Shame and Blame: Second-Generation Memories of Nazi Germany.

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Summary:

Through creative and critical writing my thesis investigates the ways in which second-generation Germans may inherit their parents' traumatic memories. I explore the role that creative projects may play in liberating those who have been trouble by a painful past.

This venture began when I met a Jewish man whose family died in the camps. At this moment, feelings of shame threatened to overwhelm me. My mother lived in Germany during World War II. Anxiety about my heritage had always been difficult to manage. Consequently, my thesis became a pilgrimage of reconciliation as I tried to heal this shameful legacy. This move towards healing stemmed from the belief that my burden of shame was out of place three generations after the war. My acknowledgement encouraged me to explore a variety of creative techniques used by others who had grappled with trauma. How did other creative artists devise narratives that facilitated healing?

I chose to reconcile my burden of shame by creating my mother's story. Because my mother rarely spoke about her past, I employed imagination, historical research and reconstruction to produce a narrative out of silence. During this undertaking, her story became mine as I explored my response to her life. Conjuring up memories of my mother also shed light on my own identity, enabling me to leave behind a childhood denial of my German heritage. By accepting that I belonged to a nation capable of committing terrible atrocities, my auto/biography became an act of witness, for my mother and myself which I found healing. This act of witness culminated in a practice-led narrative and an academic inquiry, constructed in response to the encouragement of literary theorists who believe that painful pasts could be repaired by engaging with them via writing. My exegetical response to my narrative was designed to enable the reader to situate my story within a wider

historical and cultural perspective of second-generation German shame. The exegesis also reflected critically on my creative composition, particularly in relation to the ethics of constructing my mother's voice for my own benefit.

Finally, I investigated the concept of healing via creativity: for individuals and a nation, as they endeavour to construct an identity that reconciles people with a difficult past. My conclusion highlights the importance of engaging imaginatively with suffering and providing strategies for addressing such traumas.

Key words: Shame, memory, trauma, legacy, forgiveness, healing, second-generation, Holocaust, Germans, creativity.

Declaration:

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed……

Date……

Signed……..

Date……...

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I especially want to express my appreciation to the people who so generously agreed to be interviewed for this project. Their honesty and insight have enabled me to move beyond theory as I seek to understand the long-term effects of trauma and shame.

And, finally, I would like to dedicate this book to my mother. After writing so many words about her I still find it difficult to express my newfound gratitude for being her daughter.

In the Shadow of the Shoah,

by

Barbara Brown.

Contents

Prologue: After Berlin

A wave of heat carries the fragrance of Christmas baking away from our house and into the garden, Magpies gather in noisy chorus beneath the shade of the ash tree. The birds are waiting not so patiently for the scraps of burnt almond bread. Inside the cool house stands an empty pine tree, stretching out its green arms to receive our play dough ornaments and the fragile silver baubles from my childhood. Old decorations mingle with new, the symbols of my blended past: German, English, Irish and Australian.

As the heat leaves the day I gather up my family photos. For most of the year these framed memories lay scattered all over the house, but each Christmas they congregate on the small cedar table near our front door, as I create my shrine to the past. After surrounding each picture with a sprig of rosemary I light the slender white candles that will illuminate each face. Memories look up at me with their secret smile, and then my daughter interrupts:

'Mum, don't be angry with me, but can we do without the shrine this year? It's so close to the front door that I find it embarrassing, especially when friends come over.' Zoë leans into my back and stares at her brother's face.

'Why don't I move it to a different place, somewhere less obvious?'

'But I don't see why do we have it at all.' she demands. 'Christmas is supposed to be happy, but this table always makes me feel sad. Can't we just put them in a drawer?'

My mother always set up an altar for Christmas, a place to honour every person she had ever lost. Each Christmas Eve I watched as she lit the candles – creating yellow flames to dance with the past. Mum's group of ghosts watched as we opened our presents. Then I imagined them listening as my father turned on the radio to hear 'Silent Night'.

Now, my daughter wanted all of this to stop, but it had always been our custom; we passed down pain and refused to forget.

'I'll think about it, Zoe, but we always remember family at Christmas – it's just what we do.'

My daughter mumbles something as she wanders off to her room, leaving me to face my mother's dark and anxious eyes. I pick up her photo and carry it into the kitchen, setting it down carefully on the table; from there she can watch me making a cup of tea. I gaze longingly into a face I have only recently come to understand. I like this new feeling. Before my trip to Berlin Mum and I had held each other at a distance. We just didn't get along, and the fact that she had lived in Germany during the war only made the rift between us deeper. My Aryan heritage was not something I was proud of…

1. Mishka

Mishka's drawling accent filled the tutorial room of my Life Writing class. Every student stopped their whisperings to stare at the newest member of our group.

'I am from America – New York actually.'

He reminded me of a Yankee cab driver who longed to tell one last story to the unsuspecting passengers jammed into the back seat of his taxi. Entranced, I looked on as he grabbed the wheel and took every student along for the ride.

'But my family were originally from Poland. They were Jews.'

My stomach turned, as if it knew what was coming.

'And most of them didn't survive the camps.'

Everyone stopped – how were we supposed to respond to this? People started to fidget. Our tutor broke into the uneasy silence.

'OK, did everyone finish the article by Hirsch and Spitzer?'

I looked down at my text book but the words were a blur. Around me people started talking as if nothing had happened.

That was the first night I didn't sleep. Two-thirty came and went and I knew I had to do something. My dog Smokey watched me from his favourite chair.

'Sorry sweetie, no time for a tickle.'

I was going to write Mishka an email. Flicking on the light by the computer desk, I thought about all I wanted to say. He had to know that my mother was from Germany. I wanted to apologise for being linked to the country that had ruined his family. This uneasy guilt had plagued me for years. Maybe Mishka was giving me an opportunity to get rid of my shame.

Dear Mishka,

I know this will sound strange, but when I heard your story in class today I knew I had to write. My mother was German; she lived in Berlin during WWII. As far as I know, she was an ordinary woman, but I can't be sure. She kept most of her past quiet. Maybe she was involved with the Nazis in some way, I really don't know. When I heard about your family, I felt ashamed. The Germans did such terrible things to the Jews.

I want to say sorry. I know this won't mean much, but you have to know.

Barbara

My hand shook as I pressed send. This man was a stranger, but I needed him to understand. The war happened sixty years ago, but I was looking for absolution.

If Mishka read my email he gave no sign. Each time I saw him in the university corridor I walked the other way, covered in a guilty sweat. None of this made sense. But, then I remembered the first time I had been embarrassed by my heritage. At primary school my mother had always stood apart from the others – her German accent, her liverwurst and kartoffel salat, and her unspoken past all marked her as different, but I wanted her to be the same.

Now, my childhood anxieties returned as Mishka's perished family began to creep into every corner of my life. I needed to understand this takeover bid so I started questioning everything about my mother's past. She had told me some stories about her life before the war and after, but those six awful years in between remained a mystery. Every night I lay in the darkness, questioning my motivation for cross-examining my mother's past. Nothing could bring Mishka's family back, and my

mother was dead. I should be leaving her in peace, but, my anxiety wouldn't go away.

In response to all of this my behaviour became quite ridiculous. If I saw Mishka coming towards me, like a guilty child, I would hide in the Humanities toilets until he had walked past. But I could hardly stay behind the door for ever. The only way out was to understand the reasons for my discomfort. But everything I wanted to know about my mother's past was out of reach. All that remained was a few dusty boxes of black and white photos and Mum's early notebooks penned in unreadable gothic writing.

Concerns about my university course slipped away as I started to focus my research on Nazi Germany, but nothing I did could ease my worries. It was then that Warren urged me to go to Germany and find out for myself. My husband had started doing the washing and rustling up toasted cheese sandwiches while I sat staring at DVDs of concentration camps.

'Look at you; you're no use as you are.'

'Thanks a lot,' I mumbled.

'Why don't you book a ticket and fly over to Germany?'

'It's not that simple – I haven't got a lot to go on for a start.'

We went on like this for days, but in the end he won me over. I would stay for a month – that had to be enough. My Berlin itinerary began to look like a shopping list. In the absence of anything substantial I hoped that visiting museums would show me pictures and relics from that time. And somewhere I had the address of Mum's old home. If I contacted her relatives they might be able to shed some light on my mystery. Best of all, I knew that if I walked the same streets as my mother I could put myself in her shoes and begin to understand what it might have been like to live in Nazi Germany. But, between decision day and my departure my certainty

caved in. I had never travelled alone before, and Berlin was full of ghosts. Maybe I would uncover a terrible secret. Ignorance had to be the better option – but then there was Mishka. Of course, he wasn't the only one. If I was honest with myself I had been troubled by Jewish ghosts for most of my life.

Departure day came, but I couldn't make myself get up early. Burying my head under the pillows, I wondered whether it was possible to change my mind. Later, at the airport gate my sixteen year old daughter started crying. A freezer full of food and a list of instructions stuck to the fridge door seemed like poor consolation for a month without her Mum.

Once aboard I was catapulted into the past. The language of my childhood was everywhere: foreign, but familiar. It belonged to my mother, but it was the voice of the enemy, the bad Jerries of films like *The Dirty Dozen* and *The Great Escape* and it was an idiom I refused to share. As a child I pretended I was Irish, like my Dad. His jokes and jigs always made me laugh and his barefoot childhood on a farm in County Cavan was far more appealing than Mum's Germany.

'Achtung!' came over the loudspeaker. It was only the Lufthansa airhostess, but even this announcement took me back to the TV documentaries I had seen as a child. In those, a black and white Hitler had screamed 'Achtung' to his followers, urging them to give him their most ardent attention. But this plane was a quiet haven, far away from the might of the Nazis. Then, as if to remind me that I would not find refuge the plane began to lurch forward. My stomach grew queasy; determined not to be sick I closed my eyes, but voices from the past invaded the space …

2. It's all in the past

'Your mummy killed our grand-dad in the War!' A gang of taunting schoolboys told me I was a daughter of the enemy. Not knowing what to do, I ran across the primary school playground and into the girls' toilets. Crouching behind the lavatory door I waited for my sister Carol to give the 'all-clear'. My classmates must have realised I was different when they saw me coming to school in my strange rollen hair style. And, at lunchtime they could smell my liverwurst sandwiches.

I didn't want my mother's Germany, but it was difficult to avoid it. Each afternoon Mum tried teaching us a little bit of German, but Carol and I resisted. Her words were too strange and strong and we were lazy. Eventually, she accepted our lack of enthusiasm and simply gave up. But there were other ways. During our after-school snack Mum began telling us snippets from her war, but Dad soon put an end to that.

'What do you want to upset the girls for? All of that's over now.'

Gradually, a fake truce settled over our family. But, I began to see that Mum wasn't the only one with war-time stories ...

Dad had bought a car from one of his mates, silver with red leather seats.

'We're going for a drive into the country; you girls better sit in the back.'

Even from there we could see Dad's sweat on the steering wheel and his knuckles whitening from his tight, tight grip. That night I heard them talking.

'It's no good Marianne, I can't do it.'

'Don't upset yourself Michael; we don't really need a car.'

Later, I asked Mum why Dad had decided to sell the car. She explained that he had been one of the Rats of Tobruk. The bombing had given him shell shock. Now, he was so nervey he couldn't manage to drive.

The war was over; so why did it keep interfering with my family. I wanted none of it, but it still found ways of creeping in ...

* * *

‘Mummy, I don't feel very well, can I stay home from school?’ She touched my face, still warm from my secret hot water bottle. Then she looked into my mouth.

‘I can’t see anything; your throat isn’t red at all.’

My pleading looks must have worn her away, and she gave in. From the safety of my bed I turned my green eiderdown into a sheltered valley, making hills with my knees. Quiet Lego villages grew in the dip; here was a place where plastic children could play and nobody was forced to hide in the toilets.

Then, Mum wove her stay-at-home magic and my breakfast appeared on the little table by my bed. Underneath an embroidered cloth sat a brown, three-and-a-half-minute egg, with strips of toast ready for dipping. I was the princess of Lego land, far away from hurtful schoolboys:

‘Your Mum's German – that makes you a killer.’

But that wasn’t possible; I had never hurt anyone.

‘But your Mum’s the enemy, so you must have!’

It was the worst time of my day, spiteful schoolboys turning me red with shame, but I didn’t understand what was wrong with being German.

Germany – that mysterious country of her birth, that sad, best forgotten place that wouldn’t go away. Television was our daily reminder. Carol and I watched Sergeant Schulz from *Hogan’s Heroes* bungle his way through the Second World War, but while we were laughing, the nasty Germans came along and wiped the grins from our faces. I watched my Mum and wondered what sort of German she had been.

But she was my mother – neither nasty nor stupid; just a sad woman holding her head low and whispering:

‘Yes, I am from Germany.’

I did not want her pain or her sadness, so I hid under my blankets and made friends with my Lego children. Then one day Mr Crown knocked on our front door. Here was the headmaster!

‘What is going on?’ he demanded. ‘Why is Barbara away from school so often? That is not the way we do things here.’

This important man towered over us, glaring at my Mum. I tried to explain to him why I couldn’t go to school, it was the names they called me, but he chanted back in his singsong voice:

‘Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.’

When the lecture was over Mr Crown left; the matter had been resolved.

The next day Mum followed the headmaster’s orders without question. She wouldn’t listen. I left the house with my hair coiled in a ‘rollen’ across my head, my sandwiches smelling of liver. At school the boys continued to call out through the toilet door. My headaches, stomach pains, and sore throats would not change her mind.

Then, one day, I woke up feeling really sick, but Mum wouldn’t believe me. So I ached my way through the morning, barely able to see the blackboard. Lunchtime came, and with it my spots. The school nurse sent me to the sick room, and then she rang home:

‘Please pick Barbara up immediately, it looks as if she has a nasty dose of measles, probably the German variety.’

An hour later Mum hurried through the sick room door, looking worried. By then I was feeling rather superior. Here was proof I was really sick, but she didn't hesitate to cut me down:

'Barbara, let me tell you a story on the way home. It's all about a little girl who cried wolf.'

Fifty years later I was flying towards my Mum's Germany to look for answers. The name calling had stopped, but I still felt embarrassed about my mother's heritage. Resting my head against the plane window, I recalled the double jeopardy that was part of my childhood – feeling uncomfortable because my mother was German, and ashamed because of my disloyalty towards her. As my finger traced the drops of condensation sliding down the plane window, Mum spoke from somewhere …

'My darling daughter, there you go again, fretting about the past. It is finished - over. This constant coal raking will do you no good. After the war every child struggled with their parents' memories. If Germany is the source of your disgrace I don't understand why you are you coming.

'You've got to realise that no matter what I did I couldn't hide who I was and where I came from. My accent and the way I looked gave me away. Somehow, everybody just knew. As a child in Germany, I had been taught to be proud of my heritage. Remember "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles?" But, when I travelled to England after the war I was forced to hide my nationality – nobody wanted to be friends with the enemy.'

'Wine?' The smiling hostess distracted me with a plastic cup of Riesling. Sipping it mindlessly, I flicked through a magazine. A mother and her child stared out through the wire of an Australian detention camp. Barely able to conceal my anger, I read the latest diatribe against the refugees who had come to Australia in search of safety.

Like my mother before me, I lived in a country that put people into camps when all they wanted was a place to call home.

After we emigrated from England to Australia in 1966, Mum searched longingly for the remnants of her homeland. When she heard about a German Lutheran Christmas service in the city, Carol and I travelled with her on the bus to Adelaide. Together we walked down Flinders Street towards the Bethlehem Church. The service had already started, so we crept in quietly, not wanting to disturb the hushed congregation of elderly German Australians.

'Look,' whispered Carol, 'it's a real Christmas tree!'

A tall pine filled the church with nostalgia, every branch holding a flickering white candle. Australian festivities occurred in the heat of summer and we were supposed to rely on the safety of plastic fairy lights and a plastic Harris Scarfe's tree. But this place remembered winter. Carol and I watched this flickering magic while contemplating the terrors and joys of a small fire.

The atmosphere of Christmas past grew heavy as the minister wheezed his way into the pulpit. Looking down on us, he began speaking in that familiar yet foreign language of German. And, even though I couldn't understand, I knew he was berating the congregation and urging us to do better. Threats of punishment seemed more terrifying when delivered in the booming tones of a German man who wagged his finger.

Then the time came both dreaded and longed for. The congregation sang 'Silent Night' in German, as the minister climbed down from his pulpit to switch on the tape recorder. Someone dimmed the lights as we listened to the sound of Berlin Christmas bells echoing around the building. I watched anxiously and, as if on cue, Mum's face crumpled. Carol and I hugged her sagging body as we attempted to make everything right.

Now, I was on a plane that was taking me towards the source of my mother's sadness. Once in Berlin I was determined to unravel the mysteries behind these images. But, in reality, Germany had already arrived. I was sitting in a section full of elderly German passengers – some of them even looked like my mother. Watching them furtively, I began to wonder what they had done during the war, but my concerns were soon swept away by the couple next to me. They were settling in for the long flight – and as they eased their feet into fluffy pink and blue travelling slippers, the war seemed like the furthest thing from their minds.

'We are on our way home to Frankfurt, how about you?' My neighbour's strong German accent reminded me of my mother; even her hands were covered in the same blue veins, tracing a path across her arthritic knuckles.

'I am going to Berlin,' I told her. 'That was where my mother was born.'

'It is a very modern city now, she wouldn't recognise it – everything has changed.'

The plane hit another swirl of clouds and my wine splashed onto the tray table. As my neighbour mopped it up with her hanky I remembered my mother once more, always cleaning, always caring. This woman's kindness swept away any earlier suspicions about her wartime past, leaving me feeling embarrassed. This wasn't going to be an easy journey.

3. Making up stories

The baggage carousel groaned like an old donkey, complaining under the weight of everyone's cases. I hastily grabbed my over-stuffed bag, but in reality I was reluctant to leave the shelter of Tegel airport. Daunted by the idea of navigating my way through this strange city, I hovered near the revolving doors, but waiting outside the terminal was my unexpected rescuer.

Margarete and I had only met via email, as we negotiated the dates and charges for her Charlottenburg apartment. But here she was, introducing herself in a husky Berlin accent and handing over the keys to her Hektor Strasse apartment. With kind determination she guided me towards a waiting taxi, only stopping to explain my destination to the driver. I was in a half dream, self-consciously rearranging my flattened plane hair in response to Margarete's sleek looks, but she seemed unaware of my efforts.

'Sorry, I have to rush, my plane to Moscow leaves in half an hour.'

Then she turned and waved as the taxi sped me away.

