

## The story of “a German child” Ilse

It was January 1945 in Graditz Germany. I remember my Mama, Annastasia Licha Grutzner, told me to pack my suitcase. She said the war is getting closer and we have to leave. I packed my wooden doll and her clothes but when Mama checked my suitcase, she made me leave them behind.

A big vehicle came after midnight and stopped in front of our house. My Mama, sisters Inge 14 years old, Magda 10 years old, brother Gerhart 8 years old and myself 12 years old were loaded up by the Government/Red Cross and taken to Czechoslovakia along with many other refugees fleeing our hometown. We were dropped off in an empty school house where we slept on mattresses on the floor. My Father Ernst Paul Grutzner had been in Kiel working in the ship industry I believe and then during this time he had been sent to France.

While in the school house I was diagnosed with scarlet fever and sent to the hospital in Benesov, Czechoslovakia. I made friends there with two other girls, Gisela who was also 12 years old and Sigrid who was only 4 years old. We three girls stayed there two months or longer and we were inseparable.

I remember my Mama and sisters coming to visit me but they had to stay behind the gate for fear of getting scarlet fever which was very contagious. When bombing sirens went off, because the German artillery was trying to shoot down the Russian planes, we were told to grab a blanket, get the little ones and run to the bunkers as fast as possible. We were to stay there until they gave the signal it was safe to come out.

Right before the war ended, my two sisters Inge and Magda rode the train to visit me in the hospital again but they never made it. May of 1945 the war was over and everyone got separated in the mayhem that followed. My Mama Annastasia and brother Gerhard Herbert ended up in Passau in West Germany occupied by the Americans. Ingeborg Charlotte (Inge) and Magdalena Erica (Magda) made their way back home to Graditz Germany where they found our Father. Father wanted to know where the others were but they did not know. Gisela, Sigrid and I wondered why our mothers didn't come to pick us up but we didn't realize all the chaos that was going on.

In June I was let go from the hospital and put on a train to Prague with the instructions to go to the Red Cross there. It was dark when we arrived. Gisela and Sigrid were with me but we couldn't find it. I asked a man where the Red Cross was and he wouldn't give me an answer because I was a German. Another man came along and sent us to a hut where they told us all they could do was take us to where others were being held. We three marched along following a man who was carrying a machine gun where we ended up in a refugee camp. It had been a hotel and was filled with 100's of very sick people. We slept on the floor with no beds. They cut off my braids and checked me for lice. I was glad they didn't find any so they wouldn't shave my head.

The Russian soldiers would come in at night with their flashlights and take older girls out and rape them. I remember the girls screaming as they were being taken away. Two older girls asked us to help them hide from the Russians. The older girls would lie on the floor then we would put a blanket over them and lay on top of them so when the soldiers looked in, they would only see us little girls and leave.

We moved out and went to the Sokol stadium in Prague. I was still with Gisela, Sigrid, and the two older girls. We stayed for two weeks in horrible living conditions with water soup to eat. Lice were so bad that men would strip naked to get the lice off of them. Then one day someone came and announced they wanted people to take a job. We volunteered and went to the Russian camp to clean the dining room for the soldiers. We would sneak any leftovers from the soldiers' plates to have something to eat. At night we went back to the stadium.

Then a convent of nuns asked for people to clean a renovated convent in Prague. Thinking we would be safe with the nuns we volunteered to go clean for them and in turn they gave us a good meal.

Two weeks later there was an announcement over the loudspeaker for all Germans who wanted to go back to Germany to get in line. Thousands got into line because we all wanted to go home. We went to the train station and were loaded into the cattle train. We thought we were going to Germany but the Russians took us to Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia to a camp. It was a concentration camp; it had been a holding camp for Jews. Upon entering the camp through the big gate any belongings, pictures, wedding rings anyone had were thrown on a big pile. They took whatever they wanted. If you had gold fillings in your teeth, they were taken out also. The men got a whip to them as

they entered through the gate. Next, all men, women, and children stripped down and we threw our clothes on a pile and went to the shower house together. As we came out two men sprayed us with powder as we turned around. They were nasty, laughing and making fun. I looked for my dress but couldn't find it so just grabbed something else to wear. We were again checked for lice and many women got their heads shaved when they found it. Women and children were separated. We were put in bunkbeds with straw and a blanket. The girl in the bed next to me died of spool-worms. They were coming out of every orifice. She was only 4 or 5 years old. They did nothing to help her.

