we had to wash and bake. Also, the wagon had to be straitened. At 10 AM there was a gathering. Our trek leader held a speech, advising how to conduct ourselves in Bulgaria. In the evening, after all the work we had performed, we were exhausted. Today we were together again with the Doblars, our neighbors from home.

Tuesday **May 9, 1944** - Today we are moving on. The roadway is good, it makes it easier on our horses. It even is easier on us and we can change drivers. Us young ones always had to walk. It was hard at the beginning. We all had terrible muscle cramps but in the end we all got used to it, but still it was very tiring indeed. Today, the weather was not so good. One time it was cold then it was warm. Today, we traveled 40 km and wound up in Tutraken. Right away we cooked and took care of our horses and then we all went to bed. To get feed for the horses was often harder than to get food for us.

Wednesday **May 10, 1944** - Today, nothing special was happening. At least the road was better, but how often must one wish to have an end to this traveling. When might that be?

Thursday **May 11, 1944** - At 4 AM we were on the move again. When I write that we leave at four that does not mean we got up at four and left. Oh no, one had to get up at two to feed the horses, since they had to get fed and often it meant we had to do without coffee or tea and started out with just a piece of bread in the hand. We could not do that with the horses, they had to perform a difficult task and that made them priority. Travel was difficult today but the nature and landscape was wonderful. Soon, steep ravines, then again nicely planted fields. Changing constantly. But it was beautiful! We also met many people. If there only was more sunshine. Everything would be twice as nice. Surely there would be a different mood. The weather is not that great but we can be content. Mainly, it is

not raining. When it rains, one has to dress so heavily that one gets soaked and walking is stressful. One would think wearing a ton of clothes. The roads here are, as I mentioned a few times before, considerably better as they were in the Dobruzscha. At 6 PM we passed through the Bulgarian city Russae. It was a beautiful, clean city and looked like a jewelry case. Everywhere it was green and the people were friendly. Right outside of the city we settled for the night. Quickly we made tea and prepared for our night quarters, since we all had gotten really tired. Even if I do not mention it all the time, but naturally, the horses had to be fed and watered.

Friday **May 12, 1944** - As we were waking up, we realized that the weather would be great. And it was so. The sun was shining - it was just great. Today we are staying at our resting place. Today we had to do laundry again. Mama and aunt T. went to wash at the Danube river. The rest of us stayed at the wagon and cleaned up. They sent a boy to tell us to come to the river and that the water was warm and one could go swimming. Quickly we went - We washed our hair and bathed - it was wonderful. Besides that we had a sun and air bath as well. That evening we received feed for the horses again. Thank God! When one is so far away from a town it is so difficult to find feed and often one has to walk several kilometers to get some. As so often before, we slept outside.

Saturday **May 13, 1944** - The weather has worsened, but it doesn't matter, warm weather, cold weather, we have to move on and on toward our destiny. Where might it be? Today, we traveled 35 km. Now of course, we had to walk along side the wagon. Oh well, there is nothing to change that. We again slept outside under the sky; we had to watch our horses so they would not get stolen again.

Sunday **May 14, 1944** - The weather got a bit better. If it only would get warmer, so that we could take off our coats while walking! The roadway is hilly. To drive up the hill is not that difficult, but going down hill is catastrophic for us. Our horses do not want to slow. I do not remember exactly where it happened. It was also at a steep hill. Halfway down there was a curve . Even before we attempted to go downhill, we prepared ourselves. We attached a chain or ropes to the back end of the wagon and attached a board on which I stood to act as breaks. The third horse was not harnessed and led by my cousin while my mother sat on the wagon to lead it. My brother and my aunt each lead one of the horses in front of the wagon. But nothing seemed to help. As we entered the curve, I could not break anymore and my aunt and brother could not hold the horses back, they went faster and faster downhill and the horses could not make the curve. They kept going straight, right toward a ditch and slamming full force into it. We thought that all was lost and fearfully approached the wagon ,worrying about mother. But just like a miracle, nothing had happened to her, mother had scooted onto the wagon shaft, she must have had a special guardian angel. Even the wagon was all right and its load too, not even the ropes had broken. We could not thank God enough for this mercy. On further downhill roadways, our group leaders lead the wagons or others that knew how to lead wagons better than we understood to do. Today, we traveled 35 km. We rested in Karamanov. We slept in a nice people's house, but one of us stayed with the wagon since we had become more cautious.