So, this was Berlin. I had imagined bustle, but in the early morning its streets were quiet. The driver pulled up and I stepped cautiously out of the cab and into a tranquil street edged with poplars. Pots of spring flowers drifted along the wall of each apartment and the air carried warm-weather sweetness. Hektor Strasse was empty except for a greeting of tiny birds twittering loudly as I dragged my case up the stairs to number ten. Once inside I felt like a child with an unexpected present. This was my space and mine alone. I didn't have to share or compromise. It was a surprising freedom after so much anxiety. This trip marked the first time I had lived by myself. I had always wondered if I could manage without any props for company.

I had expected a pokey bed-sit, but in Margarete's apartment light travelled through the French doors, flooding the rooms with yellow. Dark furniture clung to

the edge of every wall, reminding me of a monastic retreat. This was just what I needed, a quiet place to come home to after a day of searching.

Jetlag started to claim me. I needed a cup of tea. After searching in vain for a tea bag in Margarete's kitchen I realised I needed to find a supermarket. My first shopping expedition in Berlin, this should be interesting. After all, I didn't speak the language or understand the money, but in the end I discovered that all supermarkets were the same, with aisles spreading out under neon lights while mindless music played in the background.

Back in my apartment, I started to unpack the shopping, putting tomato soup and packets of instant noodles into Margarete's emptied-out cupboards, but it all felt too familiar. Kitchen duties were an integral part of my daily routine at home. Time alone here meant something different. I was in Germany to understand my mother, but this journey would also give me time for personal meandering. I didn't want to be stuck in the kitchen as if I'd never left home. I dug out an English map of the Charlottenberg area and began planning a walk.

If I went outside, maybe I would find traces of my mother. On the plane I had had the distinct feeling she was travelling with me, but since my arrival at Tegel airport she had withdrawn. When I was a child similar silences prevailed. I remember sitting together around the brooding tea table with air as thick as an English fog, the murky stillness convincing me that I had done something to upset her. Had she heard me fighting with my sister, or maybe she'd discovered the hole in my new school tights? Frightened of her anger, I started to chat, filling in the gaps left open by her stillness. Later on, I realised that Mum's silence had nothing to do with any hole in my tights – the past had whisked her away – it might have been a song on the radio, or the blue tint of her mother's German china cup. I wasn't sure; all I knew was that in spite of my cheery chatter, wistfulness had transported her back to Berlin.

These memories helped me to acknowledge the other reason for this trip. At first it was all about Mum's wartime life, but now I wanted more. Why had she been so withdrawn, she must have realised that as a child I longed for intimacy. I sat down hard on Margarete's leather couch as I recognised the task that lay ahead, the two strands of my uncertainty. I was here to unravel both my second-hand shame and my longing for affection. The reasons were out there; I just had to find them.

Mum had kept her distance, and most of her war-time life remained hidden. She had only given me dots, but now I wanted to join them. I had been clinging on to black and white outlines when really I needed colour. An artist starts with a barely recognisable sketch before adding the paint. If Mum's snippets of information were the lines of a charcoal drawing, then maybe I could use her outlines as a beginning and fill them in from a larger palette.

These sketches might come from anywhere; I just had to keep my eyes and ears open. On the plane I had started reading Anthony Beevor's book *Berlin – the Downfall*. Mum was on every page. When the author described how the Russians had 'liberated' the city – women fleeing, nothing to eat, hiding in shelters – I imagined her in every situation. Beevor portrayed Berliners lining up for food in queues that lasted the entire day. They were starving – no meat, no butter – nothing but beetroot. My heart had ached; I wanted to respond.

That evening I did. Under the glow of Margarete's red desk lamp I decided that each time I discovered something new about Mum's life I would answer with a story. Placing myself under her shadow, I would find out what her time had been like in Nazi Germany. And if I wrote down these ideas maybe Mum would guide my pen.

Berlin, November 1943

It is difficult to write my diary in a bomb shelter; my elbows are squashed against my sides and my handwriting has become scribbles on the page. Most people would not bother to keep a journal under such circumstances, but I am not sure what else I can do. My scribbling helps to pass time, and maybe one day someone will find my little book under the rubble if I don't get out alive.

Who knows, maybe writing this diary will prevent me from going mad! Each night this room becomes a little smaller as the others spread out, wanting more space. Mutti encourages me to be patient, but I find myself in a state of constant irritation with my neighbours. This shelter is too small – I have measured it, nine steps across and twelve steps from the door to the wall opposite. How can eight people live in such a room? The air smells of stale sweat and my lavender scented handkerchief no longer protects me.

Thankfully, writing fills my mind with other thoughts. Then I don't have to worry about Frau Mendel sitting next to me, muttering her prayers and smelling of stale cabbage. I even caught her trying to read the diary over my shoulder, but my book is private and not for public viewing. So, when she leans too far I poke her with my pencil. Mutti frowns and tells me to be more generous, but I will not have anyone knowing my business.

Next to Frau Mendel is her daughter Trudy. She is about my age, but that is where the resemblance stops. She looks like a statue staring at the ceiling, as if she is waiting for another bomb to drop. Her big eyes never blink and her constant vigil makes me shiver.

Old Mr Zuring, on the other hand, never seems to sit; he paces the linoleum back and forth, back and forth. This constant shuffling will wear it away. His carpet slippers are torn and his toes poke through, dripping little spots of blood onto the

floor, but he just keeps walking. Why should I worry, one bang and we will all be gone; and any holes in the flooring will not be my concern.

And there, standing by the door is Antje, hoping that her son will walk into the bunker and give her his warm embrace. Sometimes I can't bear to watch her sadness, Eric was sent to the Russian front eighteen months ago and I do not hold hope for his return. Each morning Antje spreads her lace handkerchief out like a tablecloth. Then she places a small piece of black bread with a smear of plum jam in the middle of the hanky. This is to be her son's breakfast, but he will never eat it. Finally, Antje throws the bread away, but Charlie Mendel runs across the room screaming:

'Don't you know that Eric is never coming back? At least give the bread to someone who can make use of it!'

How cruel he is, let her dream in peace.

Mutti tries calming Herr Zuring by explaining that Antje is in sorrow for her son.

'Surely a small piece of bread cannot make any difference to you; please let her keep some hope.'

Across from me sits Frau Munt. She dozes day and night no matter how often the bombs wrack our little bunker. I remember her as a fine lady; elegant fox furs and little velvet hats held in place with a pearl hatpin. For me she always carried bon bons in her pocket. Now look at her. Her mouth is open and I can see a drop of spittle sliding down her chin. Her droopy bosom rests on her stomach and she snores like a man. What a place!

Outside the bombs scream, demolishing what is left of Berlin. My only response is to sit and write; I have energy for little else. I want to shake an angry fist at the sky, but the world is retaliating and people say we deserve this. So, I will have

to wait it out, but I must do something, and writing is my only option. Somehow, these words form a protective shield around me, stopping the falling debris that was my life …

Is that how it happened? Mum in a shelter as the war collapsed. I wanted to keep on writing, but jet lag plucked away my determination. Then, as I pulled the bed covers over my face I listened to the steady quiet...

'So now you are making stories up about me, not that I can really blame you for wanting to know. I kept everything so close to my chest. My poor Barbara, I don't imagine it was easy for you growing up in England after the war, everybody knowing that your mother was German. England after 1945 was not a place to be different. Memories of suffering had turned into revenge. Let me tell you what happened …

'I had just given you your evening bath and dressed you in the nightie Mutti had sent over from Germany. Your bottle of milk was warming in a jug by the fire. I liked sitting with you by the window in the half-light, watching the traffic below. You sucked hard on the teat, hungry. This felt like peace and I wanted to make it last, but I knew Michael was busy downstairs behind the bar, waiting for me to join him. Together we served the nightly jostle of drinkers and Saturday was our busiest time. I had boosted the numbers; a new curiosity, Michael's German wife.

'Your bottle was empty, but a small pearl of milk stayed, resting on your chin. I bent down to pick up a flannel when a shot fired through the window. Keeping my head low, I tried to shield your body. You wriggled and pushed against me but we lay together for a long time, waiting.

'Finally, I heard your father calling up the stairs:

'"Marianne, can you come down, I can't manage the bar on my own".'

‘Still holding you, I crawled to the door. By then you were crying.

‘“Michael, please come up, someone has tried to shoot me”.’

‘Now, do you see why I kept quiet? I was a foreigner and their enemy … ’

I kept still, not wanting to interrupt this memory; I was puzzled by the attempted shooting. Had the assailant lost someone during the war? If this was retaliation then Mum was their easy target. After 1945 everything was black and white; grey could not exist.

I was with her on that night, feeling Mum’s fear, sensing her anger. She must have held me tight, trying to protect me, but dread seeped across her skin like a transfusion. And when Dad found out, he probably wanted to call the police. Maybe Mum stopped him.

‘Marianne, it can happen again if we do nothing.’

I conjure up her response.

‘If I report him people will think I am innocent, but maybe he is right. Perhaps I am guilty.’

4. Finding Warschauer Strasse

Birds gathered outside my window, calling to me through the curtains. For a moment I thought they were the magpies of home, but no, I was in Germany. Lying in a bedroom made red by the crimson curtains, I recalled my night – a dream, Mum speaking to me. I felt shaken by our conversation as I listened to the difficulties Mum had faced when she first came to England. Journeying into the past was like walking through a minefield. I tugged the eiderdown over my face and blocked out the sun.

When I closed the door to number 10, later that morning, I broke away from the burdens of my Berlin agenda and travelled on a whim, playing an old game with myself – turning right, turning left – where was I? I was in a park full of green leaves and softness. Children stood at the water's edge, feeding swans, white ones, the proper birds of my English childhood. Everywhere I looked, people stretched out on the grass, greedy for the sun. Little groups gathered on picnic rugs, chatting in their exclusive language. I was an outsider, yearning for someone to wave and call me over. And as I walked the gravel path I understood – this was how Mum must have felt when she first came to England after the war. Everything had been different, the language, the food – and once people heard her accent they would have looked at her strangely.

I wanted to understand Mum's past, her war, but it must have been difficult for her to speak. While she lived in Germany the Nazis compelled people to keep their thoughts hidden, and at the end of the war the Russians came, forcing her to blend in or be violated. Then it was over so she travelled to England and became a foreigner – the enemy. Lying low became Mum's second nature.

Underneath the cover-up she must have longed for her Germany. When Dad took Carol and me to a Saturday matinee Mum refused to come; she stayed home, writing letters to old friends – the ones she had left behind. I could never understand

why she didn't want to see *Summer Holiday* with Cliff Richard. After the movie Dad would always buy us an ice cream; this was our special treat, but Mum denied herself anything extraordinary. And when we came home, six envelopes, stamped and ready to post, were leaning against the sugar bowl, all destined for Germany.

How eagerly my Mum waited for a reply. She was always looking out of the window,

'Has he been yet?'

She wanted her homeland to respond. Fat letters finally came, envelopes addressed to Marianne Wilhelmina Emilie, holding newspaper cuttings and photos of Berlin rebuilt. I watched as she studied these careful clippings, but the city of her past had disappeared, replaced by a landscape of cleared bombsites and high-rise.

'That is not the Berlin I remember.'

And, sometimes parcels came, especially around Christmas. The fragrance of marzipan and ginger bread leaked through the layers of brown paper held together with tight brown string. Mum's past had come to visit. When Carol and I finished eating their exotic abundance Mum made us sit down to write thank you letters. It was a laborious process, copying her clearly printed German words while we listened to her scolding:

'I wish you girls would learn German, and then you could write to Auntie Lucie. Think how pleased she would be.'

But no matter how much she pleaded we continued with our defiance – her language was nothing to be proud of.

In spite of trying to keep it at bay, Mum's Germany seeped into my earliest life. She carried me close to her heart for nine months, whispering German lullabies. After I was born Dad would take me for my daily stroll to the Waterloo Station News Theatre, where it was possible for me to peek over the edge of my pram and see

‘Newsreels of the World’ with its endless reminders of Nazi Germany. In a hundred tiny ways, Mum’s country became a part of me.

And now I was here to unravel the knots in her stories, to understand the hidden parts of her life that influenced me. Would I find her in Warschauer Strasse? Maybe not, but at least I would feel the cracks in her pavement, and taste the dregs of her bitter coffee. Mum’s home stood on the other side of the city, in the suburb of Friedrichschain – it was the old east, and far away from wealthy Charlottenburg.

In Warschauer Strasse the weather had turned a steely cold. I stopped for a hot coffee in a café directly opposite Mum’s building. Judging by the photos stored in a suitcase under my bed, this street was still the busy place it had always been. A large strip of grass cut its way through the centre and tall trees lined either side. Trams still rumbled down the middle, and children played on the grass.

I had known about this strip of grass. It was the nearest thing to a garden for Mum and her school friend Eve. Both girls had ridden their tricycles along the gravel path, laughing and giggling while they pretended to run over my grandmother's toes; Mutti did her best to look stern, but her efforts only made them laugh more.

From the café window I watched weeds fight the grass for space while hooded teenagers rode their skateboards past a huddle of smoking onlookers who gave them shouts of encouragement. Looking beyond the grass to my mother’s building, I realised that the graciousness shown in her photos had disappeared. Now number 21 was painted a bright yellow with swirls of black graffiti growling along the base of its buttery walls. A small shop stood next to the apartment’s entrance. It sold bicycle parts. It used to be a bakery, I knew that much. Each morning my mother would come here to buy milk and rolls, a trusted position for a four-year-old. Meanwhile, my grandmother waited upstairs, the oval mahogany table covered in porcelain and silver, with the maid standing by ready to serve breakfast.

Mum liked to talk about those years before the war. Her early childhood had been easy in spite of Germany's besieged economy. I could still hear the lilt in her voice when she told me how lucky she had been – so many other children had gone hungry and shoeless, but for her there was enough. Still, out on the streets she would have faced neediness. There was no escaping a city where the currency changed value with every chime of the clock and hunger stalked the streets.

And, after the death of her beloved Papa the family had to sack their maid, and left their stylish apartment for the less than elegant Friedrichschain. Yet, no matter how life changed, my grandmother managed to maintain their early dignity. Photos show Mum dressed in white winter coats with dainty fur hats, but it must have been a struggle to be elegant in the midst of deprivation. It was around this time that Hitler promised the German people he would rescue them from the strangle-hold of Europe's post war treaty of Versailles. The Szalezeck's were now a household of two; grandfather had avoided the changes in his country's destiny by dying too early of a brain tumour. His wife and daughter were left to manage the onslaught of Nazism on their own. I wonder how they coped with so much change. I would reach out to Mum with a story …

Berlin, February 1933

Mutti and I have just come back from visiting Papa in the Kreuzburg cemetery. Each week we rush to catch the trolley car. Mutti is always eager to get there, but to tell you the truth, I am sick of it. I know he is dead, and of course that makes me sad, but why do we have to go so regularly?

Mutti wants me to dress smartly, as if Papa can see! Then we sit on the bench by his headstone while she tells him everything. Mutti asks me not to wriggle, and for a while I manage, but the bench is hard and I am not sure Papa can hear us.

Today my mother has a lot to say. She tells him about the parliament being burnt down and that people are blaming the Communists. Everywhere there is street fighting. Mutti explains to Papa that Hitler is responsible for all of this:

'Wait and see – this man is no good for Germany' she tells him, as if he can do anything about it. My Papa used to belong to the Social Democrats, so maybe he is still interested in all this political talk. Or would he prefer to rest and have fun? I know I would.

My Uncle Hans came over on Tuesday to make sure we were managing. He worries about us:

'Two women alone,' he is always saying, 'that should not be!'

And just to make sure we aren't going hungry he brings us a basket filled with roll mops and pumpernickel. And if I am lucky there is a piece of marzipan for me.

Maybe Uncle Hans is worried about us because so many people are being taken away. Mutti told me that Hitler hates the Communists and blames them for the street fighting:

'Will we be taken too?' I ask her, but she pats my head and tells me to empty it of worry:

'Our family stands with the Social Democrats; so we are safe. Your Papa called it a Party for the workers – it is our job to protect the little people.'

This seems like too much for us to do, two women alone. I wish Papa were still here; he would protect us. But sometimes I can't even remember what he looks like; I think that's the trouble with being four when he left.

Mutti explains that he was often away from home because he was a salesman. Sometimes I think that his absence prepared us for the time when we would be truly alone. When he was working our consolation was the pretty postcards posted from

all over Germany. I still have them, hidden under my nighties for safekeeping. When I am lonely I bring them out and look at his loopy handwriting, trying to remember.

On the way home from the cemetery the trolley car is empty. Usually I like to watch the other passengers, but today there is no one to see. I am bored so I ask Mutti to tell me my favourite Papa memory:

'When we knew your Papa was coming home you sat on the sofa by the window and waited. As he climbed down from the trolley car he always looked up to our apartment window and waved. Then you started bouncing up and down on the cushions. Such impatience!

'I had to remind you that Papa would need to change his clothes before he could play, but you always replied in such a cross voice,

'"Mutti, I have been waiting too long already".

'When he finally walked through our apartment door you sat on your hands, as if that was the only way you could stop yourself from running over to him. He worried that you might dirty his white starched collar. They had to be specially laundered, you know. While he changed into his smoking jacket you hopped up and down outside his bedroom.

'When he came out of the bedroom he would bend down low and say,

'"Now Marianne, I am all yours."

'Then he would gather you up into his arms and place you gently on your kinder chair next to him at the dining room table. From there you sat and watched while I poured him a cup of coffee. Sometimes, he would put a small piece of poppy seed cake – that was his favourite – into your mouth, and I would have to remind you not to drop the crumbs.

'After he was finished you were allowed on to his knee while he told you stories of the strange places and funny people he had met on his travels. When Papa

started tickling you it was his sign; the time had come to play lions. Then you jumped down and hid behind the sofa. He would come, growling and pretending to look in every place. Finally, he found you and he would lie on his back, and just like a small cub, you crawled up onto his chest. He hugged you so tight, calling you his lovely little lion as you rolled on the floor together, laughing and laughing.'

How I love it when Mutti tells me this story. It reminds me that Papa is not just someone we visit in the cemetery, but I don't ask her too often. I know it makes her sad.

This Papa was my grandfather, a man I never knew, but learnt to love because of my mother's early stories. I knew what he looked like, thanks to Mum's carefully-labelled photographs. There he was, fourth from the right, in a picture with his rowing club. They had just won a prize, because they are standing behind a banner, drinking, probably schnapps. His trimmed moustache and ramrod posture told me he was a strong, proud German.

If he had lived a little longer, I like to imagine him joining a plot to assassinate Hitler, or helping a group of desperate Jews trying to escape across the border with papers he had risked his life to secure. Of course, I will never know. His halted life brimmed with possibilities and he died in 1927, long before his country had changed the face of the world.