Gisela and Sigrid were still with me; however, the two older girls that were with us were sent to a different barrack. We went to the shower room once a week. I remember having a bad tooth which was pulled out on my 13th birthday there. When it got cold, they couldn't heat the barrack so they moved us to a stone building with no windows except on the ceiling which let some light in.

I was there for around six months from June into December.

A few days before Christmas some people came to take all the children with no parents. They started reading names off of a list. They called my name. Gisela was not on the list and we screamed and cried that she was with me and had no one either. They let her stay with me so all three of us were still together.

I later learned Uncle Premysl Pitter a Czech and Tante Olga Fierz who was Swiss, got permission to go into Theresienstadt to get the children with no family. Later Tante Olga told me the drivers were told to load up the children as fast as possible and get out of there before someone changed their mind and wouldn't let them go.

We were loaded onto two big trucks. It was dark and no one knew where we were going. We were afraid and didn't want to go. They stopped somewhere and bags of bread and lunchmeat were put on the truck. We were so hungry we were like a pack of wolves. Everyone got sick because their stomachs couldn't handle all the food after not having any for such a long time.

We arrived and were given a bath, food, and a down feather bed. We were in heaven. It had been dark when we arrived but, in the morning, we got breakfast and could see where we were. It had snowed and we were in a beautiful castle – Olešovice. It was like a fairytale. It was winter and the children were quarantined for two weeks after arrival to make sure they did not have any diseases.

I believe the castle belonged to a German Barron who left Czechoslovakia before the Russians came. Soon it was Christmas and the big hall was decorated. We had a Christmas tree and celebrated singing and dancing with the Jewish, Czech, and German children all together. We stayed there until spring.



Castle Olešovice in 1945

I had the pleasure of staying in touch with and visiting Tante Olga who later told me they put a sign at the front gate that said quarantined because of typhoid, stay away. We really didn't have typhoid, but they did this to keep the Russians out and it worked.

After a couple of months, we were moved to the next castle, Štiřín, also in Czechoslovakia. Tante Olga and Uncle Premysl came by and checked on us. I remember someone playing Heidenroslein on the piano. She told me I could just make up my own dance so I danced while she played the piano. We also put on plays. We did Snow White and the 7 Dwarfs. I played Snow White, but I didn't want to be kissed by the prince.



Me on far left

Castle Štiřín in 1945

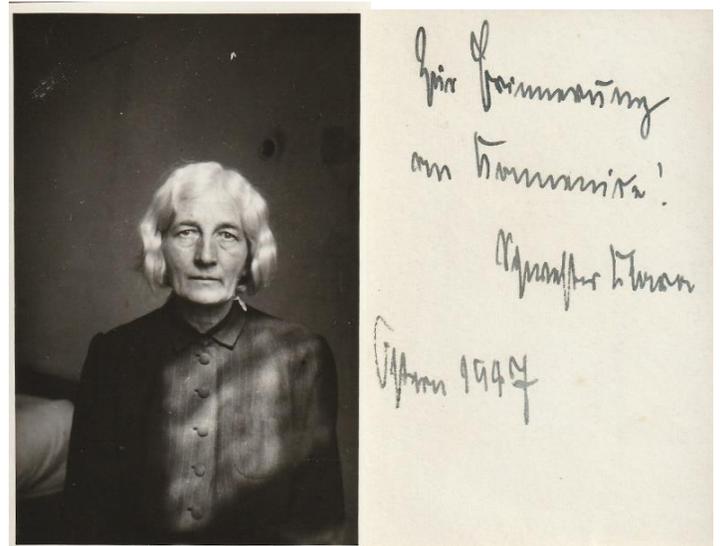


Castle Kamenice in 1945

After several months we were moved again to a very big castle in Czechoslovakia called Kamenice. There were beautiful blue walls with gold on them. I remember some people came from Switzerland to visit the castle and asked us what we would like for Christmas. I told them I wanted boots because my feet got cold. I got boots that year for Christmas and was so happy. Tante Olga and Uncle Premysl would get information from us and try to find our families. I had written several letters home. Slowly parents were being found. Gisela and Sigrid also found their families. I was one of the last children to find a family member.