Monday **May 15, 1944** - Real early we were on our way again. The weather as well as the road were better again. Yesterday, when I described the accident, I forgot to mention that at that time we still had the foal. Since it could not walk these long distances, it was riding on the wagon. It was not easy either. When all this happened, we decided to sell the foal. The next day there was an opportunity to do so. There was a Bulgarian who was in need of a foal since his had died. He was

not willing to give us the price I asked. I wanted 500 Lew and he was only willing to give 200. I let him march along side us for about a few hours and when we arrived at our next stop for rest, we had agreed at a price of 350 Lew. My mother was scolding, since I did not sell it right away for 200 Lew. I believed that if he really wanted it he would pay a bit more. I was right. Either of us had to give in somewhat, but this seemed fair. Now I had additional work to do, I had to milk the mare. The first several days, she was missing the foal a lot and I felt sorry for her, but there was no other way. Because of the heavy work she had to perform, she soon forgot and her milk was slowly seizing. Today, we traveled 46 km, to Tatarin. We were billeted with a poor but very nice lady. Aunt H. found billet at the neighbors; there were boys and girls. They took Dagi and Edith along for a walk, Irene and Oscar Dobler also went along. The youth in Bulgaria walks almost every evening and it is called 'Dwischenie'. They became quite amused. Us others fixed supper, ate and went to bed. Our hostess had given us white bread. Alfred had to sleep on the wagon, all of us others slept in a room. The horses once again were in a stable.

Tuesday **May 16, 1944** - Moved on at 6 AM. The woman had given us all kinds of things to take along. It was rather cold as we were leaving, but it got warmer and warmer, at last it was rather hot. We really got warmed through for a change. At 12:30, we arrived at X. Now we want to write letters and then go to the Danube river to bathe. I am really looking forward to it. We found billet with real nice people. Usually we were treated real well by the Bulgarians. Mostly there was bean soup and Memalyga (a thick puree made of cornmeal) Also, they served garlic with each meal. Potatoes were very rare. The Bulgarians are a busy people. They work anyplace where ever they are, especially the women. Either they knit or spun wool, even while riding to the fields. This night we slept in special buildings, if one can call them that. It was a 'Kisch'. We had them at home too, one stored corn in them. It was a shed made of wood and was on stilts. As we were ready to go to bed, the Doblens were with us too, their son Oscar came riding around on a donkey. We had a show, without have to get tickets. Mrs. Dobler was scolding but the rest of us were quite amused. There are masses of donkeys in Bulgaria. This is their main transportation.

Wednesday, **May 17, 1944** - At 7 Am we moved on. The road was much better. Surely some time we will reach our destination. But it probably will take a long time. We were to get supplies in Nikopol. We stopped about 3 km away from Nikopol in a small Bulgarian village. Most citizens of this village were very unfriendly. They did not even want to give us water. But there were exceptions like anywhere. Alfred got acquainted with a Bulgarian and was invited by him to come to eat. He brought home nuts and dried fruit. The Bulgarian army supplied us with bean soup. At the wagon, mom had backed Kuechla (pancakes). In the afternoon the food rations were beans, preserved food, butter, cheese, flour and even pickles. For the horses we received barley, corn, straw and hay.

Thursday, **May 18, 1944** - Today we left at 10 AM. As we arrived at our destiny for the day, it started to rain. We had to sleep outside. Thank God, the rain did not last long. Nevertheless, we did not sleep good since the horses fought all night long.

Friday, **May 19, 1944** - At 6 AM we started out again. Earlier, when we crawled out of bed, it was pretty cold. But the sun seemed to want to please us. She climbed higher and higher and warmed us. At last, when we arrived in K, it was pretty hot. We took off our coats. How nice it is to be able to walk without a coat. The countryside here, it is so beautiful. We were at the Danube river again, it is nice

there. We are often reminded of the waltz songs: "*Donau Wellen*" (Danube waves) or "*An der schoenen blauen Donau*" (at the wonderful blue Danube river). Who of us would have believed that we would get to see the Danube river and this wonderful region? The trip and the task we are now performing is not easy, actually it is very difficult. Yet regardless, all that one experiences is a nice memorandum. These days, weeks and months will always be in our minds. Soon we get to bathe again and then we will sleep outside.