There he is again, in a school photo, class 1A – all boys. I scrutinise their scrubbed faces, wondering what became of them. Who did they have to fight, how many did they kill? I didn't like to imagine my grandfather with a gun in his hand. Maybe there was grace in an early death. It meant that he could lie untarnished in our family photos, the Papa who played lions as he rolled around on the floor remained untouched by Sieg Heil and Auschwitz.

None of this pondering about my grandfather was bringing me any closer to my Mum and her apartment. I had to find a way of getting into her building. Like all apartments, the main entrance was locked. I looked along the list of names; only Schindler sounded familiar, but for all the wrong reasons – I felt sure he wasn't related to the famous Oskar. Peering through the glass door, all I could see was a dark brown staircase and few bicycles leaning against the wall. I waited by the entrance, hoping someone would come home and leave the door unlocked. No such luck. Both Mum and I were disappointed:

'After all Barbara, you have come all this way and now you slouch by the doorway to my flat, too scared to ring the bell and ask for help.'

She was right, but I was my mother's daughter and unwilling to risk offence. I stood there patiently, but no one came. Feeling like a fraud, I walked off into the rain. The sturdy local library offered me shelter, and with it some local history books.

Thankfully, the librarian was keen to show me the section chronicling the history of her local suburb. Like a child, I could only stare at the pictures because the German words were a mystery. Photographs taken in 1910 showed a busy commercial port, with elegant apartment buildings, carved doorways and etched window frames, all shot in stately black and white. Another picture showed the Volks Park – a playground ostensibly for the people, but in reality this was an enchantment for children, with spouting fountains and statues of fairy tale characters. Hansel and Gretel sat on a large duck ready to fly to happier lands. I saw a different Friedrichschain in the final photo – my mother's home had been flattened by bombs, all trees were gone; black sticks had replaced them. Rubble lay everywhere and Hansel and Gretel had flown away to happier lands. With the help of the librarian I photocopied the sadness and left.

5. Memorials

A booming voice interrupted my breakfast coffee. That had to be Manfred, the caretaker. Margarete had told me about his offers of help, but I wasn't sure I really wanted them. I discovered, unexpectedly, that I liked being on my own, solving my muddles and managing. Admittedly, there were times when the evenings stretched out too quietly, so I urged myself to be friendly. Out on the landing I was greeted by a short man with a generous grin, bounding towards me with his hand outstretched.

'Margarete told me all about you, Barbara Brown from Under Down.'

We laughed together. Then he invited me to the opening of an art exhibition at the gallery next door:

'It's on Friday. There will be wine, food, and good pictures. That way you can meet your new neighbours.'

I was tempted. I had been too nervous to go out alone at night, but this invitation felt safe.

After Manfred left I pulled out my inventory of the museums I hoped would tell me about my mother's wartime life. I needed to see photographs and the objects of war that would open the door of my imagination. All through my life I had learnt about war by watching films and reading books, visiting museums or participating in Remembrance Days. Now, it seemed inevitable, in the face of uncertainty that I would visit Germany's repository of memory to fill in the gaps of my knowledge. I guess this was going to be a haphazard method of uncovering Mum's story, but I knew from my visit to the library in Friedrichschain that if I saw a photo I would be able to put my Mum into the picture and create her story. My first destination was The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe.

I got out of the train at the station near Unter den Linden and walked towards an overwhelming collection of concrete blocks that seemed to go on for ever. Slabs

of grey were etched into the melancholy sky. At first glance these rows of misery told me nothing. What was the point? But wasn't the murder of six million people beyond my comprehension. I picked my way carefully between the stones, uncertain of my step. The path was moving. The blocks were going to fall. I had to get away.

At the top of the steps to the memorial's underground museum the Holocaust survivor, Primo Levi, warned me about the perils of complacency:

'It happened, therefore it can happen again: this is the core of what we have to say.'

This man had survived, but the awful fear of repetition never left him.

Underneath the granite blocks the museum inched forward through a series of catacombs, each room telling a story. I looked at so many 'before' pictures, Jewish life before the Holocaust. I scrutinised a small family portrait, wondering if it could it have been Mishka's. My thoughts had moved away from the man who had instigated this trip. Lately, I had been more intent on getting to know the hidden parts of my mother than on understanding my inherited sense of shame. But, the museum reminded me that Mishka was the final motivation for my trip. I had left my family in Australia because I was haunted by his story. If I could understand his ongoing sorrow then I might be able to appreciate the complexity of my mother's life.

If this was a photo of Mishka's family then they looked very elegant, as if they were attending a wedding. Dark eyes peered at me from behind the glass. For a while this secluded place protected them, but it didn't last. I followed this Jewish wedding party around the room, watching them scatter like seeds on hostile ground. Some were shot, some burned, most died. This underground memorial repeated their story over and over again. Like a petulant child I wanted my mother. She had to tell me why. I know it was an unreasonable request, one made in the face of my overwhelming shame. The air held no answers. I walked up the steps of the museum

and sat down on one of the smaller grey blocks. It was like resting on someone's grave. I was crushed by the immensity of this place and my old uncertainties returned. Mum must have known what was going on; a crime of that magnitude couldn't have gone unnoticed. Her quiet withdrawal was because she was guilty.

'Excuse me, may I sit here?'

An old woman, dressed in nothing but black perched on the edge of my concrete square.

'I noticed that you were very taken with the wedding photos down stairs.'

I didn't want her there, she unsettled me, and besides there were plenty of other blocks.

'They were standing in a group,' I explained, 'happy – getting ready for their big day. It was good to see.'

'Yes, but it didn't last,' she said. 'Their happiness didn't last.'

'Yes, I know. The Germans came and everything changed.' My response came too easily, masking a shame that rose like a blush.

'Yes, most of them were taken to the camps. Those left behind were shot in the village square.'

She sighed heavily, as if thinking of a distant thing. Rising slowly, she left behind a drift of stale lavender water.

My emotions see-sawed, leaving me empty. I wanted to leave. A small café was hidden behind the grey memorial, playing down its cheery existence in the midst of melancholy. Some people might not think it appropriate to eat kuchen and cream after seeing so many pictures of gaunt people behind barbed wire. So, I sat towards the back of the cafe, nursing a mug of hot coffee when a sparrow flew in, looking for crumbs. Grateful for his jaunty distraction, I gave him a small piece of cake. He hopped between the chairs, chirruping and happy. Then he flew up onto the table,

holding his tiny head to one side, watching me with such intensity that his gaze calmed me.

'Tell me little bird, what did Mum know?'

He gave me a final chirrup and flew away through the open door.

My Mum had always been a kind person, helping neighbours, giving to charity. Was it possible that underneath this generous exterior she harboured a guilty secret? I pulled out my notebook and began toying with possibilities. My loyalty to my mother wouldn't allow me to imagine anything too terrible, but every day she would have faced the dreadfulness of the Nazi regime …

Berlin, June 1943

My bags are heavy with potatoes; the handles dig into my skin, puckering my fingers and turning them red. Mutti will have to wait. The sun is too hot to keep on going. I will find a park bench under the elms, and from there I will hear the birds.

My peace is broken when an old woman, dressed in heavy black, sits down beside me. She doesn't speak, but I hear her sighing under the warm June sun. Perspiration glistens, turning her cheeks into shiny apples. I am about to say hallo when I see a pinpoint of yellow hidden under her coat. Is she wearing a star? Then she can't sit here. I am tempted to move away. I don't want any trouble, but she seems harmless enough and the street is empty.

The sun makes me drowsy and I close my eyes, but not for long.

'You can't sit here, you old cow.'

We both look up – a group of boys dressed in Hitler Youth uniforms stand around the bench in a jeering circle. Fear trickles down my neck, but there is no need. They are not bothered with me.

They begin to taunt the old woman, pulling her off the bench and spinning her around. Her grey, pinned up hair, flies out in every direction, like a silver halo. One of the boys spits on her with his slobbery mouth, and this is their signal. The others start spitting until her face is wet with their saliva. Then the smallest boy shoves her, and she trips. Blood comes. She is a bundle of black on the pavement. The gang seem to be unsure of their next move. Then the old woman groans and they run away. I should do something, but what? Mutti must be worried by now. I gather my bags and hurry along the road. I will not look back …

That was all I let myself imagine. I knew I was letting Mum off the hook, but my mind refused to encounter anything more dreadful. Surely, she couldn't have done anything worse. But, the man who had started it all was the one who really deserved my anger, not my mother. Looking at the map I discovered that I was close to Hitler's Bunker. Leaving the last of my cake to the birds, I headed off. Here, there was no startling memorial to the leader of the Nazis, just a small plaque sitting on an innocent square of lawn. I wanted to kick that grass away – how *dare* it grow so green. This place should have looked like turf at the end of a footy match – torn up and muddy, so that people could see where the boots had been – the kicking and the kicking; but there was nothing, just a quiet piece of grass. Death had diminished Hitler, but in reality he was everywhere, the reason for all of this - the museums, the documentaries, and the broken lives.

Surely my mother had seen through him. There had to be another story, something to balance out the last one. I wanted this 'memory' to be more in keeping with the person I knew, and it would include my grandmother, a strong-willed woman who rarely gave in. I remembered Omi's visits when I was a child. She held

me with her stern gaze, but when we played hide and seek she tickled me through the curtains …

Berlin, April 22, 1942

Today is Hitler's birthday, and the entire city is getting ready for his party. Every household receives a letter ordering them to hang a Swastika flag from their window. A kit, telling us the most appropriate way to acknowledge our Führer's birthday, comes with this letter. It contains suggestions for poems to read and songs we can all sing. Of course, Mutti throws it in the rubbish, but I wish she would take these orders more seriously; surely hanging a flag from our window can do no harm. If Hitler's staff car drives along our street they might look up and expect to see a proud banner hanging from number 21 Warschauer Strasse. They will not be pleased by this empty space!

My friends are convinced that Hitler's eyes can hypnotise them. Liselle tells me that each time she hears his voice she becomes so weak she has to lie down. What rubbish! How can one man have such power? I would never be so stupid! They are probably out there now, screaming his name in the hope that he will look their way. Of course Mutti has forbidden me to join them:

'I know we are all supposed to celebrate but I cannot,' she explained.

'Too many of my Jewish friends have disappeared, and those left behind have shrivelled into waiting. How can I make a party in the midst of this sadness?'

When Mutti refuses to hang out Hitler's flag, I am frightened. Will someone report us to Nazi headquarters? Mutti is always warning me about the possibility of neighbours spying on us, how can she say this and then refuse to hang the Swastika? This is such a small thing. A flag draped from our window might be enough to keep us safe. Sometimes I don't understand her.

On the other hand, maybe Mutti is right. Last night the soldiers came for Heidi, our Jewish neighbour in the flat below. Their boots woke up the entire apartment building. Why take her? What has she done – nothing except to be Jewish! Now her flat stands empty, except for her canary. I can hear it singing as I walk past Heidi's door. Does that poor bird have enough seed? Mutti and I want to rescue her, but we don't have a key, and the superintendent of our building refuses to help:

'Why should I rescue a Jewish bird?' he tells me when we ask him to unlock the door to Heidi's flat ...

The sky darkened as huge drops of rain splashed mud onto my jeans. I had seen too much misery for one day; it was time to go back to Hektor Strasse. There I could sit by the French windows with my cup of tea, watching the street below. Then my new stories would be able to settle in. For now they were hovering over the holes in my mother's life, but once home they would find an opening and drop into my question marks to seal the cracks.

The bus arrived and I climbed the stairs to the top. My body swaying as the lumbering double decker weaved its way in and out of the wet traffic. This was my favourite spot, on the top deck by the front window. From here I could pretend to be the driver. When I was little, my sister Carol and I raced to the front of the bus so that we could hold onto the bar by the window. From there we imagined that it was possible for two small girls to control a lumbering double decker by hanging on to the rail. We swerved and bumped into each other as the bus rounded each corner, laughing so loudly that Mum raised her watchful eyebrows. We should be together now – two sisters searching for the answers, but Carol couldn't wait to discover the reasons behind her sadness; she left for another journey, down a tangle of Intensive Care trip wires and into outer space.

6. Where are the heroes?

Today, I had an appointment to speak to the director of the Silent Heroes Museum. My trip to Berlin was supposed to be a balanced inquiry; I was trying hard not to demonise my mother because of her German heritage. This museum was one of the few places that recognised that some Germans had little to be ashamed of. And if the opportunity arose during our interview, I hoped that Dr Kosmala would listen to my own small story. It was passed down when I was a child. I was aware that there were so many other tales of courage, and many made ours seem less than extraordinary. Even so, it was our family's talisman – proof that there had been times when we behaved differently from the others.

In 1938 Jewish life in Germany was under a cloud, culminating in Kristallnacht, the 'night of broken glass'. Hiding Mum's Jewish school friend Eve was our family's proof that they had not turned their back on the persecuted. While others shunned them, our family said 'yes'…

Berlin, November 1938

When Jewish shops burn and the synagogues are smashed, our world begins to change. On the outside, life is the same, but if the Nazis can smash Jewish businesses, they can do anything.

Eve told me yesterday that her Papa had received a warning. Someone slipped a message under her father's shop door:

'The time has come. You must all leave. If you don't get out now they will take your family and lock you up.'

But where can the Cohens hide?

Eve stood by as her Papa contacted all his old friends, phone call after phone call. He is popular and knows many people through his business connections, but

neither salesmen nor customers were prepared to help him. They are too frightened to shelter Jews, even if they are old friends:

'We want to help, but we have our own families to think of. If they find you it will be the end of us.'

Eve's father is desperate. She told me how she watched him pacing their kitchen floor, crying. I could see she was shaken; her Papa is the strong one, but now he is crumbling. Then my Mutti told Herr Cohen she was willing to hide Eve and her sister Irene until the trouble blows over. I am both proud and frightened. What if the Nazis discover them in our flat, will they take us all away?

Herr Cohen fought in the Great War; I have seen his medals. How can this be happening? They are Germans, like the rest of us, but the government treats them like outsiders. Everywhere there are posters telling us that Jews are evil, that they eat children and steal our money. This sounds more like a frightening Prussian fairy tale than the truth, but some people believe these stories and each day our friends' fear grows bigger.

It is dark when Eve and Irene arrive at our flat; all they have is a small cardboard suitcase. At home their bedroom is full of dolls and smart clothes, is this all they can bring? I try to listen as Eve's mother and Mutti whisper together in the kitchen, but they are too careful, and I must make sure my school friends feel at home. I watch, helpless, as Frau Cohen holds her daughters close for just one minute before she leaves. The door closes softly and she is gone.

We stand around our living room like awkward dolls, unsure of what to do next; this is not like any other after-school visit. Thankfully, Mutti breaks into our silence by offering us a drink. There are times when Mutti's job at the chocolate factory can be very useful, but I still do not know where everyone will sleep; ours is

such a small flat. Mutti and I usually lie together in the double bed, but now we have two extras.

'You girls need your rest, who knows what will happen tomorrow.'

Mutti tucks the three of us into the big bed before pulling a quilt around her shoulders and settling into her chair by the fire. When I look across, I can see her determination—she is a lioness, preparing to protect her cubs from all intruders.

Irene falls asleep straight away, but Eve and I talk in whispers. She is worried about her family – Mutti, Vati and her little brother Ernst. What is happening to them? How can she stand it – not knowing if they are safe? Eve whispers beneath the covers, telling me that her brother is staying with their local doctor while her parents hide in separate parts of the city. The whole family is separated now, but I always remember them as together.

Whenever I came to their home after school, they would be sitting around their long kitchen table, laughing at Ernst's schoolboy jokes. Frau Cohen always told the others to move along and make room for me. I stayed with them until Mutti had finished her work for the day. She did not like me to come home to an empty flat. We spent so much time together that Irene and Eve became my make believe sisters while Ernst was the annoying brother I never had.

Now it is our turn to care for them, but this is different. The atmosphere in our flat is quiet and anxious, and nothing like the rowdy after-school gatherings we have been used to. The next day Mutti and I try to go about our business, pretending we are not hiding two Jewish girls, but I am jumpy and nervous. Am I imagining Frau Schmidt's accusing glare when we ask her for four breakfast rolls instead of two? Mutti quickly reassures the baker's wife that we are especially hungry this morning ...

Hope filled my anxious heart as I climbed the stairs to the Silent Heroes Museum. Dr Kosmala would listen to this story and realise its importance. This memory had protected me all through my childhood from feelings of shame. It was my raincoat in the storm. In Germany I needed this shield more than ever, but I only felt right in using it if the director of a museum that heralded Jewish rescuers approved. Nervously, I pulled open the small white door of the museum and waited at the reception desk. My mother, the girl who had shared her bed with her Jewish classmate was dead, but I did not want this act of courage to be buried alongside her. I tried to speak on her behalf, but the director wasn't sure of the story's value.

'You must understand that, in reality, only male Jews were sent to Dachau concentration camp during Kristallnacht. And later they were released, so your mother's Jewish friend was under no real threat.'

The white walls surrounding me displayed the real stories of bravery. I looked closely at the picture of a German man who was sent to a concentration camp for hiding his Jewish neighbours. Maybe my mother didn't have that type of courage. The room was full of people's compassion and its terrible consequences. In comparison, my family's story hung by a thread – it was not daring enough, nor late enough in the war to be really significant. Eve was due to arrive in Berlin in a fortnight's time; she had decided to tell Dr. Kosmala her side of the story. Her daughters were coming too. After so many years we were to be together, remembering painful events while acknowledging that not every German hated Jews. How could I explain to them that their story was not so important? Defeated, I left.

That evening, I sat by the open French doors of my Berlin apartment, nursing my laptop and a glass of wine, unsure of what to do next. Finally, I decided to send Dr Kosmala an email. I wanted her to appreciate the importance of our memories.

Her uncertainty made me question Mum’s stories and I was frightened that Mishka’s ghosts would never leave me.

7. Satin on the Pavement

Dr Kosmala's 'no' had soured my plans. I was determined to find other ways of redeeming my family, but everything was a mess. I had come to this country to find out why I felt so ashamed of my mother, of being thought of as German. I was trying to get rid of that awful feeling that shook me each time I faced a Jew. Now I was scouring the museums of Berlin like an amateur detective, looking for clues about a furtive past, but alongside that I was longing for redemption, something that would signify my mother's virtue. These separate strands of my longing had become tangled and I wasn't sure how to pull them apart.

I stared for a long time at my list, hoping something would leap out. In the absence of inspiration I opted for another museum. Grabbing my coat I took a train to the Deutsche History Museum. The building was close to the Brandenburger Tor, the grand archway that had watched benignly as thousands of the Nazis marched underneath, holding high their flaming torches for all to see. These young men thought they were carrying the beam of truth for the millions of Germans, watching from the side lines.