Schvester Klara would come once a week and we would sit in a pretty room with comfortable chairs reading books and poetry. I especially remember learning Die Kraniche des Ibykus by Friedrich Schiller.

Klára Mágrová.



One-time Tante Olga and Uncle Premysl were going to Prague and asked, "Why don't you come along?". I was excited to go. We went to Milíčuv Dům where they showed me around.

On my 14<sup>th</sup> birthday I finally got a letter from my Mama that said my Father had been killed by the Russians and that she was in Passau Germany and everything was going to be ok. Magda & Inga made it out of the Russian sector where they were working for farmers.



*Děti jsou naše budoucnost.*

*Pamatujte na jejich výchovu!*

Podporujte „MILÍČUV DŮM“, útulek mládeže v Praze-Zižkově, u olšanského rybníka.

I went to a convent close to the train station in Prague to wait for transportation to go back to Germany. We had to wait for a group before they would send us.

Mother Superior told me to come back and stay with them if I didn't like Germany anymore. If they didn't find my Mama I would have stayed there and become a nun.

The day came when I was put on a train going to Furth im Wald Germany. I was dropped off and spent the night in an orphanage. I remember having a good time playing with the other children there. The next day was my 15th birthday. My Mama and sister Magda came to pick me up. I started to run toward a woman I thought was my Mama then stopped. I thought this woman was too small. I didn't realize I had grown the years apart. We cried, kissed, and hugged. I was finally reunited with my family after being apart for 2 years and 7 months. January 1945 to Aug 28, 1947

I went to live in Passau in St Nikola Kloster (Monastery) turned into a refugee camp. The rooms were big and we had 16 people living in one room.

I went back to school in Passau and graduated then I went to Nurnberg for nursing school. I became interested in nursing while I was in the hospital with scarlet fever. Some of the older children, myself included, helped with taking care of the younger ones, and I decided this was what I wanted to do. I married an American soldier stationed in Germany, moved to America in October of 1958 where I worked as a nurse. I had two children Paul Marcus and Regina Kay.

I can't begin to thank Tante Olga and Uncle Premysl for all they did in rescuing me and the other children through Operation Castles.

ILSE GRUTZNER HAMILTON BATEMAN

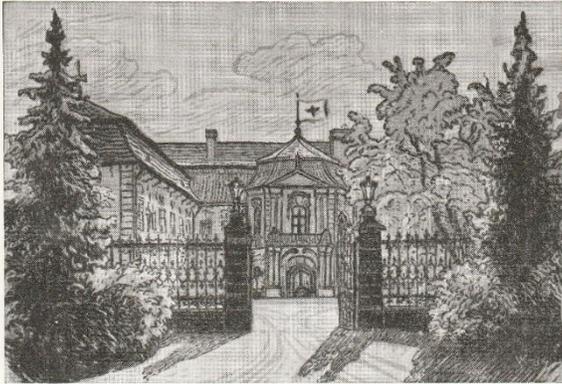
Uncle Premysl Pitter



Der lieben Ilse  
in herzlichster Erinnerung

Premysl Pitter.

Affoltern a. a. 15. Juli 1967.



Schloss Küssnacht im Jahr 1945.

Meiner lieben Ilse  
Hamilton-Grützner  
in Erinnerung an den 1. August  
1983

in Affoltern am Albis Tante Olga.