Saturday, **May 20, 1944** - Already at 5 Am we were leaving. The night had passed with very little sleep. Yesterday evening we had sung a lot. We sing almost every evening. Often, boys and girls gather here with us and we sing in trios and quartets, because singing helps ease heavy and sad moods, which appear often with us. Because, "*where one sings, one happily belongs, bad people do not know songs*". The trail was again rather hilly today. We traveled 35 km. It was very hot and hard to endure. This is terrible, one time cold and one time hot. We traveled until Galowa, where we were billeted and to stay tomorrow as well, since we should and had to bake. We slept in a straw storage shed. It looked as if it was going to rain, but then it cleared and we could sleep.

Sunday, **May 21, 1944** - Daxis birthday - we went to congratulate at a reasonable time. For once again a beautiful Sunday. But first we had to bake and wash. After that we were to have a comfortable Sunday afternoon. We had brought yeast from home but our baking experience was quite interesting. The Bulgarians did not have an oven. Here they bake in the yard on a concrete slab. They made a fire with straw, then when the concrete was rather hot, the bread dough was put on it and it was covered with a metal sheet and on top of that straw was burned again. Even though this was unusual and new, the bread turned out well. At first we naturally were skeptical. After lunch we all took a nap. How wonderful it was to sleep under God's sky in the warm sunshine. For 5PM in the afternoon, we were invited for Daxis birthday party. We had coffee, honey bread and cookies. Of course it was not like at home. There was a big spread put on the ground and the cups and glasses were put there and the baked goods as well. We all sat on our rear and happily celebrated the birthday. In the evening, the young ones went for a walk. (Dwischenie). We slept again in the straw storage shed, but pretty good.

Monday, **May 22, 1944** - Today is the wedding anniversary of our dear grandparents! And Oscar 's birthday. We were leaving at 6 Am but had a chance to eat breakfast. When we met Oscar, we full heartily congratulated him. Regretfully, we could not congratulate our grandparents. If we only knew where they were. Would they still be on the road or would they already be at the destination? Today, it is 59 years, since they were united by god for their whole life. Who is able to go hand in hand through their whole life, to share happiness and sorrow, can be feel grateful, regardless of all this hardship. May it be god's will that our dear grandparents may celebrated their diamond anniversary next year. We hope and pray for that.

Our Lord and father has guided them so far and surely will continue to do so. In him we trust! "*You have the roads of all roads, you don't lack resources, your work is all blessing, your walk is pure light. No one can hinder your creation, your work won't rest, when you want to please your children, you shall!*" The weather was again beautiful. But as we reached our day's destination, it became rather cold. A wind started up that soon developed into a storm. We could not even make a soup. We were freezing terribly. We slept outside but it was pretty warm under the covers.

Tuesday, **May 23, 1944** - We left at 7 AM, but only accomplished a distance of 12 km. But what a bad 12 km's. The weather was terribly bad - a sandstorm - one could hardly see the road. Because of the warm i.e. hot days just before, our faces were burned so bad that the skin was peeling and that was painful. On top of that the sand blowing onto the sensitive skin was almost unbearable. Nevertheless, we were pleased to get closer to our destination. The Bulgarian police assigned us to the appropriate farms. As we entered a farm yard, the hosts were terrible. It was impossible to stay there, the hostess came out with a stick, chasing us off. (For that she had to house four families at once a bit later.) We told her off in German, Russian and some mixed Bulgarian language. We dropped words, we normally would not think of. Our Alfred left the farmyard right away and found us a place to stay. The hostesses there were very nice and dear. We were moved to tears as to how nicely they received us. We did not have to look after the horses, they led them into a barn right away. We were to rest from travel. Our hostesses (there were two) right away brought us water to wash up. It was really nice to get spoiled a bit. When we wanted to cook lunch, they would not let us help. We did not have to do anything, and they would take care of us as long we had to stay there. As usual, we had bean soup and Mamalyga. I went to look for aunt Hilde and found her not far from us. As I came back, a young lady led me to another house, there were two houses on this farm. One was just like most houses with an open chimney and a three-legged stand to cook on, but this was quite different. We were totally amazed, after this long journey to see a nicely furnished room. Beds, covered with white sheets, hallways carpeted, couches with cushions, pictures on the walls, just absolutely marvelous! Nowhere did we find anything like this! In the evening we went with this young lady to see her friends. One of them was a teacher who spoke some German and we were able to correspond a little. We sang and played and even danced. Bulgaria is not at war, thank goodness. We even practiced a national Bulgarian dance. We slept in real beds, exceptional.

