

I N T R O D U C T I O N

For a long time, I was thinking of writing an autobiography. My life was full of interesting experiences and I thought that it would be a pity if I would not put them down in writing. When I spoke about them, my children showed great interest in my stories about the past and encouraged me to write a biography.

But, ^{for years} I never found the time for it. My medical practice had grown to such an extent in the last few years that I had to work all day long in my office and then, after my office hours, I had to do paper work till late at night, often beyond midnight till 2 or 3 in the morning. I usually worked 17 to 18 hours a day and never got enough sleep. That went on for many years.

Only after I had retired from medical practice, about in 1975, 3 years ago, could I start with the writing of the biography which was quite a big undertaking which I hope to finish in about one year.

I am writing the entire biography in English. But my mother-tongue is German, and although I have been living now in the United States for over 30 years and have become sufficiently acclimated to the English language, it must be remembered that I never felt able to express myself adequately in English, and the writing of this biography therefore cost me a disproportionate amount of time and effort.

It is not meant for publication but only for reading by my family. Style was therefore of minor importance, more important facts and data, as precise as possible in simple

sentences, especially for young people, made more interesting by insertion of pictures, geographic maps, important documents, with translations where necessary.

I realize that I have to go far into the past and that I have to write many details about my family. This will therefore not be an auto-biography, but rather a family-biography, limited, of course, to a certain degree. The family was very big and it would be impossible to include great many uncles, aunts, and the more than 100 cousins of Hedy and myself, although some will be included in the course of the narration.

I had the good idea of interviewing some of our relatives and recording their stories on a tape recorder, adding thereby their stories verbatim to this family-biography. They contain many details, about which I had no knowledge or insufficient knowledge, and they will help very much to complete the picture, like pieces of a so-called puzzle or a mosaic.

Although this will cause often repetition of certain events, it will enable the reader to see some persons and some events from different angles. This method of interviewing people with the help of a tape recorder will, I hope, be used later on by my descendants in continuing this biography.

Some of the readers will perhaps find all these details boring, others may find them highly interesting and valuable. There are moments in everybody's life, when one thinks of his ancestors, becomes interested in certain details, perhaps in a mood of melancholia. Then these pages may become help-

ful or perhaps important.

In many respects this biography will be incomplete, but this is the case with every biography. Of my 8 great-grandparents I knew only one, and of my 4 grandparents I knew only 2, the parents of my mother. Of my parents, I did not know my father, since I was born 8 days after he had died. But I know a lot about him, things that were told to me. About this chapter, I will write later in more detail.

I am writing this biography mainly to show my children, grandchildren, and their progeny, where they came from and what kind of people their ancestors were. They will learn, what difficulties, enormous efforts, sufferings, and often great tragedies combined, to bring them into their present position. Words like difficulties, sufferings, or tragedies are not mere abstractions. They were the realities of our lives, and to really understand them, it was necessary that I explain everything in great detail. Although I will have to describe many tragic events, it is in general a success story. The dark clouds have passed, "and new life has grown out of the ruins". (After Schiller: Wilhelm Tell).

I will have to write a lot about history and geography, in which I have always been very interested. Would that not have been the case, I would not have undertaken to write this biography. I have always tried to be well informed about daily events by reading the newspapers and magazines. My interest in geography stems from my interest in stamps. I was in younger years a philatelist and looked

each country up on the map. This interest increased steadily, although I had given up collecting stamps for long periods of time, sometimes resuming it again in the hope that some of my children or grandchildren will take over one day and continue. But this did not come about. But geographic maps always interest, almost fascinate me. My interest in history has its origin in the gymnasium, when we were learning Latin and later Greek. Later in life there came the great interest in art, architecture, etc., which required knowledge of history and geography, and still later our travels to foreign countries. Wherever we went and still go, visits to museums especially require and enrich our knowledge of history.

I found it necessary to mention all that before starting with the biography. But I don't want to give the impression that I regard myself as an expert in these fields. I have rather to say that my knowledge of history, geography, and art is very limited, but more than sufficient for the writing of this biography.

We lived in a different world. I am now 81 years old, and I found that it was necessary to describe all the details, in order to understand the past better, when reading these lines, 20 or 50 years later, and as an incurable optimist I go even further, to 100 years and beyond.

You will find many grammatical faults and errors in punctuation. I will not make any corrections anymore, as that will be too time-consuming, and I ask you to bear with me.

The insertion of great many pictures enhanced comprehension and appreciation, where descriptions alone would be

insufficient to give a clear picture.

The main purpose of my voluminous description of my experiences and those of many members of my family, who lived in Europe among millions of criminals, who persecuted them and finally killed them, executing a devilish plan of Hitler and the Nazis is to let my descendants, children and grand-children know, where they came from.

It is a heroic story and I wanted my progeny to know their roots, to be proud of their ancestors. I had to go far into the past to show that there were great, noble, high-taught, high-minded persons in our families of whom they can be proud, so that they should never think cheaply of themselves. The roots are strong and good and my grandchildren will find satisfaction and inspiration from my story.

They will read the story again when they will be grown up and understand better what is described. Then they will perhaps continue by adding their own story and that of their own progeny. Vivant sequentes - May others follow.

New York, May 25th, 1978.

Adolph Mechner.