I wanted the museum to show me how the National Socialists had managed to convince ordinary people like my mother to follow them. Poisonous Nazi propaganda covered every wall. A picture taken in 1924, two years after my mother was born, illustrated a queue of famished people lining the streets of Berlin, holding their ration cards as they waited expectantly for food. The next display case highlighted a bank note, printed during the time of hyperinflation; the bearer was told that Germany's disastrous money problems were the fault of the Jews. Nazi poison was beginning to spread. Ordinary men, hungry men, were offered extra rations if they joined the SS. Unsurprisingly, numbers increased. Could I have resisted such clever tactics?

Banners appeared in every schoolroom, table tennis club, railway station, and hospital as Hitler's propaganda messages multiplied. The state acted as temptress, luring people to their ranks by offering them government-sponsored holidays via their 'Strength through Joy' programme. And, in the corner of the room stood a child's dolls house, covered in ornate wallpaper, miniature pictures of Adolf Hitler decorated every wall. He was persuading people from the cradle to the grave. An original Volkswagen stood in the middle of the room; this was the people's car, another contribution from their beloved leader. And here was another gift, but there was a catch. It was the People's Receiver, the Volksempfanger, a small, affordable radio – cheap enough for everyone. But, there was a trap. This messenger was able to spread Nazi propaganda to the masses. Now, Hitler could speak in every factory and kitchen. And later on, there was another benefit; Nazi spies could check the position of the radio dial. Of course, it was forbidden to listen to foreign radio stations.

This relentless propaganda co-existed alongside the public humiliation of the Jews. Craniometres on display were an example of the ones used to measure Jewish skulls. The Nazis were sure that Jewish heads were a different head shape. Posters displaying 'typical' Jewish features encouraged people to identify the Jews living in their neighbourhood. They were to be displayed on every classroom or church notice board.

How to avoid such poisonous indoctrination? The Party had Mum surrounded – school, bank notes, holidays, songs, posters, cars, the radio – the lies were closing in. And, at the beginning of all of this she was fifteen …

Berlin, November 1938

Last night my ears throbbed with the sound of crashing glass and people screaming. Mutti kept telling me to stay away from my window, but I had to see.

Across the street was Herr Goldstein's haberdashery shop. Usually, the doors are closed and his blinds drawn, but last night the shop lay open. Most of the material had been torn or burnt. Abundant rolls of velvet and spools of ribbon sprawled out like snakes across the street. And, there, trampled under the boots of an SS guard, lay the pink satin Mutti had ordered for me. I wanted to shout at the soldier – telling him to stop – but then I realised he was the one.

A week ago Mutti and I walked over to the haberdashery shop to place an order. A guard was standing in the entrance, frowning and copying down our names with his angry writing. 'Juden' had been slashed in red across the doorway of Herr Goldstein's shop, as if to bar our access, but Mutti would not let that get in her way:

'We have always bought our material from Herr Goldstein's; this is no reason to stop.'

She is like that, brave, but I did not want to go in, especially with the guard glaring at us, but you do not say no to Mutti.

Herr Goldstein was so happy to see us. He treated me like a princess, asking me to sit down in his emptying shop. And as he wrote down our order for pink satin, he included an extra metre of material so that Mutti could make me a matching shawl.

'Thank you for your courage, coming here in such terrible times!'

'Tch, that's not courage,' Mutti told him. 'You have always been our haberdasher, and by God's grace, you always will. That little man with his puny moustache won't dictate to me where I shop.'

'Hush Mutti,' I told her. 'The officer might hear you. Then trouble will start.'

A week later my pink satin lay in the road. Everywhere there was crying and burning. I watched as the SS man picked up a brick and smashed it against the Goldsteins' shop window. The glass cracked and splintered on to the road. A large piece fell on top of the material I had hoped would catch everyone's eye at the church dance. I watched from my window as the guard stomped the glass with his boots, grinding it hard into the road until it became diamonds and finally ash. Then he ran away …

In the midst of such turmoil I didn't want to imagine my mother worrying about a party dress …

'Barbara, don't accuse me! You are always angry. The war is over now, be still. If I could give you peace, I would. I know it's flippant, worrying about a party when there was so much sorrow. You have made this journey to ask me some questions, but can't your heart find a little understanding? I was young; it was a party. Such lovely material – ruined. Sometimes I felt as if that satin was a symbol of my early years in Germany. I only wanted a normal life: to attend parties, go boating on the Spree, and maybe a friendship with a boy. Then Hitler burst in, changing everything. You come here, complacent in your comfort, ready to judge me. I was fifteen, what could I do. You are desperate to apportion blame, so can I remind you about more recent attempts at genocide - Rwanda, Bosnia and Sri Lanka. Need I go on? It's easy for you to point your finger at the sins of others, but I wonder whether you ever look in the mirror and question what you are doing.

'I was a young girl, naïve and frightened. Mutti was for ever urging me to be brave, but I was full of fear. We each tried in our own way to resist the ferocity of Nazism. It was impossible. We felt like ants trying to stop a steamroller. All we

could do was show a little compassion while trying to survive Hitler's onslaught. We made an effort to stay human. Many did not.

'You wonder why I didn't tell you more when you were a child, but did you really want to hear about the savagery committed in the name of the German people. I tried to protect you, let you believe for a while longer in the possibility of human goodness. The war was the past and I wanted it forgotten, not paraded daily in front of my children …'

Mum's words blind-sided me. Had I really been too busy accusing her to see my own shortcomings? On the way out of the museum I discovered some pictures that showed the misery of Germany's defeat. The magnitude of Hitler's ambition was crumbling. German arrogance had been replaced by poverty and despair. Under the Fuhrer Berlin was the hope of the world, but photos showed a city in tatters. I saw people starving; their gaunt eyes reminding me of those they had persecuted. Desperate for firewood, they had chopped down the remaining trees along the Unter den Linden, growing vegetables in the Tiergarten Park. Mum was in every picture. My heart ached for her.

Berlin, May 1945

Smouldering pine trees lie across our path, and the air is thick with smoke. This is spring, but it feels like winter, and I am not sure which path to take.

I turn around to ask Mutti if she knows the way, but when I see her I can't help laughing:

'You remind me of our old chimney sweep, covered in so much ash; all I can see are your eyes.'

Mutti has always been smart, even on our tight budget she managed to find a cheap fox fur and some patent leather shoes. Now she looks like a homeless tramp.

‘Marianne, you are no better. If a Russian soldier saw you now he would run the other way. You are surely safe from his advances.’

Mutti had made sure of that. Before we left home she had cut, no, hacked at my hair, trying to turn me into an unattractive boy. Our neighbour had come to her assistance by giving me Fredrich’s shirt and trousers:

‘He won’t be needing them where he has gone!’

Then, with dabs of beetroot juice, Mutti had spotted my face to make me look sickly. I thought the last step unnecessary because my skin was already scabby, but in a desperate way she seemed to be having fun, so I let her anoint me with red until I looked more like a clown than a boy with Typhus fever.

Our plan was to hide in the Spree forest, trying to stay clear of the Russians and their need for revenge. We left the flat in the middle of the night with our neighbours, Herr Braun and his wife, Lottie. She is such a nervous woman she never stops talking:

‘I have heard they go for any woman, age doesn’t matter. Heidi Muller was attacked the day before yesterday and she must be at least eighty.’

‘Hush woman, we must give all our attention to getting away. If they find us it is not so bad, we have had a life, but Marianne is still young and we have planned this escape for her.’

Between the four of us, we managed to put together a bundle of food, scraps really, but it is enough. Berlin is in chaos, broken buildings and rubble barricades block every street. As we made our way to the forest our path was lit by the bombs that glowered across the sky and the roaring fires that were demolishing our city. We moved slowly. Lottie had fallen in the street and now she is limping badly, her husband helping her with every step. Mutti had been sure this part of the forest would be safe, but up ahead trees are burning and we can hear gunfire:

‘We are caught whichever way we go,’ she explains, ‘behind us are bombs, and in front there is fighting.’

‘I vote we stay here for the rest of the night,’ Herr Braun suggests, ‘the fighting is across the river, and I don’t think they are coming this way. Anyway, Lottie needs to rest; her ankle is like a balloon.’

We are too tired to argue, so we sink into a bed of pine needles that smell both green and musty. Herr Braun busies himself by scooping them together to form a mound. It will be a cushion for his wife’s foot. Mutti is worried:

‘I don’t think it is wise to stop here, we are too exposed!’

‘But it is impossible for me to walk another step,’ says Lottie. ‘We must rest.’

Mutti looks around, as if searching for an escape:

‘Over there are mounds of earth. Maybe we can dig a pit and hide.’

Herr Braun walks over to where Mutti is pointing and kicks the dirt; it comes away easily: ‘Probably loosened by the bombs,’ he tells her.

Lottie rests on her cushion of pine while we dig and scrape the ground, trying to make a hole big enough for us to lie in.

‘Scratching with our hands will take forever.’ I look down at my bleeding nails and decide to search for something to make our digging easier. Eventually I bring back some large pieces of fallen pine bark, scooped out like a spade, and we finish our shallow pit as the coming sun filters through the smoke. Then Herr Braun takes charge:

‘If you all lie down I can cover you with these branches, and then I will get in on the side.’

It is a tight fit with no room to move. I lie between Mutti and Frau Braun, the branches scratching my face. An insect crawls up my leg; I try to wriggle it off but Mutti clasps my hand. Her squeezing fingers tell me to lie still.

From beyond the forest comes the stomp of boots. Each footfall brings them closer. I make my breath soft, quiet, until I am barely there, shrinking into the pine needles, very still. I lie this way for a long time. Do the soldiers hesitate when they pass us; surely there must be a moment when they look our way? I want to see them as their sound becomes smaller, but Mutti is still holding my hand.

We must have stayed there all day. I think I sleep. Just before evening I wake, in desperate need of a toilet, my stomach aching with hunger. Mutti releases my hand and her watching eyes tell me it is safe to stand up. How my body aches as my bones ease their way out of our pine pit. Needles stick to every part of me – skin, hair, even my teeth. For a moment the shooting has stopped and we sit together, eating the remains of our bundle.

'We cannot stay here for long, there is nothing left for us to eat,' says Herr Braun. 'Maybe we should try to go back and see what things are like.'

His wife thinks it is too early and votes we look for berries. My Mutti becomes angry:

'Lottie, what are you thinking of, that is nonsense. How can we forage in the forest for berries like Bund der Maidschen, when behind every tree there may be a Russian soldier ready to do his business?'

After a good deal of squabbling we decide to go back, even if it just to see what has happened. The light is fading and it seems like a safe time to leave. We walk to the edge of the forest, looking for a road back to the city. These woods had once been our Sunday picnic destination, now they are black and broken. It feels good to be leaving. Amongst the trees I think I can see a body, maybe more. Are they our fallen soldiers? I cannot bring myself to look closely.

Frau Braun's ankle is so painful she begs us to rest, but Mutti argues with Lottie's husband, telling him it is too dangerous to sit in such an exposed area.

Maybe it is our arguing, but nobody hears them coming. Then:

'Quiet! Soldiers.' Lottie whispers a warning.

Around the corner come a small group of Russians carrying guns. We know they have been fighting; their clothes are rags and they have torn their trousers to make temporary bandages. An officer leads one of his men – he has bandages over his eyes. It is slow travelling.

'Why are you here?' he asks, more curious than angry.

'We are refugees, looking for food,' Mutti tells him, sending me a warning frown.

I watch as their eyes sweep over us, pausing at Lottie and Mutti before settling on me. This is it – all I have feared is about to happen. But Mutti has coached me in boy behaviour and I give them a grin. Then the officer asks me, 'Why aren't you off fighting like the others?'

My legs soften; will they hold me? Then Mutti rescues me again:

'Can't you see he is sick? He is not well enough to fight.'

'We are not so fussy with our soldiers, right now we need as many men as we can get.' Then he grabs my arm ...

'I wouldn't touch him if I were you, sir. My son has typhus – it is contagious.' The soldier lets me go but he doesn't step away; I cough, hawking spittle onto the road. A few drops of slime wet his boots and he moves back to the group:

'You shouldn't be out, walking so openly, spreading your German diseases,' and they move away, leaving us still by the side of the road …

I imagine Mum carrying this grief like a thick blanket, wrapping it around until no one could touch her. I had tried, was always trying. Happy Barbara – laughing and singing, wanting to make her smile. I could still hear Mum's laughter; Dad would

tease, or I would tickle, but those moments soon disappeared. And at the end, when she was dying, I brought her home because I wanted to give her one last chance to throw away the blanket. Then, I hoped she would embrace me, laugh with me, and come out from behind the wrappings of memory that bound her to the past.

I walked out of the museum and into the heart of Berlin's tourist hub. People passed me, wearing big clothes and loud voices, looking at the display windows of the expensive stores lining the Unter den Linden. Across the road was a Nivea shop offering facials for the weary traveller – a cream to smooth away the dust from their journey. I wanted them to stock a lotion for me. After my visit to the museum I needed a complete makeover, something to ease away the crevices and cracks made plain by remembering.

As I walked up Hektor Strasse, I saw Herr Klingner sitting in the last of the evening light surrounded by neighbours from the next-door shop. Each day they gathered on the pavement around their small metal table, painting china to sell in their shop while Herr Klingner looked on, drinking coffee and passing comments on their choice of colour. These beasts were not the cosy, old-lady porcelain paintings that belonged to the country shows of Adelaide; here stood brown and green dragons, lizards and monsters, leering at passers-by in their gruesome, tooth-ridden way.

Manfred introduced me to one of the painters. Frau Grunow was a small, heavy woman intently painting teeth. As I walked towards her she wiped her hands on her black apron, then she shook my hand with patient steadiness. We smiled at each other; I could not speak German and she had no English, but I admired their paintings and the way they gathered in such a European way, their internal lives spilling onto the pavement for everyone to see.

Sometimes, when my evenings were too long, I looked over the edge of my balcony, hoping for distraction. Like a peeping Tom I watched Manfred and his

neighbours drinking wine and smoking. Then, friends walked by with their inevitable German shepherd. My neighbours invited them to take a seat and the party grew, becoming a relaxed ending to their day. And as I watched them I realised I no longer wondered what they had done in the war – they had become ordinary people. They were my neighbours.

8. The handbag lady

I'd had enough of museums and memorials; I was overwhelmed with sadness. Visualising Mum in every setting, seeing her hungry or frightened, imagining her being browbeaten by propaganda – it was all getting too much. Then, there was the other strand of my quest. Uncovering more horror stories about the demise of the Jews, wondering what Mum knew, whether she was involved. I was getting to the point where I didn't want to know. It was time for me to be an ordinary Berliner. Shopping, walking, and washing weren't the usual activities on my list of relaxing pastimes, but that morning they looked distinctly attractive. But, before I could sweep away a trail of dust from underneath my bed, Zoë was on the other end of the phone, missing me. To leave my daughter during her final year was not great planning:

'I'm reading *The Crucible*; I have to write an essay on the persecution of minority groups. Do you have any ideas? I'm stuck.'

So, even during my 'at-home' day my thoughts settled on sadness. Zoë and I talked for a while; it had been a long time since I read Miller's play, but I gave her a few ideas, no doubt made fresh by visiting Jewish memorials. It looked as if had become the family expert on the persecution of minorities. After the phone call, I went down stairs to check the mail. On the landing I met Herr Klingner:

'How is Barbara Brown from Under Down?'

I smiled, a little weary of this familiar joke, but grateful for his friendly face.

'Tell me, what are you doing in Berlin? Margarete said you were here to find out something about the past. That is a big job!'

I told him what I knew of my mother's story, wanting him to understand how the war had affected her, and why it was important to know where my guilt was coming from. He was right; it was a big job.

‘I admire anyone who tries to find out about their family – even the skeletons in the cupboard. Before I forget, I was coming up to tell you something. I have a message from your Aunt Lucie. She would like you to call her.’

Aunt Lucie, the handbag lady. She was my mother’s playmate when they were three. They had lived in the same apartment block on Warschauer Strasse. On wet afternoons, Lucie would gather up her mother’s old handbags, string them along her arm then walk down the hall to my Mum’s door:

‘Can Marianne play handbags today?’

Then they would sit on the landing and pretend to go to shopping, or they would imagine a trip to the theatre, or a holiday on a train – anywhere that required a handbag. We still ‘wrote’, Lucie and I, she in German and me in English, using our dictionaries to decipher each other's fragile foreignness. I wanted her to tell me more about my mother’s past, so I prayed that our language differences wouldn’t form an impenetrable barrier.

After collecting my mail I went upstairs to phone Lucie. Using hand gestures Lucie couldn’t see, I acted out an unseen charade. Thankfully, a few childhood phrases of German came back:

‘Eins, zwei, drei – three o’clock for Kaffee.’

At three o’clock the next afternoon I announced my arrival through the intercom outside Lucie’s flat. A tiny woman with frizzled orange hair opened the door. ‘Ah, Barbara, wilkommen to Deutschland.’

We hugged awkwardly, my large bunch of yellow roses coming between us, and threatening to scratch us both. Her apartment was like a shrine to my past. Crocheted doilies, china ornaments and the strong smell of German coffee transported me back to my parents’ home. And, even though Lucie was eighty-six and stooping into her walking frame, she was determined to look after me. She

turned into another comforting mother-memory – sitting me in an overstuffed chair and passing me a selection of kuchen, before topping my choice with a large spoonful of cream. Then she waited. We were about to embark on a perilous conversation, Lucie without English and me with only a few words of German.

Luckily the TV broke through our silence. That afternoon I was grateful for a new case of swine flu discussed with passion by the newsreader. I attempted, using my hands, Lucie's dictionary, and the television, to talk about this latest scare. Then, we moved onto graffiti and car theft, all with the aid of our helpful newsreader. More orders of coffee and cake helped to fill the silences. Then, in a final attempt to close the gaps laid bare by our language difference, Lucie brought out her photo album to show me her son and daughter-in-law, and some pictures of a church outing. We continued to muddle our way through the remains of the day, each aware that there was so much more to say.

That evening Manfred came to my rescue. He was sitting outside in his usual position:

'Well, how did it go, with you and your Aunt Lucie?'

He had a way of making everything I did sound important, a singular event, and I warmed to his interest, telling him about our language problems, conversations about swine flu and graffiti, and my desire to uncover more about my mother's friendship with Lucie.

'This is not a problem, I can come with you on your next visit and, how do you say, translate.'

At first I was excited, but then shyness took over. Manfred was a stranger and I wondered whether he would he look into my family and see the barnacles that clung to its sides. Then again, this was not a chance I could miss:

'What a wonderful idea, there is so much I want to know.