Wednesday, **May 24, 1944** - The village, we came to yesterday is named Kosloduy. This village is one of the largest in Bulgaria. It is 7-8 km in length. It resembles a small city. Our hostess is a mail carrier. Today is graduation - a real national celebration. Already early in the morning one heard the orchestra play. We were invited by our Bulgarian acquaintances to join the festivities. In the morning we went to the school, where people of all ages already were dancing. After watching the dancing for a while we decided to go for a walk to look around the village. One of the Bulgarian young ladies explained a lot to us. Then we visited our trek leader. After that we went home. There we had to wash. At 4 PM, we went back to the school and Irotschka and I danced along to a national dance. We arrived at the house being tired but we had to get the wagon straitened, to have it clean for tomorrow's departure. We did not have to worry about the horses nor our meals today. That was great. We went to bed very late

Thursday, **May 25, 1944** - At sunrise we were leaving again. Our hostesses presented us with a bouquet of flowers and fresh baked bread at our departure. It was touching. We thanked whole hearted for their loving hospitality, really, for every thing good and dear. We, naturally, wished all them the best. A pity, that we could not eat the bread, it was all doughy, not baked long enough. The voyage went to the next supply city - Lom. Regretfully we had to stay outside here again, since the advance trek was not finished with their work. How nice it would have been if we could have found billet, since it got rather cold again. But the road way was good and we can be satisfied. We wanted to go to bed real early. As soon we were under our covers, it started to rain. We then looked for a place to protect

from the rain. There were flees though. Did hardly sleep during the night for catching flees.

Friday, **May 26, 1944** -Today, we had to get supplies. Wonder what we shall find? At 11 AM, the supplies arrived. We had to get this and that. And to top it all, our wheel was broken again and we had to take it to the smith shop. At least, we did not have to wait for very long. We had to find feed for the horses, which is always our biggest worry. Hope they have some wheat chaffs, hay or straw. Was able to find some oats, corn and barley after all. After this chore, the wagon had to be cleaned up. Also, we had to go into the city to shop for different items. Today we received very good army rations -32 different items, from the smallest piece of candy to flour, bread, different lunch meats, butter etc., more or less what one can use. In the meantime it got late and we crawled under our bedcovers. Just before we, of course, sang a few songs. Naturally, we slept outside.

Saturday, **May 27, 1944** - The distribution was not yet completed by this morning , therefor we stayed until the afternoon . Now the wagons were prepared for departure. Soon, soon we will be at our destination. It would not be so bad if we did not have to constantly worry about the horses. They let one grow gray hair soon. But we do need the horses. But soon we should have succeeded. We moved on in the afternoon. We passed through the city Lom. The city itself was very nice. Too bad that we could not stay any longer. We rested outside a village. Here we also shall spend the night. As we crawled into our 'beds', the moon lovingly looked at us through the trees. And many, many stars glistened in the sky. Which star I wonder is mine? What will he bring me? Half asleep, we hummed the song " *The moon has risen, the golden stars glisten in the sky, bright and clear.*"

Sunday, **May 28, 1944** - Today is whit sun ! We never would have thought to be on the road around this time. At 5 AM, we were on the road again. Today, it is rather cold again. Can't wait for it to get really warm again. Toward evening though, it was quite nice. We traveled until Vidin. We wound up on a highway which was surrounded by water on each side. Quickly, we prepared supper and ate. To built a stove was not too hard to do. As I remember, I already told about that. The lake we stopped at was right warm and we could not resist to swim. How nice it was to splash in the water. For a change, I got to sleep in the wagon. Mom, Aunt Tina, Irotschka and Alfred bedded down next to the lake banks, since there was no other place available.

Monday, **May 29, 1944** - Alfred almost fell into the water during the night, that is how close the sleeping quarters were to the water. At 8 AM, we arrived at Vidin. There we were helped onto ferries and transported across the Danube river. The weather was great. The fare across the Danube river was very nice, it lasted 45 minutes. German soldiers were helping us all during the time of crossing. Boys and girls gathered and sang folklore songs. Only to fast did the trip on the ferry go by and we had to get off. Too bad that we could not ride the ferry like this to Vienna. Now we are again in Rumania. We came through a city and outside of this city, we rested. Today we were to get more supplies. Now it is getting to be too much. Our wagon is too small, where shall we put it all, Suddenly, at 5 PM, we received orders to move on. The Rumanians will not let us rest here. Terrible. We drove 6 km further to another village. We were not allowed to enter the farm yards. We had to bed down in the street, amidst the biggest dirt.