Tante Olga Fierz and Ilse Grutzner Hamilton Bateman on Lake Lucerne





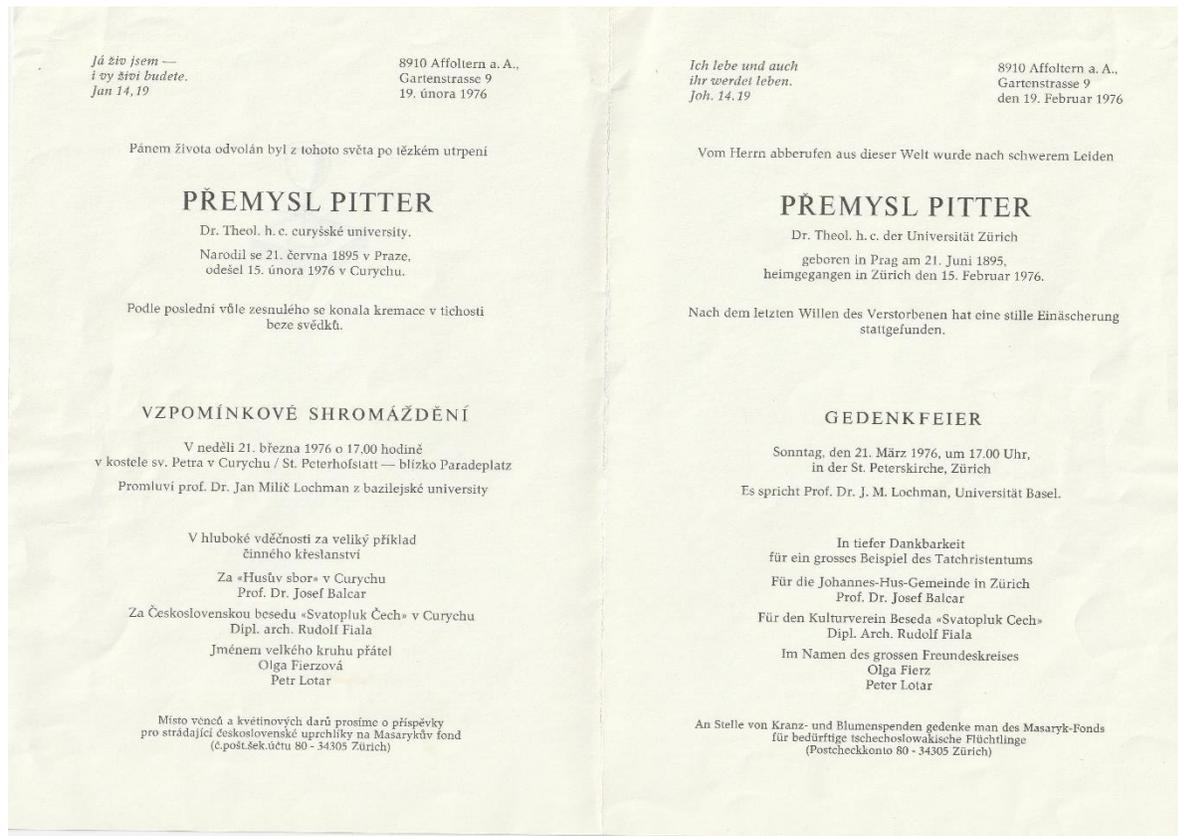
**HOTEL ZÁMEK ŠTÍŘÍN** = eine Gedenktafel für P. Pitter.  
 Im Jahre P. Pitter wurde von der UNESCO  
 eine Festschrift in der Karls-Universität  
 in Prag abgehalten.

Liebe Frau,  
 am 14. April des 100. Geburtsdag von  
 Pitter gab es ein großes Treffen mit  
 viele Tränen rausger - Was denken wir alle an dich  
 nur früher dich hast du Dr. Felge Kollmann  
 Karl Schreiner  
 Helena Klajová - Schwester Helena!

Herzliche Grüße von Schwester Eng.  
 Liebe Frau, ich denke oft an dich, habe ein schönes Bild  
 mit Lehr. Opa von Dir. Habe gehofft dich zu sehen! - leider!  
 Ich freue mich, daß es dir gut geht, bleib gesund, vergiß nicht  
 viele liebe Grüße!  
 Denise Helene Staller

NAKLADATELSTVÍ (ROMA) PRAHA ©

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Ilse October 2019 - age 87



Ilse pointing to her photo in Tante Olga's book.



Ich kann Tante Olga und  
Onkel Premysl und auch  
Tante Clara nicht mehr  
vergessen!!

Meine Liebe und  
Dankbarkeit besteht auch  
über das Grab hinaus.

In Liebe

Ilse Bateman

Kranzschwester im USA x  
Germany, bin in dem Ruhestand  
11-30-84