9. My Mum the Rubble Woman.

This day had been a long time in coming. Mum had told me how she cleaned bricks after the war was over, but I had never understood what her job really entailed. Today I was hoping to find out. The guide book directed me to a Trummerfrauen statue in the suburb of Neukolln. The statue had been erected to celebrate the achievements of the 'rubble women' of Germany, who cleaned up the mess after the Allied bombing was over. Most German men had been killed or had gone into hiding, so it was the women who were forced to clear away the bombed debris, their labours earning them extra rations.

It was as if the Trummerfrauen scouring of Germany's dirty past allowed a fresh hope to emerge from the ruins. Never had the saying 'a new broom sweeps clean' been so apt. I envisaged the country's wickedness settling onto its people's skin like a second layer; so now it was up to the German hausfrau to make amends. Maybe, this was this when Germany's healing began, under the vigorous swishing of the mop and duster. Did ordinary women, like my Mum, wash away the memory of six million crimes, as they cleaned the streets of broken bricks, one piece at a time?

My Mum's spotless house was her most prized possession, and cleaning had always been her way of dealing with trouble. When my father was admitted to hospital for a triple heart bypass, Mum sorted through every cupboard in the house. And after hearing the news about Mutti's osteosarcoma, our home endured an extra spring polish, even though it was the middle of winter. Maybe exorcising dirt to make way for fresh beginnings was the only way she knew of dealing with bad news.

But the time came when Mum was too old and sick to clean, so we employed a home help. A young woman from the local council flitted around my mother's house like a darting bird, while Mum sat in the corner crying. It was almost impossible for me to imagine anyone grieving the loss of their mop and duster, but

Mum had wielded both with pride for as long as I could remember. It was as if they were strapped to her wrists, a living part of her. When old age finally took hold my Mum was made to relinquish them. Therapeutic scrubbing was no longer possible; she had to sit next to her pain, unable to get away.

If I close my eyes I can still see Mum's hands, always busy, always moving, but when arthritis converted her fingers into swollen hooks it became increasingly difficult for her to hold a potato peeler or darn my father's socks:

'Throw them away,' I told her, 'Nobody darns anymore.'

This was the beginning of another pointless conversation and I watched Mum retreat into her wartime memories, a place where nobody discarded anything. And from her vantage point she contemplated her wasteful daughter, and the fragile bridge of our understanding fell down once more.

These memories filled my mind as I sat on a near empty train that was taking me to Neukolln. I wanted to visit the Rubble Woman statue so that I could pay homage to the time when my mother cleaned the bricks of Berlin. It was here she learnt to keep everything 'just in case', and it was this attitude that helped to rebuild her broken city, piece by piece.

As I stepped off the train, my bag full of travelling necessities broke at the handle, leaving it dangling by one strap, but I was in luck – there was a market at the top of the railway station stairs. I would buy another one. The booths were a hotch-potch of old and new. Wandering from one to another I found a stall selling daffodils and a butcher's stall displaying an array of fragrant wursts, but there were no bag stalls. Defeated, I stopped to listen as a group of musicians serenading the shoppers; I almost forgot why I was there. When the song ended I turned around; behind me was a revolving carousel heavy with so many handbags. Without heeding my mother's call for frugality, I picked out a new one – bright red. The handle would have been

simple to repair, but I didn't have time to look for a mender. I could feel Mum's disapproving glare (that was permanently there), and her scolding voice telling me how wasteful I was.

She was always inside my head. It was time to confront her - this woman who had made skimping and cleaning such a high priority. My sense of direction is a family joke, so I stumbled around the park with my flapping map, asking for directions. The grounds went on for ever and, inevitably, I got lost, lost amongst flowerbeds and children's playgrounds, lost in the middle of a fairground preparing for opening night, lost, and pushing through weeds and bracken. I had walked past these flowers only ten minutes before. Would I ever find her?

Two women walked ahead of me; they looked like old friends, close and chatting. One was pushing the other in a wheelchair, hard work on a gravel path that wound its way up the hill. They both had short grey hair and jeans, the uniform of my era; aging baby boomers, ready for one more adventure. I caught up to them and asked for help, showing them the photograph of the statue I had printed from my computer:

'Yes, I am sure I have seen that statue in this park, it's near the far entrance.' They pointed to a path I had missed. Underneath my first picture they spied another much livelier version of a rubble woman. She was standing with her legs apart, pick slung across her shoulder, as if she was one of the seven dwarves, whistling her way to work. The woman pushing the wheelchair was studying the two illustrations:

'The other statue is in Alexanderplatz. The Communists would have portrayed the Trummerfrauen as happy to work for their future, not burdened by the troubles of the past.'

I stared at both pictures and understood the difference, but my mother was definitely the statue in this park, sitting down after a long day, hunched forward with

tiredness, and saddened by all she had seen. She was not a cheerful dwarf, ready to battle with the wreckage of war.

I thanked my rescuers and followed their suggestions. And as I turned a corner I saw her, a large stone woman wearing a headscarf and stone shoes that were far too big. If this woman was my mother, then the fashionable furs and perky hats had disappeared. This statue was dressed in rags. The artist had given her a resigned look, wearily gazing across the rubble that was once Berlin, too tired to bother with one more brick. I walked over to the stone woman and placed a bunch of yellow tulips in her arms; she received them with quiet dignity. They were her due. Her hand held a hammer that looked too heavy to lift. She was ready for work, but daunted by the task. Maybe she was wondering where she would find the energy to clean up the wreckage that had been Berlin because Allied bombing had destroyed more than eighty per cent of her home.

Sitting at the foot of the statue, I looked up at her stern face, heavy with responsibility; I wanted to imagine what it was like for Mum to clean enough bricks to get something to eat …

Berlin, March 1946

I did not want to get out of bed this morning, even though our apartment is little more than a hovel. My back was aching and I could hear thin spears of rain tapping against the sheet of iron that pretends to be a window, but Mutti called me for breakfast, if you can describe beetroot jam on stale bread with ersatz coffee a breakfast. I gave in because I was empty, and besides, our rations are running low and clearing bricks is the only way to keep our cupboards stocked.

Mutti and I belong to the Berlin rubble women, the Trummerfrauen. Each morning we get up in darkness to join the queues of chattering hausfraus who

receive their rations by clearing away the rubble that was once Berlin. These women, clad in aprons and headscarves, line up along the broken streets as if they are waiting for the doors to open for the Ka De We Christmas sale. Surely, it is only German women who get excited at the thought of cleaning.

For it is women who have been given this job; all our men have gone, dead on the battlefields or dying in hospital, and we are left alone with a pile of broken bricks that was once our great city. Elegant buildings reduced to a rotting corpse, and we, its proud citizens, picking through the bones like scavenging insects, but where do we start? Smashed buildings and piles of rubble stretch on forever. How can women clear away such chaos? Then again, this is what women have always done; tidy away the debris after our menfolk have finished with their mindless pastimes.

Part of our job is to search for precious whole bricks; they can earn us an extra potato for our troubles. But, they are hard to come by; everywhere is dust and debris. Mutti is so determined to find the bricks the others have missed that her fingers are cracked and bleeding. When I beg her to stop, she reminds me that this brick might be the one that gives us the potato we need to make pancakes. Then I stop pleading, for I am unable to resist her pancakes. Hunger seems to drive my every waking moment; even the sight of Mutti's bleeding fingers does not stop me from dreaming about food.

As we scrabble over the piles of rubble like ants scouring for sugar we can feel the watching eyes of Russian soldiers. They no longer interfere with us, but I do not trust them. Russian soldiers and German women, this is an uneasy alliance. Today, as I bend over a pile of rubble, searching for bricks, I can feel their eyes burrowing through my jacket. Why do they bother? Surely, I am nothing to look at,

just a shrivelled sack of skin, my clothes falling off skinny shoulders and hair cropped short. Still they stare.

I kick away some small stones with my shoe and there, looking up at me, is the face of an old man, buried beneath the ruins. Instantly, a soldier is by my side, and together we pull away a plank of wood that lies across the dead man's chest. At first, I imagine that the soldier will take the body away for a proper burial, but no. Instead, he kneels down in the dirt and begins searching through the dead man's pockets. Inside the man's striped waistcoat the soldier finds a gold pocket watch. He puts it up to his ear, shakes his head and buries it deep inside his uniform. As he stands up, he gives me a toothless smile before striding towards his comrades to show them his bounty.

Now I am left alone with this slightly smelly corpse. Obviously, any burial rites are my responsibility, but what am I supposed to do with his crooked arms and legs? They have buckled underneath him in an impossible contortion. It is tempting to walk away, but there, beneath his broken glasses, his eyes hold me with a look of quiet expectation. I feel too weak to lift him by myself, so I search for something decent to cover him. In a past life, this man might have hoped for a fancy funeral, with black horses and relatives following behind, but our war has dispensed with such traditions. All I can find is a piece of torn cardboard, which I use to cover his face from the destroyed city that had been his home.

And there I kneel in the dust, trying to pray, but to whom, and for what? When I eventually stand up, I realise Mutti has disappeared. Maybe this heavy work is too much for her. Anxiously, I run over to the other women to find out where she has gone:

'Your mother, she is a lucky woman. Just now, she found two whole bricks. I think she is on her way to the Russian captain to get her extra potato rations.'

I run along the street after her, in the direction of the Allied Control Council, only to witness Mutti emerging triumphantly with her extra coupons. So, tonight, after many months, we enjoy a dinner of potato pancakes, made proudly by Mutti's bleeding hands. I like to imagine this was a fitting supper for the old man's burial party …

I read the plaque underneath the statue, which explained how the Trummerfrauen had cleaned Berlin to make way for a better future, but the new Germany was not a place my mother wanted to call home. In 1949 she left her Berlin and made her way to England, unable to stay in a city torn open by post-war bickering and one more set of soldiers.

I sat quietly at the foot of this memorial, remembering my house-proud German mother—it was a part of her heritage that never disappeared:

'Barbara, don't walk on the floors, I mopped them this morning!'

I had just come in from school. Where else could I go if I couldn't walk on Mum's clean floors; surely she didn't expect me to become Fred Astaire and dance on the ceiling. Later, when Mum visited me in my new home she would run her fingers along the skirting boards:

'Hmm, we haven't dusted lately.'

I played out my early adult life in slothful rebellion, with dirty dishes, a freezer full of outdated food and floors that had taken on an ancient, lived-in look. While I determinedly did everything my mother thought unwise, she kept cleaning and cooking and cleaning and cooking. Eventually, her home became my oasis, a place to visit when my twenty- first century life threatened to spin off-centre. Visiting Mum meant being greeted by dainty blue and white dishes all set out on a lace tablecloth. Her graceful existence stood in sharp contrast to my heavy-duty

mugs and op-shop plates. To visit Mum was to feel loved, cosseted, and smothered and I could only take it in small spells. Still, I knew where to go when I required her order instead of my chaos. Maybe that was what the bunch of tulips were for; to say ‘thank you’ for putting her skills to good use, the skills she learnt while cleaning up the streets of Berlin.

The statue continued to hold my gaze, unperturbed by my memories. But, then I looked at my watch and realised I was late for Herr Klingner’s Art Show. Dashing off, I left my mother alone in the park with her hammer and flowers. As she watched me run down the path I could imagine her thinking:

‘There she goes again – leaving everything to the last minute. That girl has no organisation.’

Manfred’s Art Show was displayed in the small shop next door to my apartment building. Even though I was late, the gallery was quiet. I slipped in and took a glass of wine from the side table and decided to look around. The walls overflowed with a generosity of colour, large pictures of strong, outrageous women. The artist had detailed each muscled arm and knuckled finger; their very souls seemed to be on show. This must have been my day for meaningful glances with inanimate objects. Then, Manfred interrupted my reflections.

‘Barbara, let me introduce you to my wife, ex that is.’

I turned towards my smiling landlord and his guest, a diminutive woman with long yellow hair. They both held glasses of white wine, looking as if they were determined to enjoy the party. We smiled and talked about the paintings, but I felt ill-at-ease. My afternoon encounter with the statue had thrown me off balance. Then tiredness stole away the last shreds of my determination, and I left the gallery with a murmured goodbye.

From my next door balcony I watched as Manfred's party spilt out onto the pavement. Flowers daubed the warm night air with their perfume. It was a time to celebrate, but I felt unable to join in. Trapped in the past, somehow, modern Berlin seemed wrong. How could I party on in a city whose foundations were steeped in so much unhappiness?

10. The soup kitchen

By now the history of Berlin filled my every waking minute. Nothing else seemed to matter except the shadow lands that clung so persistently to this country. This was my reason for coming, and like a creature obsessed I would not be distracted. Steadfastly, I continued on the trauma trail, looking for my mother, listening for clues that could tell me about her time in Hitler's Germany. That Tuesday I ended up at the Wannsee Conference Centre, a stately building overlooking a lake full of clear water that was covered in small darting boats. Here everything skimmed across the shiny surface, but underneath there were monsters hiding. I was standing in a building that had witnessed the authorisation of the Jewish Final Solution.

Inside the first room of that house I came across a copy of an article written by Goebbels and then printed in 'Das Reich.' He was determined to eradicate any sympathy people still held for their Jewish neighbours.

'Pity or even regret is fully inappropriate under the circumstances!'

He wanted the German people to harden their hearts against the Jews. Somehow, these 'vermin' were responsible for Germany's losses during WWI. They were to blame for the harsh penalties meted out by the Treaty of Versailles, which had caused so much suffering for the Fatherland – inflation, depression, unemployment, and a terrible loss of pride. Pity was out of place when the time came to exact retribution!

With Goebbels' advice sitting heavy in my heart I sat in the corner of a darkened room to watch an early black and white film showing charity workers serving soup and bread to hundreds of Jews waiting to be transported to Riga. The date was September 1941. I could feel the anticipation that filled the air as people queued for their soup, hanging onto their bulging cases, talking excitedly. I watched closely as volunteer officials sorted out Jewish papers and offered to look after

people's luggage while they were away, as it was forbidden to take any personal belongings into the camp. I learnt that some Jews saw themselves as pioneers, believing they were needed for the important task of colonising the East. But in November 1941 the Nazis murdered 4000 Riga Jews; their services as colonisers had obviously not been required

What did these kindly soup kitchen volunteers know about the eventual fate of these 'new settlers'. How must they have felt when they discovered that the people who had queued for their carefully made soup had been sent to their deaths? My heart was full of questions, but there was nobody that could answer me. I was fearfully alone in that shadowy room, knowing what was about to happen. I wanted to turn time back and warn them, but I was too late.

The story of Jewish extermination went on and on, as one display followed another. Some Germans, when shown pictures of the Jews who lived in the ghettos, thought it more humane to finish them off. After all, they no longer looked human, with haunted eyes peering out of bony sockets and clothes dropping off them like coats slipping from a hanger.

Peering out through the arching windows, I watched the gardeners pulling errant weeds out of the flower beds and sweeping pieces of stray gravel back into position. Everything must have its place. From where I sat I was able to imagine Goebbels and Goering looking out of this same window, captivated by the charming scene. Then with pens poised they each waited in turn to sign a document that would seal the fate of so many.

A room next to the toilets was set aside for something different. In here people were encouraged to express their feelings about the past. Like me, they were dealing with their unruly legacy of shame. One second-generation woman wrote about the weight of her inherited guilt:

‘Yes, my father’s guilt is part of my life. I live and therefore I bear responsibility. I can only stand it by being prepared to keep confronting this past and by taking these horrific events seriously ... My challenge is to implement this awareness in my everyday life and to do something to combat prejudice, disrespect and the destruction of humanity.’

This woman knew how I felt! Her reflection underlined my reasons for coming to this country. She was also working for a compassionate future, based on the understanding of her past. As I read her statement I recalled my constant need to do well: visiting refugees in detention centres, serving meals to the homeless and caring for children from third-world countries. Without knowing it I had tried to eradicate the possibility of doing harm by becoming virtuous, but my righteousness was a different kind of burden.

That evening I didn’t want to be alone. Mishka’s ghosts had a habit of inviting themselves into my apartment to talk about their past. But that night my heart wasn’t in it, I wanted to spend an evening with the living. After all, it was Saturday and the streets were full of people, eating, drinking, and listening to music. Modern Germany was beckoning – move away from the shadow.

Nearby Savigny Platz was a tourist’s mecca; with cosy cafes tucked under archways, accordion players moving from table to table and people drinking from overflowing steins. The Atrane Jazz Club was out of the way, hiding at the dead-end of a quiet street. Inside the club there was standing room only. A young waitress placed me in a queue. Here nobody seemed to mind the squash; we stood around the edge of the room listening to fill-in CDs, waiting for the main attraction. When the waitress wound her way back to me through a tangle of tables she told me a seat was available if I was prepared to share. I joined a slender woman with blonde spiky hair, sitting at a circular table at the back of the club.

Then Esther Kaiser appeared, serenading us in a smoky blue voice that curled around the room. I settled into the music and closed my eyes. Her voice massaged the weariness of Wannsee, letting it drift off into rhythm and smoke. Music had always been one of my mother's safety valves; she cried when the radio played a song that reminded her of home, but when a Strauss waltz came on she grabbed my hands and twirled me around the kitchen:

'This is how we used to dance after work,' she told me, swaying me from side to side. I was her reluctant partner; but she didn't seem to notice:

'Sometimes we would dance all night, and in the morning I would run home to wash my face before going to work – with no sleep at all.'

Eventually Mum let me go as she continued with her housework. I was stunned. Mum was singing along to a Strauss waltz. Music had lifted her and carried her away on a wave of remembering. And, even though she was mopping our kitchen floor in Stanford, I think she was back in Berlin, waltzing.

11. Lily of the Valley

I'd had enough of the list – today I was staying in bed – all day! Pulling the covers over my head, I refused to look at my itinerary. Day after day I had been so typically good, searching for my Mum, picking up every stone in case something was hiding underneath, but today I was on strike. Then the phone rang. Was somebody sick? I jumped out of bed, fumbling with the receiver:

'Happy Mother's Day! Do you miss me?'

It was Zoë. I had forgotten all about Mother's Day. It always meant breakfast in bed – my daughter would prance into the bedroom with her hand-drawn menu, asking me to choose between French toast and muesli. Later, she carried the breakfast tray to my bedside, curled up next to me and asked me to tell her the story of my Mother's Day disaster,

'When we lived in England, like most people we had a two storey house. One Mother's Day, I cooked my Mum fried eggs with bacon, and made her a pot of tea. I remember carrying the tray very carefully up the stairs to her bedroom, but I tripped on a lumpy bit in the carpet and my beautiful breakfast tray slid all the way down the stairs, eggs and bacon splattering all over the carpet.'

Zoë always laughed and this was the beginning of our Mother's Day ritual. In Berlin, this day was going to be different. With Zoe's wishes ringing in my ears I decided to return to my mother's home in Warschauer Strasse and celebrate with her. And this time I was determined to get past the front door.