Tuesday, **May 30, 1944** - today we only advanced 12 km. The Rumanians dictated our travel plans again now. It was awful. It took us 6 and ½ hours to make the 12 km and reach our days destination. We had to stand more than we were moving.

In the village it was difficult to find a stay. There were no woods and we were not allowed to stay on the roads because of enemy planes. The citizens were not very friendly either. After searching for a long time we finally found a spot. Standing around in the heat was terrible. We almost got fried - skin was peeling off our faces. Later, we got a little lucky though, our hosts were very friendly. We were able to wash clothes and bathe for a change. Since there was a baking oven in this farmyard, we decided to back us a late whit cake. In the evening one of our horses became ill. We were worried. We poured medicine down the horse. Hopefully it will be all right. It would be terrible if something happened to it. Thank, God, during the night it was doing better and, in the morning, all was fine.

Wednesday, **May 31, 1944** - Already at 4 Am we were leaving. And I had not slept in the night because of the horse. One almost falls asleep on the road, while walking. Today we traveled 26 km, well we walked. The journey went well. We were housed with very nice people. It was my turn again to seek feed for the horses. In the Street a lady approached me and took me along. She gave me good straw, mixed with wheat chaff and told me to come back later in the evening to get more feed for the journey. That was nice of her. In the evening, aunt Tina and I went back. This Lady was very friendly and even served us some pancakes. We received two sacks of feed. Naturally, before we left, we thanked her gratefully. Also, we went to see the trek leader to find out when we were to move on. He was trying to feed us a tale. He suggested, that the roadway would be so bad, that we had to take of a wheel to be able to advance on such a narrow road. Of course, we did not believe a word of it. There were some though that believed it. At 10 PM, we went to bed.

Thursday, **June 1, 1944** - we were leaving at 5 AM. We always have to leave right early to be at our destination by 8 or 9, because of enemy attack probability. Naturally, when needing to leave at 5 Am, one had to get up about two hours earlier to feed and water the horses. Also one had to prepare breakfast. The bedding has to be rolled up and packed onto the wagon. Today's journey was terrible again, our wagon tent does not want to hold up. We are out of nails to secure it. Again and again, we had to pull the old nails, straiten them and reuse them. This posed a great hardship on us, day after day. Reaching our destination, the horses were put on the pasture. We stayed on the street, under the trees. Of course, we had to camouflage our wagons. Now, we had to search for water. To our dismay, the local people turned off the fountains. Finally, after searching a very long time, we did find water. We had to stand in line for and then had to carry the water for 3 km to get back to the wagon. That was really sad. While waiting for water our wagon was reorganized to hold more things again. After lunch, we napped a little. We barely had laid down, when our command brought the pleasing news that we were within 200 km of our final destination. Just not to have to travel too far anymore that was our greatest wish. In the evening, young and old gathered again, and we sang a lot. At 10 PM we crawled under our covers.

Friday, **June 2, 1944** - At 5 AM, we were leaving. Our wheel broke down while on the road. Just as if we needed that. The road was full of rocks. Now, we even had to borrow 300 lei to get our wheel fixed. We stopped at a smith shop, but this smith had less tools than we had. We had to bring our tool box, This smith does not even have coals but made a fire with straw to heat the rim, but it worked. Within reasonable time, we were able to continue to travel. Our group leader, Reinhold Dobler, helped us along. We found shelter in some woods.. The citizens of the nearby village were very unfriendly. Did not even want to give or sell anything.. Soon we need to worry where to get feed for our horses. It is a blessing

that there ate meadows and pastures. Naturally, we were not allowed to go into strange fields without permission. But all looked the other way After our passing through, a German-Rumanian Commission will estimated damage we may have caused and reimburse the appropriate farmers.

