

14th September 1951

My Life Story

So completely unaware was I of a world outside my school- and family life that even the declaration of war in September 1939 failed to disturb me. I was therefore utterly staggered when one early morning the following May I beheld endless rows of well-equipped German troops marching grimly by our frontdoor. This was invasion, war, occupation - in other words - reality in its harshest form literally brought home to me.

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I do not like to recall the years following this rough awakening. They contain too much real pain and irreparable loss. Besides, my personal tribulations seem trivial when compared with the nameless sufferings this war has caused all over the world.

The facts, briefly, are these: My unenthusiastic attendance at the Medical Faculty of a formerly Austrian University was abruptly broken off and followed by a compulsory seven months' sojourn at a Nazi Youth Labour Camp. Soon after my discharge a deportation order, describing our family as 'unreliable border inhabitants' was to take us, together with a busload of equally unworthy compatriots and a minimum of luggage, to Silesia in the heart of the 'Vaterland', where, it was expected, proper environment combined with modern indoctrination methods would convert us into first rate national-socialist citizens.

We never got further than the local railway station. My father who had been suffering from a severe cold was feverish and a German doctor certified that he was in no condition to undertake the proposed journey. We were sent home - but father did not survive the shock. He died nine days later of pneumonia and heartfailure.

Mother and I never felt quite safe afterwards, but - probably due to some administrative oversight - we suffered no further interference.

Liberation came at long last and a new life seemed to begin - full of hope and promise.

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Possessed with a strong desire to contribute actively towards the war effort and make up for lost time, I took up service with the American Army and, to Mama's great sorrow and my friends' shocked disapproval, I followed the victorious troops into enemy territory. Young and inexperienced, with a fair amount of good will as my only asset, I was to learn many a lesson during my brief army career. I discovered to my dismay that our God-sent liberators and allies were not entirely exempt from human weaknesses and that our desperately hoped-for 'Free World' was wrought with imperfections.

After the-on the whole instructive-army episode I spent a few years on the staff of United Nations Specialized Agencies, with Paris and Geneva as theatre of operations. This period can be considered as largely more satisfactory.

EXPLANATORY NOTES TO EXCERPTS from “‘ my life story’ by Odette Brausch “

Odette Brausch’s wartime experiences and work for the American Liberation army:

My mother never spoke to anyone about these years of her life, except to my father, and he kept much of this knowledge to himself during his lifetime.

However he did tell us, her daughters, that she worked for the Americans as interpreter (she was proficient in 5 languages and was learning Russian) and she drove army vehicles for the U.S. forces. (My father was always very proud of the fact that she could ‘double-clutch’ which is apparently how one changes the gears in a truck).

She also kept journals or diaries (we, her daughters, have not found all of them). These do not describe the momentous events of her times and her life but do describe her feelings, thoughts and reactions.

It is significant that her journals are in English. She had developed a loathing for the German language. I believe that she chose English as the language of her diaries because it was the language of those she hoped would be the victors in the war.

She hated that the American soldiers addressed Luxembourgers in German. She says in her diary that

“some so-called American soldiers are offended by our in-born fanatic hatred of anything German.....they instinctively speak that language.....”

The disappointment that she expresses concerning her army experiences derive from the fact that she felt the American soldiers were too friendly with the Germans.

Her diary mentions

“They ‘fraternize’ with Germans.....it is impossible for me to put into words how I feel about this. It is simply inconceivable and leaves me numbed as from a heavy blow”.

But she realised that she was being too strong in her judgements and admitted in her diary that it was unjust

“to some extent because I judge and condemn the whole body because of some rotten members”.

Finally she explains to herself in her diary their failures in this regard, as follows:

“I know why the average American soldier has such a serene disregard for what we call enemy : simply because he is opposed to any strong feeling of any kind”.

My mother’s father, Dr Jean Brausch, who died very shortly after the family was due to be deported (see “My Life Story”) was awarded « la Croix de l’ordre de la Resistance 1940-1944 » posthumously on 23rd January 1947.

Luxembourg, 3rd January 2014.

Odette Brausch