On the way out to Friedrichschain I paused in the city to walk along the River Spree. The day stretched out before me, why should I rush? Sunlight teased the water and people lay on the grass verge, immersed in their day. Voices travelled from across the river, and with time on my hands I decided to follow the singing. Inside the courtyard of the Markische Museum I listened to a small all-female choir singing

German folk songs. And there she was, an elderly woman, dressed in an old fashioned dirndl and looking my way. She swayed as she sang, lost in the pleasure of old songs, eyes half closed, recalling a different time. I stood with my back to the wall watching her, the weathered stones warming my touch.

When the concert was over I slipped through the back door of the museum and walked straight into a room from my childhood. I had passed through a time machine and reappeared in the middle of the 1950s. My mother stood alongside me as we recalled the games we used to play together, German games that were probably out of place in our English sitting room, but were the only ones she knew. Fondly, I looked at the toys from my bedroom: pick-up sticks, a tiny kitchen cabinet with real pots and pans, and my doll with her gentle china face. And these books were the ones Mum always read. Here was ‘Strumpfel Pieter’ with its terrifying stories about a girl playing with matches who managed to set herself alight, and a boy who stood too close to the water’s edge and drowned.

Did Mum choose these stories to frighten me into obedience? In the 1950s, fear was the parental weapon of choice and one my mother liked to use, but I was her good little girl. She always told me she had walked on clouds after I was born; believing she was unable to get pregnant, she had given up on her dream of becoming a mother. Then, out of nowhere, I appeared; ready to take away her sadness with a single smile. As a new mother, she was determined to embrace the future, but her painful memories kept interfering.

After Mum died I searched everywhere for her diary, a secret place that held her innermost worries - the terror she felt when a bomb dropped, or her bewilderment when she came face to face with the Russian soldiers who were supposed to be her liberators. But I found nothing except a record of her doctor’s appointments, lists of

tablets and what she planned to cook for the coming week. In response to this absence I seemed to be making up her diary. I had to get to know her.

So, I left my pretend bedroom at the back of the museum and travelled to Warschauer Strasse. Sitting outside on a bench opposite my Mum's flat I cradled a pot of pink begonias. I had planned to buy Mum's favourite – Lily of the Valley, but there were none in stock. These begonias would have to do. Flowers were my Mother's Day gift, but I was uncertain about the best way to give them to her. The ground next to me was soft, and if Mum looked out of the window she might see them. I knelt down by the bench and using a piece of bark I had found amongst the weeds, I dug a hole just big enough for my gift. Patting the ground tight I wished I had managed to find her favourites …

Berlin, 1939

Today our class went on a field trip to the Grunewald forest. Flowers were everywhere – I have never seen so many. They stood in clumps behind each tree, and the smell – so beautiful!

Frau Wengel allowed us to wander freely after lunch until it was time to leave for the train. The rest of my classmates walked together in a huddle, but I was left to myself. I didn't mind. Who would want to mingle with Hitler's sweethearts anyway, his darling Bunde Menschen? That is what I have decided to call them. They have left me alone ever since I refused to join the organisation. All they ever seem to do is play sport, which I hate, and march around in endless circles. Still, I wish I could join in the singing – except for the Horst Weissel song – and the uniform is very smart, but that is not enough of a reason to join such a silly group. Mutti would not like it anyway.

The forest was so quiet, peaceful; the pine needles acting like a carpet. Everything was still. Lily of the Valley grew in clumps at the edge of the shade, where the sunlight caught their creamy white faces. Frau Wengel insisted that we leave the flowers just where we found them, but I picked a tiny bunch for Mutti. She was at home with a bad cold and I knew she liked them. When I heard the teacher calling us I began to worry about my little bunch. Where could I hide them? Finally, I decided to put them underneath my cardigan at the bottom of my rucksack, hoping they would not be too squashed. When I looked at my watch I knew I was late, so I ran down the path towards my waiting class. They were standing around, all huffy with impatience, complaining that I was keeping them from the train. Once on board they all sat together, humming their stupid songs. I didn't care one bit! Then Karla called out to me:

'Come on Marianne, why don't you join in. We learnt this one last week. I'm so sorry, I forgot – you weren't there.'

My tears and I had a fight and I won. I didn't want them to see me upset.

When the train pulled into our station at Friedrichshain Mutti was waiting on the platform.

'Mutti – you should be in bed, you have a cold.'

'No liebling, I had to see my Marianne. I knew those girls would give her a hard time,' and she gave me a hug.

'Dear Mutti, my bag holds a secret for you, but you have to wait 'til we get back to the flat. Can you make a guess? It smells pretty and it's from the valley.'

I looked down at the gift of flowers I had planted for my mother. I wanted them to be enough, to add to the tentative bridge that was beginning to form between us. As I struggled to stand up I realised I had been kneeling for so long I had given myself

cramp. I dusted off my hands and walked across the road. This was my second visit to Warschauer Strasse and I was determined to get in. Full of belated determination, I lurked around the entrance to number 21, hoping that someone would leave the door ajar. I passed the time by watching the street, people walking their dogs and children playing on the median strip; for everyone else this was an ordinary day. Then the door opened and a man walked out; I pushed my foot against the entrance to stop it from closing. Inside at last.

Once in the hallway I wasn't sure what to do. I felt like a thief, expecting someone to grab me by the shoulder. I nearly tripped over the bicycles leaning against the wall that obscured the building's peeling paint and cracking linoleum. The only thing of substance was the staircase; dark and sturdy it rose up, taking me up to the next floor. As I hung on to the banister's heavy wood, I caught a glimpse of my mother playing on this stairwell with her friend Lucie, their laughter tinkling along the corridor like the peal of innocent bells.

I wanted to be a magician and look through every door but they were all the same: impenetrable and heavy, holding few clues. So, I sat down on the top step, willing no one to come out while I basked in the memory of laughter.

12. The piano lesson

It was time to come down from the hurdy-gurdy of daily visits and discover whether or not I was getting anywhere. Each day I visited places of national mourning to find out more about my mother, but I wasn't sure whether this was helping. I had seen her in so many places, witnessed her hunger and her fear, but was it based on reality? And, of course, I had seen some terrible pictures detailing the persecution of the Jews, but was I any closer to understanding why Mishka's revelation at university that had caused me so much anxiety?

My imagined stories were beginning to give shape to my mother's life during the war. I was placing the woman I knew into different settings, sparked off by my museum visits. Then I set her free on the page. I was beginning to understand her silence. Maybe empathy was the key to unravelling the different strands of my knot. Without any clear answers I decided to climb back onto my merry-go-round.

Today I had decided to go to the 'The Topography of Terror'. Even the name filled me with dread. Would I find out any more by visiting one more site of unhappiness? But, in the absence of anything more substantial I had to continue.

The Topography of Terror waited for me in the rain; as yet no suitable museum had been built that could house the photographs of the Third Reich. Modern Germany continued to struggle with the best way of displaying its past; it had so many balls to juggle. The country had to appear contrite, taking full responsibility for the sins of the fathers (and mothers); as well as showing visitors from other countries (especially the Jews) that it was prepared to acknowledge guilt by refusing to shy away. This process meant that memorials appeared slowly, in the midst of great debate and consideration.

So while the government discussed the most appropriate way of displaying their past, I was left to peer through never-ending drizzle at the photos of Nazi

crimes. Moments of agony had been scattered throughout people's ordinary lives. In 1933, a city garden was set aside for dancing; I envisaged swirling black and white dresses, dark suits with crisp white shirts, as dancers laughed across the evening air. The Gestapo central headquarters and prison were only sixty metres away. The prison had accommodated Jews, Communists, artist, writers, and homosexuals, all arrested without warning. My mother liked to dance; but the music was probably too loud for her to hear the prison screams carried by the wind.

Each photograph showed a different version of suffering. A teacher, who had spoken out against Hitler, was made to ride backwards on a cow through the streets. Everybody jeered! And in 1933, a shopkeeper was sent to a prison camp because he had charged too much for butter. Nazi streets were for Nazi followers, and the Gestapo, those protectors of the German people, had been given the job of ridding their country of its enemies. Any Jew with a police record, including minor traffic offences, was arrested and sent to the camps. And gradually the streets became 'safe'.

And, here was the last photograph I was able to look at, it had been taken in Warsaw ten years before I was born. It was a picture of a little girl, looking just like me in one of my school photos, except she was thin and sad, with too big boots that must have rubbed against her heels. She was on her way to the collection point; there was no turning back. From that place she would travel to Auschwitz.

The usual unanswered questions crowded in as I walked down the street. But, in this place of dark memory Mum refused to accompany me. Who could blame her? I was sitting in judgement, mulling over each shot and deciding upon her guilt. Why should she show herself when I was so full of anger, enraged by all I had seen: the little girl in her boots, the dancers swaying to the music while people screamed into

the night. I told myself that Mum was young. What I had seen was beyond her control. I had to balance this ugliness with a more forgiving story …

Berlin, June 1939

Saturday – piano lessons with Herr Kaufmann. He lives in the apartment above and sometimes at night, I can hear him playing Chopin, or maybe it is Liszt. My understanding of composers is not what he would like it to be. Please do not get me wrong, he is a kindly man, never getting angry when I make a mistake or forget to practise. After all, it is summer and the evenings are for outside, not for doing my scales. Herr Kaufmann lives alone, with his cat Footzy and his piano:

'I never had time for marriage,' he explained, when I asked him about his empty rooms. 'If the right girl came I didn't see her, my head was always down, looking at my piano keys.' He smiled, as if all of this was unimportant.

Mutti calls from the kitchen to remind me that it is time: 'Have you got your sheet music? I really don't think you have practised enough this week; it's a waste of money if you don't make the most of your opportunities. I know it is Uncle Hans who is paying, but he will expect you to be able to play like a lady when he visits us at Christmas time.'

I am beginning to suspect that Mutti has become rather scared of her brother. He has always been a kind and rather bossy man, but when he arrived at our apartment two months ago wearing a Nazi uniform Mutti was shocked:

'Hans, what is this?'

'Now Friedel, it is only a matter of time before we all must join. This is the way of Germany's future and anyone who disagrees won't be able to get in their way.'

I watched Mutti quietly muttering as she went into the kitchen to make her brother some coffee. When he had gone, she told me about her fears:

'After all Marianne, your Uncle pays for your clothes and school books, we will just have to turn a blind eye.'

When I climb the stairs to Herr Kaufmann's apartment, I can hear his piano playing through the half open door. His beloved instrument stands next to the window, and as I walk in I can see sun filtering through specks of dust as they settle onto the polished mahogany.

'Come in Marianne dear,' he calls out.

His apartment is always a mess, music sheets everywhere and Footzy making her bed in each new pile.

'Would you like a drink before we start?'

'No thank you Herr Kaufmann, my mother and I have just finished our lunch.'

We sit together at the piano while he listens to my fumbling scales:

'I think you will need to practise a little more, you are still quite uncertain. Just try to play a few scales each afternoon when you come home from school. If your mother is able to manage it, I can give you some extra lessons – I have quite a few vacancies nowadays. Many parents don't want an old Jew to teach their bright young offspring anymore.'

I look at him, surprised. I have never heard him speak with such bitterness.

'I am sorry, Herr Kaufmann, she can only manage to pay for one lesson, though, in truth, it is my Uncle Hans who really covers the cost.'

'Yes, I have seen your Uncle Hans, wearing his new uniform. I wonder what he would think if he knew that his niece is learning to play the piano from an enemy of the Fatherland.'

Then he offers to play me a piece of Mozart, probably because he can see that I am upset. I sit next to him on the piano stool, watching the dust dance in the sun, trying not to think about the possibility of Uncle Hans and Herr Kaufmann meeting on the stairs …

I had done it again, turned my mother into an innocent bystander when I couldn't cope with the alternative. I was on an emotional see-saw - lurching from one memorial to another, shocked by everything I saw, angry at the possibility of my mother's compliance and guilty about my lack of fidelity.

13. Falling in the water

The public gardens hugged the edge of the railway line, their beds full of spring flowers, growing heavier with scent each time I walked past. But I didn't have time to linger; my daily round of misery was about to be interrupted by a visit from my Uncle Werner. My mother's cousin had telephoned a few days ago and suggested we go to Mugglesee; the lake where my Mum had kept her boat. I was almost impossible for me to imagine my shy and nervous mother steering a canoe. She wasn't a swimmer and had steadfastly refused to touch any type of steering wheel.

Before Werner arrived I washed a load of dishes that had piled up on the draining board, threw away my English newspapers and plumped the cushions. This was going to be a proper German occasion with real coffee, cups, saucers, and cake still fresh from the morning bakery. Carefully, I laid out my final piece of showmanship – a poppy seed cake and some small rounds of baked cheesecake. My mother would be proud.

Then the doorbell rang – Werner had arrived.

'Ah, my dear Barbara, it is so good to see you!'

I was caught up in his hearty embrace, his arms enveloping me as I remembered the uncle of my childhood, a tall man with head-turning blond hair and blue eyes the colour of early morning water.

Behind him stood a small, fashionably dressed woman; Werner turned and introduced me to his friend Hanne. He spoke of a recent illness, and Hanne's kindness in volunteering to be our driver for the day. I invited my guests into the dining room and we gathered around a table designed to impress. But my uncle rubbed his bulging waistline with regret and nibbled at a piece of poppy seed cake. We left behind the plate of cake and walked down the stairs.

Hanne navigated the streets of Charlottenberg with ease, driving straight through the centre of Berlin and out to Treptow. The car filled with stories and questions, as I attempted to explain why I had come to Berlin. My uncle drowned out my concerns with his hearty laughter. Remembering did not cause him any distress.

'There are many things I think I remember, but I don't really remember them, in reality they are only memories from pictures I have seen or from hearing stories from my grandmother.

'When I was ten years old, I wanted to join the Hitler Youth, not because I was a Nazi – I had a conscience – but to get the knife that came with the uniform. We were poor, so my grandmother made my shirt, but we had to buy the necktie, the black trousers and the shoes also.

'One Sunday we marched through Frankfurter Allee alongside the music and the flags. Our leader went up onto the footpath where a young man was standing. This bystander did not greet our flag, the swastika. Perhaps he didn't know he had to, or maybe he didn't want to. Anyway, our leader went over and smashed him. That was a bad experience for me. They wanted to make me a little leader but my heart was not in it.

'On 20th July 1944, we were all very sad at the attempted assassination of Hitler. We didn't see him as bad; to us he was something like a god. I only knew he was bad after the war was over. Most of the evil things he did were outside of Germany, in Poland and Czechoslovakia. Most Germans saw Hitler as a god, because we had always been unlucky: no jobs, and then condemned to poverty by the Versailles Treaty. His propaganda had filled our heads. He gave us work, but nobody realised he was preparing us for war.

As a child, I recall passing the gates of Sachsenhausen prison camp every day on my way to school. ‘Arbeit Macht Frei’ (‘Work brings you freedom’) was written across the top of the gates.

‘And when I asked my grandmother what it was all about, she told me it was a work camp for prisoners. That didn’t sound so bad, if hard work gave them an early release.

‘Later life was beginning to get dangerous for us. When there were elections the only question was “Did you vote yes?” and maybe, if you didn’t nothing would happen to you, but you lived in fear.’

Werner had been a child during the war, and even though his life had been far from easy, the brutality of the conflict seemed to have left him untouched. He was without bitterness and his open face hid nothing:

‘I can’t imagine the Nazis coming again. We are democratic now, so we fight the beginnings of any wrong ideas. But, of course, it could happen if the economic situation goes down, and then there will be people who think we will be better under another Führer.’

Hanne parked the car by a small riverside restaurant. The water held the reflection of a blue day and quiet boats hung onto the quay. We ordered local fish and three large glasses of Riesling. After too many days of horror, I was willing to relax. We laughed as Hanne, a company representative, explained the many uses of Aloe Vera while Werner acted as giggling interpreter. Then, with lunch over we left the restaurant and continued towards Mugglesee towards my Mum’s war-time retreat…

Berlin, May 1941

I left home this morning, wanting to visit my canoe after a long winter separation, but so much more happened and now my heart sings. Peter is his lovely name, we are together, but soon we will have to say goodbye.

I feel so giddy that my pen is flying all over the place, but wait; I must give this entry some order. When I am an old woman, I will want to read this and remember. And then I can tell my children and grandchildren about my first proper kiss.

I will start from the beginning. It has been a boring winter, cooped up with Mutti inside our flat, but this morning I convinced her to let me go to Mugglesee. I had to be on my own, away from war and all this unhappiness. She did not want me to go; the 20th marks the beginning of a ban on Jews using public transport. Mutti is sure this will spell trouble, but I longed to see my boat; my hideaway under the trees, and eventually she gave way.

Mutti had worried needlessly, she always does. The tram was empty, but as it trundled amiably towards Mugglesee, I started to imagine that something bad had happened to my canoe during the winter.

I try protecting her from the cold. At the beginning of every winter, I pull her out of the water and tuck her up inside the boat shed. I wrap her tight in a heavy green canvas to keep out the weather. Opa gave her to me, and now that she is such an old boat I am sure it is only my tender care that keeps her from falling apart.

When I finally know she is safe I put away my other summer pastimes, my sketchpad with its pictures of badly drawn willows and the black cooking pot for warming the soup I bring from home. Then I hide my precious photos underneath the boat's heavy bow, entrusting her with summer secrets only we can share.

As I made my way down to the water this morning I felt a prickle of fear. Maybe my winter preparations had not been enough to keep her safe. And when I reached the river I could not see the boat shed; a curtain of dangling willow was hiding it from the road. I pushed through the canopy and found the door. Thank God, it was still locked. Once inside, the stillness and soft green light enveloped me. Dust covered everything, but for a while I just sat by the open door, watching the river gurgling past.

But, this will never do! At the beginning of each rowing season, there is so much work. Cobwebs had encircled her green canvas like a cocoon, but I'm not afraid of spiders so I swept out the shed, watching them scuttle off in every direction, waiting in gloomy corners until I had gone. Cleaning done! It was time to take my canoe down to the water. I tried dragging her through the reeds, but she seemed to have grown heavier over the Christmas season.

'Let me help you with that.' And there, as if by magic, Peter was coming towards me through the trees. How different he looked, I had not seen him for two months. Now he stood before me looking handsome in his new SS uniform. Eight weeks ago, my old school friend had left for army training, but Peter had returned with his dark hair cut short and a new trim figure.

I wanted to run up to him, to touch his uniform, but instead we pulled the boat into the water together, almost falling on top of each other with our final heave. Peter broke the awkward silence:

'Well, now we are together we might as well take advantage of the situation and go for a row.'

Usually he was not so forward, but this time I did not mind; he settled me onto my cushion before pushing the canoe away from the bank.