Saturday, **June 3, 1944** - At 4 AM we move on. When can we ever get our nap out? Soon, we wont even know what a real bed is. Now we realize what our soldiers have to endure, especially in war time. What kind of strains they are subjected to. Day and night outside, whether it is good or bad weather. Yes, we surely can talk about that. Today, we passed through the city Severin. This city had really be bombed, lots of ruins. In the woods, near the outskirts of the Danube river, we halted. We had to search for feed. That was difficult. There was none here. We had to climb hills just like goats to fetch some grass from under shrubbery. As we were heading back, a Rumanian woman came along, claiming that we stole grass from her. She called us German robbers and much more. Aunt Tina was able to counter her and the rest of us did keep our mouths shut either. We were once told by a Rumanian general: We, the Rumanians are gypsies, and we are proud of that. She wanted to call the police, but did not after all. We were satisfied to have let off steam against the Rumanians. In the evenings, we were able to bathe and later went to the trek leader to fetch our money. Soon, soon we shall have accomplished our task.

Sunday, **June 4, 1944** - Today, we were to leave already at 3 AM, but our colony leader overslept and all of us had to wait for him. The whole trek from Hoffnungstal was included and the colony into individual groups. All had to be in order. Finally, at 4 Am we were leaving. To wait during the night was not pleasant. But the roadway was, especially around the city Orsowo. We galloped through Orsowo. The Rumanian Police was saluting. There were even many Germans. The streets through the city were of asphalt. It was a picturesque as to how our horses galloped through , proud as a Russian troika, and as if they knew that soon we would be at our destination and that they could rest then. Here we also met Ms. G. Braun (our woman leader). Outside a village, near Orsowo, we set up quarters for the night. We received supplies. The goal gets closer and closer.

Monday, **June 5, 1944** - Yesterday, we were told that we would have bad roadway today. But that was not so - it was suspected that there might be air attacks. The roadway itself was terrific! We did not have a nicer road so far. We had to keep a 20 meter distance from wagon to wagon. We were passing through the iron gate! A picturesque area! How many would love to see this region and are not allowed to. We were lucky to do so. Naturally, under different circumstances it would have been even more beautiful. Steeply, below u flowed the Danube river, above us there were the steep cliffs. I cannot describe how beautiful it was to see that. Real close, on the other side of the river, was Serbia; one could even see people in the hills. The sun was so bright. Just as if she wanted to make it all especially beautiful for this day and show all the beauty in a special light. But the roadway itself seemed so narrow, that two wagons could not have past at the same time. Every 100 meters, there were Rumanian posts. Nothing could happen to us. We were not allowed to enter a village. In the evening our trek leader assured us that soon we would reach our goal. Only a few more days and we had accomplished it.

Tuesday, **June 6, 1944** - left at 4 AM. We traveled 30 km. The road was fairly good. The sun was hot. We did not come to a village. Had to stay on the road, but for that there was a pasture for the horses. They could not eat enough. In the afternoon, we had to mend bedding. We also wanted to go to bathe since we camped close to the Danube river, but a Rumanian guard made us aware that we

could not swim there, since the Danube has a lot of current here. We listened. One girl went swimming anyway and almost drowned. A few men had their hands full to pull her out of the current. In the evening it seemed as it was going to rain. But it did not. During the night the moon was bright and the stars just spangled in full glamour.

Wednesday, **June 7, 1944** - We were leaving again real early today. We traveled 22 km. The weather was real nice and the road was good too. Today, there were lots of chores to do. Before we went to bed, the head of the red cross came by for a visit. He was passing through. We were rather happy to see him. He told us a lot about the northern trek across Hungary. They were to have endured a lot more than us. That was a comfort. He praised all of us, especially of the condition of our horses, which did not seem to show this long journey and its stress. He is to be with us when we are to be boarded in Jassenovo.

Thursday, **June 8, 1944** - yesterday, the leader of the Red Cross had encouraged us. Soon, we are to be at our destination. Today, we traveled 20 km. .. Only 50 km more to go and then it is it. Thank God! We can hardly wait. The road and weather were great. In the evening a big change came about. It started to pour. Lately, we did not go into any villages and today again we were stopping on the road. It was impossible to sleep on the ground, so we had to figure out something else. We were totally soaked. 5 of us had to squeeze into the wagon where there barely was room for one person. We practically we stacked on to of each other. Mom and aunt Tina, a step higher Irene and I and on to there was my brother Alfred. That was one of the worst nights - of course, we did not sleep at all. We painfully awaited the morning.