Thank God Mutti could not see me, because I do not think she would have approved. I behaved just like the decadent lady I had seen at the picture theatre, laying on my tapestry cushion, trailing my fingertips in the water. I was determined to catch Peter's eye. I do not think he was impressed with my play-acting. Anyway, I was wearing trousers and my hair was tied back with an old yellow scarf in a bid to protect it from sticky cobwebs. Even so, we laughed and talked together about the winter, and eventually he shared with me his excitement about his army training. But it was when he told me about his plans that his eyes truly brightened:

'I heard last week that we are soon to be sent to Russia. Our sergeant explained that we would be involved in an important campaign that will help win the war for Germany.' His sweet face was so sure and earnest, but I found it difficult to imagine Peter fighting anybody. Last year, while I battled with winter spiders, Peter stood at a safe distance, wearing an anxious frown, which was most endearing.

I did not like to think of Peter so far away without anybody to care for him. Maybe I looked worried, because he tried to reassure me that he was really a very capable soldier, and had passed his military training with honours. My worries must have damaged his soldierly pride, because he rowed on in silence. When we reached the bank near our swimming spot, he suddenly took my hand, looking at me with his intense brown eyes:

'Marianne, I don't know how long I will be gone. Russia seems so far away and to tell you the truth, I am a little nervous. Write to me. Please. I know your letters will make everything easier.'

It was then I realised that beneath the face of this brave soldier was a frightened boy and I wanted to plead with him to stay in Berlin, but I knew that was impossible.

‘Of course I’ll write,’ I said as I squeezed his hand. That must have given him the encouragement he needed, because he leaned over to kiss me, but my boat did not like his advances and retaliated by tipping us both out.

We floundered together in the water, gasping in the sudden cold. Then Peter helped me up on to the bank where we lay together in the sunshine, trying to dry our clothes. His nearness warmed me and I felt safe in the circle of his arms, but I wish I had not spoilt it by crying. Our first kiss was also the beginning of our goodbyes; Peter and I had been friends since schooldays, slipping in and out of each other’s lives. Now everything had changed and he was about to leave.

We rode the tram home together, damp but happy. People looked at us strangely, but we did not mind. We said our goodbyes at the bottom of the stairs, promising to meet again after work tomorrow. But, how was I going to explain my wet clothes to Mutti? Thankfully, she only gave me a quizzical look. She must have decided to ignore my wet bottom. I was grateful.

Now that I am in my bedroom recounting the day, I find it hard to believe that in one afternoon the boy I cared for has become the man I love, for surely I must call him a man if he is to fight for our country and keep us safe, but how shall I manage without him? …

I conjured up this lovers’ tryst by the water’s edge because I had only been given a glimmer of Mum’s first love. I had found his photo in the trunk under my bed. Peter was another one of her shadowy secrets. Did she fail to mention him because she didn’t want me to know she had fallen for a German soldier? I could see from the photo that he wore his SS uniform with pride. He looked as if he was ready to do his duty, but did that include killing Russian peasants and Jews? Maybe my mother kept

his picture under her pillow as she dreamt about his gallant war; only it was not an heroic battle, not one to make you proud anyway.

Werner had wanted to give me a day away from Holocaust museums and Nazi brutality, but here I was again, getting agitated about my mother's past. Why was I so judgmental when her worst crime was probably turning away when terrible things confronted her?

'Barbara, where are you? You seem so far away,' Werner roused me from my familiar melancholy.

'I was thinking about my mother during the war, how she survived, and what she must have witnessed.'

'Don't always look back with so many dark questions. It was a bad time, but not always so hard. Marianne went to parties and concerts, she was young, and for many Germans, life, particularly at the beginning of the war, went on as usual.'

Could this be true? I had always imagined suffering and struggle. If Werner was right, I would be better off picturing Mum at an all-night party, her feet aching from too much dancing. It was 1941 and as she rubbed her toes, she hummed the latest Wifried Kruger tune. Hitler was nowhere to be seen. She was living the life of an ordinary eighteen-year-old girl …

Berlin, May 1941

Today is my birthday and on the table stands a creamy porcelain vase edged with gold. It holds eighteen red roses, one for each year of my life. I cannot imagine where Mutti got them. We have planned a supper party in our flat – all my friends from work and most of our neighbours will come. Food is hard to get because our ration cards do not extend to luxuries, but Mutti has discovered that seafood is still

available, so now we have two plates of oysters sitting in the centre of the table and everyone has been asked to bring some wine.

Thank God, hats are still freely available; yesterday I found a little cocktail hat at a milliner's on Friedrichstrasse. It even goes with last year's evening dress. When Peter arrives, his eyes widen at the sight of seafood, but he makes no comment about my hat. 'This is a fine send off, thank you, Frau Szelasack.'

Peter is leaving for the Russian front at the end of the week so I decide not to worry about his lack of attention. We agreed to combine his farewell with my birthday party and I do not want to spoil our evening with any arguments.

Thomas arrives late, but as soon as he comes we gather around the piano for our favourite game; he plays a melody from an operatic aria and we guess its name and composer. While we stand together around the piano, laughing at each other's mistakes, the adults watch on indulgently. It is as if they are saying, 'Let the young ones have fun while they can, tomorrow will be different.' Then, one by one, they say good night, leaving us to our singing and dancing.

'Careful with my china,' Mutti scolds, as she goes off to bed, 'the plates on the dresser are beginning to wobble.'

When the last adult has left, we dance to Wifried Kruger's Orchestra until our feet ache, only stopping to catch our breath. Everyone is hungry so I bring out yesterday's loaf and Thomas begins to pull off chunks before I have a chance to slice it.

'Where's the coffee? I can't dance another step unless you give me a cup.' Thomas can get pretty demanding when he has had a few glasses of wine so I start to fill the kettle just as the clock chimes.

'My God, I have to go to work, quick, get out of my way. I'm sure to be late.'

‘But Marianne, this is our last chance to say goodbye. I will be gone soon, and who knows when we will be together again.’

I am unconvinced by Peter’s mock misery.

‘I will come to the station to wave you farewell. I do not have time for your dramatics now – I’m late.’

It is all right for Peter, he is waiting for his travel pass to arrive and can sit around all day doing nothing, and Thomas can sleep off the effects of his wine until his after-school pupils arrive, wanting their piano lessons, but my job starts at seven. A quick splash of cold water is all I can manage, while Gertrude finds me a dress to wear. I run down the stairs towards the tram, leaving the others to help Mutti clean up the mess of oyster shells and breadcrumbs …

My make-believe memory lasted only a moment before it was spoilt. If it was 1941, then Germany’s tentacles were stretching, as Jews from all over Europe were pulled out of their lives and flung into the Holocaust. Orders came through – Auschwitz was to be expanded, they must prepare for thousands of new ‘guests’ – only this wasn’t going to be a party.

Our small boat edged towards the shore and Werner held our hands while Hanne and I disembarked. Hanne planned to drive us back to her apartment for coffee. When she stopped to buy cake I jumped out of the car, wanting to buy a bunch of ‘thank you’ flowers. It is strange how early dictates, given to me by my mother, had stayed with me:

‘Give your husband the biggest serve’, ‘children must be smartly dressed’, ‘don’t smoke in the street, it makes you look cheap’, ‘you can’t go anywhere without bringing a gift.’

And so it was my mother who gave Hanne the roses, and once again I realised I was playing host to an alien visitor.

Hanne's small, upstairs apartment overlooked a children's park. While she was busy making coffee I stood on the balcony watching the rays of the sun caress the children playing below. When the air lost its warmth I came inside and sat next to my Uncle. Hanne was restlessly darting from china cabinet to bookcase.

'She wants to show you her photographs,' Werner explained, once more acting as interpreter.

At seventy-six, Hanne had become a movie 'extra' in Tarantino's 'Inglourious Basterds.' We sat together on the couch, looking at pictures of her in a romantic black evening dress and listening to her stories about Brad Pitt. Over glasses of red wine we discussed this fairy-tale inversion, where Jews tortured and scalped Nazis, and Hitler was burnt alive. I found it difficult to imagine a lady like Hanne taking part in such a violent fabrication, but her eyes carried a steely light that belied her fragile appearance:

'My father was killed during the war. He was a soldier. And my mother was supposed to join the BDM (the girls' version of Hitler Youth). She refused but nothing bad happened to her. When my father died there were only women left in our household. My grandfather had been killed during World War One, so my grandmother, mother, my sister and I all lived off the widow's pension. There was not much money and our life was hard. We had a little farm and all the women had to work it. I often saw my mother crying.

'As a child, I was told many bad stories about the war. In our village there was a shop owned by Jewish people. One day the Nazis came and took them away. Nobody knew where they had gone. In fact, I often ask myself, because my father was a soldier whether or not he knew what was happening to the Jews, but my

mother explained to me he had been stationed in Italy and there was no concentration camp there. Anyway, she believed that he could never do anything bad to people.'

I listened as Werner translated Hanne's story and wondered whether her recent tryst with Brad Pitt had been an attempt to redress the balance, as she remembered the time when a family of Jews had been taken from her village.

14. Bendler Block

My uncle was a picture of urgency, rushing for the train, and walking so quickly I had to remind myself he was seventy-six and overcoming prostate cancer. He wanted to take me to the German Resistance Centre at Stauffenbergstrasse, but what was his purpose in organising this trip, maybe he trying to counteract my shame by showing me that some Germans had actively resisted Hitler, risking their lives to assassinate him. Werner stood proudly by as I read the many stories of war-time defiance. Hitler had survived more than forty plots on his life. Did my uncle's pride rest on the endeavours of those in opposition?

On the plane coming over I had watched *Valkyrie*, the story of Colonel Stauffenberg's bid to kill Hitler. Now I was standing on the very spot where he had been executed, reliving the moment when Stauffenberg's indomitable courage met Hitler's desire for revenge. Rain trickled along the inside of my coat collar, adding to Bendler Block's atmosphere of thwarted courage. We walked from room to room, reading other stories of resistance, looking at the photographs of the men and women who had rejected Hitler's doctrine. Staring back at me were the people who refused to say yes, people who were prepared to die rather than give in. Their names rolled off my tongue like poetry, the Kreisau Circle, the White Rose, and the Red Orchestra – small groups of resistors who had been willing to die for their country's freedom.

'Sometimes I wish my mother had shown more courage during the war. I want so much to feel proud of her.'

'She helped where she could, of that I am sure,' Werner responded, wanting to give me a sense of hope. 'At the beginning they hid Eve and her family. Do you imagine that sort of courage stopped there?'

'I guess not, but Mum was always such a quiet person, it is difficult for me to imagine her standing up to anyone.'

‘She wasn’t always so quiet, but all of this,’ and his arms gestured to the pictures around the walls, ‘wore her down. She probably found small ways of resisting that no one knew about, I can imagine her giving the bread from her rations to help a starving Jew. But, above all, your mother wanted to stay alive; otherwise you would not be standing here now!’

‘Yes – you’re right. She was sad a lot of the time, but she remained kind, always helping, I can picture her giving away her rations to someone who needed it.’

‘My dear Barbara, you spend far too much time with the past.’

Werner was right; it was only after my mother died that I had become really interested in her story; while she was alive I hadn’t bothered. Her memory was a foreign country to me and out of bounds to someone intent on growing up without borrowed sadness. It was only after years of watching films about Nazi Germany and listening to stories from Holocaust survivors that I finally wanted to understand. And when Mishka told his story to the class that day, I realised I *had* to know. But it was too late. Mum and I couldn’t sit on the couch with a coffee and talk about her memories. This trip would have to suffice.

We decided to leave Bendler block, that troubled place of hopeful resistors who inhabited every corner. Some were shot quickly, while others lingered, they were given time to repent, but I am sure they died cursing the name of Hitler and the undoing of their Germany.

As if to inject some cheer into our morning Werner took my arm in the way of older Europeans; his steady warmth was my comfort. After our coffee we parted at the station; he planned to return home to Bonn while I considered spending another night with my laptop.

Each evening I tried to unravel the impressions of my day; I wanted to give them the shape of a story, but lives can’t be squeezed into a particular formula.

They're too messy. All I could manage was a series of impressions, mingled with questions and uncertainty.

I stood on the platform watching the red lights of my uncle's train disappear down the tunnel. While Werner was here my accusations had seemed out of place. He was a direct witness to the past – he knew what it was like to juggle the demands of a dictator with his personal conscience. But I had come to play the role of grand inquisitor, lifting up every stone in case it revealed a new piece of evidence that absolved my Mum or decided her guilt.

My mother was as an ordinary woman with few pretensions, and Werner was convinced that she had helped where she could. Nevertheless, there must have been times when she looked away, times when it was too dangerous to stand out, or when she was simply too tired or indifferent to the plight of others. But, this journey was teaching me that my mother had also been a victim, suffering under both Hitler and the Russians. I guess that the truth probably lay somewhere in between.

And then I saw her. Waiting on the platform was the old woman I had met at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews. She was standing in a sea of shopping bags. I am not sure why, but I decided to speak to her.

'Hallo, do you remember me? We sat together at the memorial.'

She turned and stared at me for a long time.

'Yes, of course I remember you, we shared a stone.'

Then her train came. I wanted to help with her abundance of bags, but she was gone too soon. It was only after the train had left that confusion set in. there was no reason for her to come to this station – there were no shops close by.

15. Uncle Robert and the wheelchair

Rain splattered forcefully against the window so I pulled the covers over my head and basked in the warmth of my German feather bed. Snuggling into its softness I anticipated an indoor day – then I remembered. This was to be the day of the Jewish Museum. But I wanted to lie here a little longer, wrapped in safety. I wanted someone to absolve me from this daily tussle, but my conscience got the better of me. This journey must not be wasted; it wasn't supposed to be a holiday. It was my job to understand the source of my guilt and deal with it, simple as that. Only it wasn't proving to be so easy. Looking back, my naïve plans read like a chemistry experiment – place museums and memorials together into a test tube, add a sufficient measure of guilt and untold stories, and finally stir with a large stick of imagination. The result would be reconciliation and forgiveness. I flung back the doona and headed for the shower.

The white walls of the Jewish Museum darted off at unexpected angles. The architect, Daniel Liebskind, has designed every partition with a story in mind – the movement from freedom to anguish. Once inside, I stood in front of a selection of old hairbrushes, some wooden and plain, others with their pearl-encrusted handles, all used to brush their owners' hair before it had been shaved. Small wisps still clung to the bristles, some black, others fair. Here was DNA proof of people's existence. In Australia, when bushfires wiped people away, forensic scientists used small samples of humanness to give names to the nameless, but in 1945 there were just too many, and nobody could untangle these minute clues.

As I looked at the pile of brushes I wondered how much more pain I could absorb before pity left and apathy crept in. Filmed interviews with survivors urged me to find meaning in the death of so many, but I was battle-fatigued. Standing

amongst yarmulke-clad survivors and their offspring, my shame felt so obvious I felt as if I would implode with guilt.

Back home, after my daughter had finished watching *Schindler's List* she asked me what Grandma had known. Swiftly, I had come to my mother's side, explaining how Hitler brainwashed the German people into believing that Jews were evil, that Grandma had done her best in a terrible situation. But now I was not so sure. How could a crime of such magnitude go unnoticed? And if Mum's guilt resided in my DNA, then maybe I ought to accept my legacy of shame. It was the price to be paid for being German.

Just then a school group entered. Looking around the room, they giggled and nudged each other, but their classroom chatter sputtered and died in the face of so much death. Their museum guide passed on Holocaust memories like a Chinese whisper. They must never forget – this was the underlying message of the Shoah. But, as I listened in I wondered whether remembering Auschwitz would stop these children from resorting to hate.

From the corner of the room I witnessed the predictable smirks of teenage embarrassment. Behind a glass cabinet full of small brown suitcases hid a small break-away group; they had had enough. One girl, dressed in a puffy pink rain jacket, watched me through her long yellow fringe, willing me to keep their secret. She didn't have to worry; I too was hiding from the constancy of Jewish death. I would not give them away.

I left and followed the signs to a special exhibition, 'Creating the Master Race: Deadly Medicine.' Hopefully, this display would tell me about the fate of my great uncle Robert. Mutti's brother had suffered from multiple sclerosis, which meant he was not able to serve any useful function under the new regime. Cripples had no role in forming the master race.

The exhibition stated that the Third Reich regretted the money it spent on caring for the unworthy lives of the disabled. Hitler told his adoring throngs, ‘we must have a healthy people in order to prevail in the world.’ Nothing unclean was allowed to slip through his tightening noose. From 1934 to 1945, 400,000 Germans were sterilized on the grounds that they would pollute the genetic pool; they suffered from schizophrenia, epilepsy, severe deformity and alcoholism. Posters covered the billboards, explaining how much it cost the state to care for people who could not contribute to a society of perfect Aryans. Hitler found it regrettable that people had not learned from nature – the survival of the fittest – so the study of eugenics became popular. By August, 1939 doctors and nurses were duty bound to report to the authorities any babies born with deformities, and these ‘useless’ lives were finished off by overdose, starvation or gas. ‘T4’ mobile gassing vans travelled throughout the country, putting ‘sufferers’ out of their misery.

This is probably how my great uncle Robert’s life ended. His death certificate stated the cause of death as pneumonia, but given the regime’s drive towards purity, I had difficulty believing that flimsy piece of authority...

Berlin, August 1942

He is such a gentle man; even though he is in a wheelchair he never gets angry. When I come to see him he takes his good hand, and uses it to pull up his withered right one so that I am able to shake it. His skin feels soft, like a child’s, but his eyes are old and full of questions. Of course he never bothers me with them. Our time together is too short. In the summer I push his chair around the gardens of the Charlottenberg hospital, and as we sit together under the shade of a linden tree I tell him about life outside. He listens so carefully, as if he is trying to absorb my energy through his skin.

Mutti told me that when my uncle was a young man he had been strong and fit, running races at school, and beating the other boys. Now his useless legs are wrapped in a rug, his knees sticking out like bent sticks. When I lay my head on his lap he strokes my hair and speaks my name with his tired voice. His words come out slowly, as if they are too heavy to carry. It is the speech of someone with multiple sclerosis.

Then one day in August Mutti receives a letter from the hospital informing us that Uncle Robert is unwell and has to be transferred to a place in the country. The fresh air will do him good. Mutti and I gather together a basket for him – new pyjamas, a jar of goose fat to rub into his chest, and a few old apples – rations do not allow us to bring anything more interesting. Finally, we put in a bottle of black currant cordial that Mutti made last autumn.

Together we ride the bus to the hospital. Uncle Robert is waiting for us under the tree that has become our favourite meeting place. As I walk towards him he lifts his hand so that we can give each other our usual greeting, but this time I want to hug him, to say goodbye. The new hospital is a long way from Berlin and I wonder when I will see him again. My uncle strokes my face as this unspoken anxiety passes between us. Of course, Mutti chats as if nothing unusual is happening, but when we leave she holds his hand for a long time, whispering into his ear. Then she turns quickly and walks down the gravel path towards the bus.