Friday, **June 9, 1944** - Since it rained hard during the night, we were not able to leave real early. Later, we were leaving anyway. The weather started clearing up and it turned nice again. Our clothes had to dry while we were walking. Right now, we are about 9 km away from the Serb boarder. After tomorrow, we shall be loaded onto a train. We had to decorate our horses and wagon with greenery and flowers. In a way it was fun doing it. We went to the Danube river again, and in the evening we received our items from the command post. Now everything is together. We sang again before going to bed. It was wonderful!

Saturday, **June 10, 1944** - We headed out at 5 AM. The road was good. At 7:30, we were crossing the Serb boarder. At 9 Am, we arrived at Jassenovo, our transfer point. Was it active here. Right away, we had to go to a de-lice station and whoever did not have any lice could well get some there since the blankets for wrap contained lice. Everything just went whoopee -do. We also received nourishment - and did not have to cook. It tasted terrific. Now we had a lot to do, since tomorrow we were to be loaded onto the trains. Now we had to unpack our wagon and try to repack our things more tightly. It is good that we were allowed to bring our things. We had to remove our roof tops from the wagons. Even though we are happy that we did not have to travel by horse and wagon anymore, it was hard to depart from all these things we had grown accustomed to for shelter during the past three months of an almost 2000 km long journey. And to the horses, who carried a heavy load, we have to say good bye today. It is sad indeed. But we are thankful to them that they faithfully pulled the wagon for us. I wonder were they will go. The horses had to be turned in and we received a receipt for that. We have to say good bye to all that had grown dear to us during this time. To the many people, we shared happiness and sorrow with, not knowing if we shall see each other again. Where destiny may take us?! Today is the parents silver anniversary - it is all so sad. It was not meant for them to be

together on this day within the circle of all loved ones. All are strewn everywhere. But where is our father? May god provide a reunion contrary to all this hardship.

Sunday, **June 11, 1944** - After breakfast, we were loaded onto the trains. Everything was rushed. We could not be fast enough. As we arrived at the trains station, enemy bombers were announced. But, thank god, it remained at alarm stage. Everything was done at 2PM. About 32 people with all their luggage were loaded into on compartment. We were stuffed like herring. Again we said good bye to all, from our wagon which was a home for three months; our horses, regardless of their behavior, brought us here nevertheless. Were will they wind up at?

Monday, **June 12, 1944** - Yesterday evening, we had good nourishment again. If it stays that way, we could live with that. We all slept well, regardless of being crowded. Late in the night, we started to move. In the midmorning, we crossed the Hungarian border. The trip went rather fast. Of course there were some stops. The weather is rather nice and calm.

Tuesday, **June 14, 1944** - Real early today we traveled through Budapest. Regretfully, we did not see much of the City. It was just around sunrise. We were traveling along the Danube river. The view was terrific. In the afternoon, we crossed the Czech border. Now we are in Czechoslovakia. This afternoon, we wrote letters wondering though if they could be sent from somewhere. It would be nice.

Wednesday, **June 15, 1944** - This morning at 7 Am we crossed the German border. Now we had arrived in the land which our ancestors left over 127 years ago to practice freedom of religion and better their living conditions in a strange country. What will this land have to offer us? How will us Germans from Russia be treated as we had been written off since just before the 2nd World War. Such questions started to appear more and more. Nobody knew the answer. Time will answer all these questions. As I write these torturing questions down, I remember the story Chadschi Munat by Leo Tolstoi, in which he talks about the heroic fight of the mountain people in the Caucasus against the czarist ruled Russia for their freedom. In his epilog to this story, Tolstoi tells the following: One day he walked across a field , which was plowed up for rest. All looked nice except in a low spot where the plow could not reach deep enough, there was a thistle left. This thistle, even though the plow and harrow may have scorned it repeatedly, still showed growth.. It looked as if a fighter, surrounded by many enemies, did not want to give up standing tall till death. And so it is, according to Tolstoi's opinion, with the freedom loving people of the Caucasus. Even if they lost their independence, in their hearts freedom lived on. Even us Germans from Russia could not be eradicated by the Czar regime nor the bolshevism. Harboring such feelings, we advanced to our destination. We would not despair not get discouraged.!

Thursday, **June 15, 1944** - Early this morning, we arrived in Pabianiza, not far from Litzmannstadt. The weather was terrible. It started pouring rain already last night and does not seem to want to stop. Right a way, we have to go to the release station. We were picked up by covered trucks, so that we would not loose any lice on the trip. We were not to come in sight until after having been treated against lice. As the procedure was done, we became real proud being transported to the train station through the city, on horse and wagon. There they stared at us as if we had come from the moon - the people thought we were black people - and walked around dressed in burlap. Possibly because we then had been called Black Sea Germans. In the afternoon, we started heading for Spatenfeld. There we were

to find our new home. Now we were loaded onto a small train and transported on. Regretfully, we still had not reached our destination! Finally, at 2:30 AM, we arrived in Turek. We left everything standing and laid directly onto the straw. That's how tired we all were.

Friday, **June 16, 1944** - At 10 AM we had breakfast. Coffee and butter sandwiches. At 12 PM, we started to travel again with horses and wagon for 30 more kilometers. Oh, those roads. We hardly could feel our bones. About 4 km away from our camp, we had to turn in our belongings at a church. We could only take with us the most necessary items. We arrived at our camp Seebreiten at 4 PM in the afternoon. There we were housed in the German House and in the School. The sleeping areas were assigned to us. As I can remember, the German House, used to be a church. We were given straw to sleep on. For supper, we had pea soup. Very timely, we laid down onto our straw beds. Here, we also met with Hoffnungstal people, who had arrived via the medical corps trek.

Saturday, **June 17, 1944** - We crawled out of the straw rather early, since people from Hoffnungstal were to visit. They informed us as to where our grandparents were and that they were in good spirits and health. Only, that they could not wait to see us. We sent our best regards, since we were not allowed at the present to leave our camp. I had to go to the kitchen to heat milk for the children. Since there was room at the school, we went there. Since the rooms were smaller, there were not as many people on one spot. We all were so tired that we longed to go to sleep. This evening we went to bed real early.

Sunday, **June 18, 1944** - Now, finally, we are done with traveling. We slept as if we were dead. The sleepless nights and the tiredness were now really coming to surface. This morning, even though not permitted, we went to visit our grandparents. We had to cross the Warthe river in a canoe. After walking for an hour, we arrived at the certain village. After a long search, we finally found our grandparents. Our reunion was such a pleasure, especially after so many months of uncertainty. Our grandparents looked rather well. Now they wanted to be with us, but it was impossible at the moment. We even did not know where we were going to be staying at. We had to cut short our visit and hurry to get back to camp before noon, so we would not be noticed missing. We took a nap in the afternoon. In the evening, we sang a lot.

Monday, **June 19, 1944** - Today is Aunt Mathilde's birthday. We congratulated real early. The camp nurse presented her with a bouquet of flowers. The weather also was wonderful. After our noon nap, we went to fetch beer and celebrated the birthday. In the evening we sang.

Tuesday, **June 20, 1944** - Today is mom's birthday. We congratulated her real early with a song. The camp nurse again brought a bouquet of flowers. But all of us are sad, dad is still missing. To overcome the morbid mood we had beer brought again and soon it got more lively. We were not to write letters, just postcards and to turn them in to the camp manager. But who would be so stupid! I had to write an extensive letter to Julius. I had to tell about our present situation and did not want to let all know. I had to smuggle now and it was fairly easy. Now there are painstaking hours of waiting for an answer from Julius. How will he react to all? This uncertainty almost flattens one. I ask myself often, what the next hours and days might bring. It did not help any to have to sit around bored at camp, with no definite work to do. Our things are still at Melkowitz, and are not allowed to go there often. Most of our time is spent with sleeping.

On **June 26, 1944** we are allowed to celebrate aunt Hilde's birthday together. On June 26, 1944, Aunt Tina and Irene were leaving for Leslau to be with relatives. What a chore it was to get all their stuff loaded on to the bus. Finally, they were in the bus and they left.. Now, we need to get out of camp. To be there for long is unbearable. Even the food became wishful thinking. Pea soup then potato soup or potato soup then pea soup.

Finally, on **June 29, 1944** we were released from the camp and arrived at a small village called Zielencin. It was a small village in the sticks, about 12 km from Seebreiten. 9 Km away from Wartha, the bus station and 13 km away from the train station. Our first impression was terrible! We stood in front of a hut, having one room, a kitchen and a pantry. (Kladowka) This is where us seven people are supposed to live. Is that possible? Yes, that is how it was. Was there another choice? Thank God, at least we had beds there and did not have to sleep on the floor. The floor was stomped clay and very damp almost wet. First, we filled the bedding with straw to at least be able to sleep good this night. So, that was the trade-off!!!