A month later we receive a letter. Oh, how I hate those envelopes with their black borders, telling us that someone has died, but Mutti says it is better that way; the envelope can act as a warning so that you know to make a cup of strong coffee and sit down before opening it. It is Uncle Robert. The letter tells us he died of pneumonia soon after being transferred to the country. I read over Mutti's shoulder

in disbelief. My uncle had not seemed so sick, but Mutti acts as if she was expecting it, as if she knew that the goodbye in Charlottenberg was the final one …

Outside the museum the rest of the world had continued on without me. I decided to shake off my despondency by walking. The rain had gone and the sun held a midday glare that bounced off the pavement and dazzled my eyes. Dawdling under the shop awnings, I looked at the 'cutesy' window displays of German kitsch – Berlin bears, dolls in dirndls and mugs with pictures of the Brandenburger Tor etched in old world sepia. Nothing could have been further from the pain of the Holocaust Museum than this effort at forgetting.

A chatter of children moved along the street. They were speaking in German, but I knew what they wanted. Yearning bodies leant against the glass, trying to choose. This shop was their delight, its sweets and ice creams tempting them on their way home from school. A small girl pushed her mother towards the open door, determined to go in, her large brown eyes almost hidden by her pink headscarf.

'That's the one I want!' she seemed to be saying.

Her mother also wore a headscarf and a long dark jacket. I realised that I was standing in the Turkish part of Berlin and this innocent pair were an example of the 'outsiders' that continued to disrupt Germany's way of life.

Last week, I was standing outside my door, searching through my overstuffed bag for my apartment key when Manfred came out of his room dressed in a sports coat and black trousers. He was obviously going out for the evening, but he stopped for a chat, and as always, this chat turned into an extended conversation, as he attempted to broaden my knowledge of German society. He told me about a dinner party he had attended, where, after a few glasses of wine, the conversation turned to

the Turkish people living in Berlin. There were the usual complaints: Turkish people were unemployed, uneducated and uncultured:

‘Then I heard something that made my skin creep. The man next to me had been getting noisier all evening, you know the type, I am sure you have them in Australia.’

I nodded.

‘After each glass of wine, his conversation became more offensive, and then he said it. “All we need is a little bit of Adolf and the Turkish problem would be solved”. ’

I was speechless.

‘His pronouncement made me wonder if Germany would ever change. Most of the people at the table argued with this suggestion, but it had been said and that was enough.’

Manfred went on to explain that in 1993, five members of a Turkish family were burnt to death, the intruders crying ‘Heil Hitler!’ as they poured petrol onto the front porch. Manfred, obviously ashamed of the incident, explained that many Germans, appalled by this resurgence of violence, walked in a candlelight procession of sorrow. Nevertheless, it was plain to see that the roots of German righteousness had not been completely eradicated. I recalled Manfred’s pronouncements as I watched the little girl in her pink headscarf march triumphantly out of the sweet shop holding her ice cream, but it had already begun to melt.

16. Having fun

I opened the front door to find Hanne standing in the hallway clutching her German/English dictionary, stabbing at various words until I understood. She wanted to take me out – too much unhappiness – go shopping – have lunch. Her high heels and designer blue silk jacket contrasted with my traveller jeans and brown jumper, but she was right, I'd had enough of trying to figure out my mother's sorrow and my guilt; we were off to Ka De We, the largest department store in Europe.

We laughed our way through the morning, giggling at the mistakes we both made as we tried to communicate. The top floor of Ka De We housed the gourmet food section. It was here that chocolate had been magically moulded into Volkswagens, castles and German bears. Alongside these ornate sweeties sat pyramids of plump cheeses, dressed in red and orange rinds. The marzipan had a cabinet all to itself – pink pigs stood alongside sugary butterflies, pushing multi-coloured cats out of their way. They all vied for our attention, but in the end we just ordered coffee.

After coffee I looked around for gifts to take home to Australia, but mine was not a Ka De We budget. My lack of funds didn't worry Hanne, and she escorted me to another shop close by. Here she translated my wishes to the counter staff, and I left the store with a Swiss army knife, a soft blue scarf and some earrings, all small enough to fit into the bottom of my case, far away from eyes of curious customs officers. Then, Hanne dropped me at the top of Hektor Strasse, and gave me a cheerful wave, before beeping the car horn as she drove away.

Walking towards my apartment, with my hands full of shopping, I didn't realise I had stood on two small brass plaques lodged into the pavement. I quickly pulled my foot away and read about Erna Steckel, born in 1909, 'deportiert (deported) 29. 10. 1941 – Lodz, ermordent (murdered) 4. 5.1942.' This woman had

once lived on my street, but the Nazis had dragged her out of her house and sent her away to the camps. I felt as if I was standing on her grave. This was just like my visit to the Killing Fields of Cambodia. As I was walking along a dirt path, I had looked down. Pieces of bone were embedded in the sand. I was standing on the remains of a human femur. Frozen, I could move neither forwards nor back. My guide rescued me with soft words of encouragement as he distracted me from the white splinters stuck into the path.

If you looked closely, sadness was everywhere. People walked regularly along this footpath, oblivious of those subtle reminders; it had become part of the scenery of Hektor Strasse, but each plaque pulled me under. I stood by the house and tried to imagine what had happened the day Erna Steckel was taken. Did her neighbours interfere or did they carry on with their morning chores, trying not to get involved? Hanne's carefully woven spell slipped away and I fell into the misery of the past.

My time with Hanne had been a moment of reprieve as I breathed air untouched by the former times. It was a delightful hiatus in my quest, but now it was time to return. That evening I decided go back to a period when shopping at Ka De We was for Aryans only. It was probably a silly notion, but I felt as if I ought to make an act of contrition for my carefree outing, so as it darkened I climbed aboard a train out to Grunewald. This station had been Berlin's gathering place for transports to the East. Here Jews from all over the city assembled and were forced on to trains that would take them away. The German Railways had recently erected a memorial on 'Platform 17' to acknowledge their role in the destruction of so many lives.

This commemoration was not so easy to find. I wandered up and down the station looking for a sign. Two young women lingered inside the grubby underground tunnel, dressed in tight jeans and sleeveless party tops, looking as if

they were about to head into the city for a late night. Unsure of what to say, I pointed to my guide book and showed them the words ‘platform 17.’ They hesitated before indicating a small entrance, leading to the memorial platform.

Overhanging trees shrouded my way. Muffled sounds were coming from a long way off and the air was crowded with silence. Then the wind picked up their voices. People were waiting, ready to board the train, urged forward by dogs and guards. The sticky air was like a lavender hanky, masking the stench of their fear. The last of the evening sun stole the gold from the plaques, those rectangular pieces of misery that recorded their final journey. I had to remember this, would not allow myself to forget, so I used my camera to photograph the words, but there were too many. Then, as the light faded I knelt down on the gritty platform and wrote the tidings in my notebook. Then it got too dark to see, so I illuminated each sign with the light from my mobile phone:

27-11-1941, 1035 Riga

13-1-1942, 1026 Riga

19-1-1942, 1005 Riga

25-1-1942, 1014 Riga

28-3-1942, 973 Lublin

2-4-1942, 641 Warsaw

14-4-1942, 67 Warsaw

2-6-1942, 100 Theresienstadt

There didn’t seem to be any logic behind these numbers, but I was sure that German competence had a reason for every figure. I wrote on in the darkness, and at the end of the platform I straightened my back, gratified to have finished. I turned. The

plaques continued down the other side and up and down the next platform. There were too many.

I stood by and watched their ghostly silhouettes waiting on the platform with suitcases by their sides. Some had packed carefully, others responding to 'Schnell, Schnell!'

'What do we bring; where are we going?'

Now, I was a Jew on platform 17, holding faint hope in my heart. Would they resettle me in the East? Could they use me to boost the war effort?

Then it arrived, covered in dirty smoke. Hope was not a passenger on this train. It was the 19-8-1942 and I was one of the hundred people sent to Riga. The beginning and the end of my journey were recorded on this track.

The wind moved through trees and I realised that I was standing by myself on a deserted platform in the middle of the night, but I wasn't afraid. Through the distant branches I glimpsed the lights of an evening café. I was tempted by a late night beer, to sit with others, hear their laughter and feel life, but it wasn't right in the midst of such sorrow. I walked through the grubby tunnel and caught the train home.

Sitting at the back of an empty carriage, I took out my notebook – it was my way of working things out. I remembered my mother crying. I had always assumed she was shedding tears of homesickness, but maybe they were cries of shame. Not long after the end of the war, Allied liberators forced the German people to bear witness to the piles of bodies, burial pits and ovens of Nazi extermination camps. People were compelled to clean up the mess, tidying away the remains of their neighbours and friends. The Final Solution was out in the open; nobody could turn away and pretend it didn't happen. Maybe this uncovering was the source of my mother's sadness.

Back in Hektor Strasse, my bed provided little comfort as I conjured up my mother's secret association with the Nazi party, spying on friends, or turning away when someone asked for help. Deep down I knew this was not true. Then, before long I imagined the opposite. Now, Mum was part of the resistance, risking her life to save others. Maybe she had passed on forged documents, helping people to escape across the border. I wanted her to stop the transports from platform 17 because nothing I did could save them.

The red numbers on the digital clock told me it was 3 35 in the morning. I found my dressing gown and went down to the kitchen to warm some milk. The fridge offered a comforting purr as I waited for the bubbles of milk to circle the pan. Back in bed, I cradled the warmth of my mug as I remembered a recent programme on ABC television.

It was 2007. Bettina, the great niece of Goering was searching for forgiveness. Her life had been scarred by the crimes of her Uncle. To escape her inherited shame she moved out of home when she was 13 and eventually left Germany. Because she would not risk the possibility of giving birth to a future Nazi she was sterilised. Then in her search for healing she began to communicate with a Jewish artist living in Australia. Ruth's parents had been prisoners in Auschwitz. Eventually, Bettina and Ruth met, each willing to talk about their unhappy inheritance and together search for a way forward. But this meeting was more difficult than they imagined. Layers of the history could not be swept away quite so easily; Bettina and Ruth faced each other with so many overwhelming emotions, in front of them stood the person of their nightmares. How could they relate to someone from the other side; the gulf was too wide. But, finally, they were able to cross the chasm and their turmoil gradually subsided.

The milk cooled in my hand as I questioned whether second-generation Germans had any right in asking for absolution, given the gravity of their parents' crimes. Young Australians were asking similar questions about their parents' involvement with the Stolen Generation, Indigenous children who had been taken from their parents and placed under white care. This practise continued well into the 1970s. However, most Australians have refused to say sorry for something they were not involved in. Yet, the aftermath of that devastation is apparent to everyone. The heartbreak of children separated from their families and made to adopt white man's ways has engulfed future generations of Aboriginals like a tsunami. Their grief and hopelessness is manifest in alcoholism, unemployment, abuse and suicide. Would 'sorry' make a difference?

I smile at another recollection. Howard Goldenberg, a Jewish doctor working with Aboriginal communities had this to say:

'My nineteen-year old son is playing pool in a rough pub in inner suburban Melbourne, his customary yarmulke on his head. An Aboriginal man stares at him … "You're a Jew, aren't you?"

'Ready for anything, my son replies, "Yes, I am."

'"Well, us mob gotta learn from you mob."

'"What do you mean?"

'"I mean – your mob, you got your land back, you got your culture, you got your pride …

'"We gotta be like that". '

Maybe sorry is the starting point for such regeneration. The Jewish people were able to move forward when their past had been recognised and I began to wonder whether an apology could be my way out of this circular mess. But who was I going to say sorry to.

17. Smashing chandeliers

Bebelplatz – the site of the Nazi book burning, and a place that had always fascinated me, I have always treated books with a respect that borders on religious fervour, so it was difficult to imagine entire libraries being tossed into the fire. I had seen photos showing flames leap and twirl against the night sky as soldiers threw book after book onto the blaze. Nobody stopped them. Books are an expression of people's dreams and ideas. To kill the book was to kill these aspirations and I planned to see where this had happened.

Walking along the Unter den Linden, I was swallowed up by the excitement of an afternoon in the heart of Germany's capital. The wide, tree-lined street was solid with people wearing pink T-shirts, as they marched together to raise money for breast cancer research. They mingled with demonstrators showing pictures of Palestinian children suffering under the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip. Once more, Berlin was free to become a place to openly demonstrate and question.

According to my guide, Bebelplatz was opposite Humboldt University. It was here that the students of 1933 cheerfully assisted the SS by bringing out armfuls of books from their university library. Many of its scholars had already joined the Party; they were passionate young idealists looking for a way out of their country's hopelessness.

The university buildings looked like any other place of learning in the twenty-first century; nothing reflected its past turbulence except a group of second-hand bookstalls that lined the fence of the academy. Each trestle table carried books reminding people what had been lost on that night in May. I wanted to find a book that expressed the turmoil of that time. Hidden amongst the cooking and gardening paperbacks was a small copy of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, its creased paperback

cover loosely holding the brown pages that had been published in 1952. I handed over five Euros and hid it in my bag.

Bebelplatz was waiting for me across the road, a quiet square surrounded by trees offering up shade against the afternoon sun. But this was a picnic place, not a burning place, and there was no plaque. Confused, I followed a small group of Japanese tourists who seemed as if they were on a similar mission. Together, we walked across the square to the front of St Hedwig's Catholic Church and discovered a small sheet of Perspex, set into the concrete. The Japanese formed a tourist huddle around the edge of the memorial, and held their cameras over the dimness.

After they had gone I moved forward, peering down into the Perspex. Everything was white emptiness; the library shelves were bare, denuded of books, their purpose devastated. The Berlin earth opened up before me. I felt as if this city could erupt at any moment, spewing forth its history over the unsuspecting. But for now the city's story had been tamed, as people snapped pictures, posing alongside markers of war as if they were rose bushes.

My mother was nine on the night of the fire, so maybe she was too young to have noticed the gathering crowd, drawn towards the leaping flames like bats around a witches brew. The fire, fuelled with pages of Brecht, books by Marx, Helen Keller and Heinrich Heine, warmed the bystanders who had begun swearing fire oaths, and dedicating themselves to German purity and nationalism.

I pictured Mutti keeping my mother inside while neighbours went up the street to see what was going on. Wanting to believe that Mutti collected books which fuelled her passion for justice, I imagined her hiding them beneath the floorboards. They were stories that would give hope when her days darkened. At the top of the stairs stood my mother, puzzled. From her bedroom window she could see flames in the distance, sparks flying through the darkness as people hurled books into the fire,

while downstairs Mutti was hiding hers as if they were precious jewels. And my mother looked on, not knowing what was true.

I left the book-burning site with a concert ticket in my pocket. I was going to a place I thought Mum might have visited when she needed a distraction. As I turned into Gendarme Markt I was greeted by a gathering of white buildings, shining against the blue sky. Here was place peace and beauty, a new façade covering the old ruins. Strolling players serenaded tourists with their languid guitars, while pigeons pecked at the droppings from outside cafes. I had half an hour before my concert started, so I ordered a sandwich, when my snack arrived so did the birds, tiny sparrows looking for their dinner. One brave bird landed on my table and started to nibble at the edge of my bread. Grateful for his company, I kept very still, watching his bright eyes darting warily. When I finished my sandwich my companion flew off. Then I ran up the stairs of the concert house.

Once I was inside, the hall swept away any of my preconceived ideas about heavy German architecture; this building was etched by intricate light. I had been allocated a seat on the top balcony, along the edge of the wall. Excusing myself, I edged past jutting knees and sat down. From this position I could look into the heart of the giant chandeliers, shimmering above the audience below.

Before coming to the concert, Manfred, who had adopted the role of my personal research assistant, told me a chilling story that had taken place at the end of the war:

'It happened on the 28th of March in 1945, as the Russians were approaching the city. The Berlin Philharmonic was holding their last concert; I'm not sure which piece they played, something rousing I suppose. Anyway, as the audience was leaving, some Hitler Youth children were standing in the foyer with baskets. Can you imagine what was in them?'

Manfred liked to play games, so I went along.

‘Flowers?’

‘No, cyanide capsules.’

‘Incredible. I know things looked grim at the end, but were they actually encouraging people to kill themselves?’

‘The message was coming through that when the Russians arrived in Berlin they would exact a terrible revenge for all we had done. And the Germans knew that women would be the soldiers’ main targets.’

He was looking uncomfortable.

‘Yes, my mother had told me about the rapes, the prospect terrified her. She had dressed up as a boy to avoid that possibility, but I will never really know what happened. All I know is that she maintained a hatred of Russians for the rest of her life.’

Manfred coughed, shifting his feet, as if the thought of my mother being attacked by a Russian soldier was too intimate for him to encounter. The prospect was not easy for me either.

As an adolescent I had read novels by Dostoyevsky and plays by Chekov, while listening endlessly to Tchaikovsky. Much to my mother’s disgust I had fallen in love with everything Russian. Looking back I wasn’t sure if this was a deliberate ploy to annoy her; I think I was too obsessed by my own dreams to hear the loathing in her voice. Then, one day, she let me have it.

‘If the Russians ever invade this country, I will kill both you and Carol before taking a cyanide capsule myself.’

Where had this venom come from? Surely Russians were educated, sensitive people, producing such beauty. Then she told me about the elderly German women she had witnessed being raped on the streets of Berlin, and how Russian soldiers had

taken her bicycle, her watch, and broken her boat. She was full of hate. Now, I wished I had been more understanding instead of provoking her anger by playing the '1812' overture through the walls of my bedroom.

I sat on the top balcony of the concert house listening to a Beethoven crescendo; I wanted my mother to know this beauty. Let her sit in this same seat, looking at the chandelier and being soothed by the music …

Berlin, October 1941

It is after eight o'clock and the concert has already started. Inge is late, as usual. She is a lovely friend, but her tardiness is sometimes too much for me. Everyone else has already gone in and the doors are shutting. My wage from the china factory doesn't usually stretch to buying concert tickets, but for me a night at the theatre is like going on a holiday. And now it looks as if I will miss out. An evening of Beethoven is just the medicine I need. Life has not been easy lately, Peter has not written for many months and I am beginning to wonder if he is still alive.

Usually, I like dressing up and joining the crowds as they surge through the doors, eager to hear the orchestra's latest offering, but today I am stuck outside! Eventually Inge puffs up the stairs:

'Marianne, I am so sorry, there was a disturbance on the tram. A Jew tried to get on, but the conductor stopped him and a fight broke out … '

'Inge, tell me later. We are very late, but maybe, if we are sweet to the doorman, he will let us in.'

We make our way to the top of the stairs and plead with the attendant.

'All right missies, you can wait at the back and then take your seats at intermission, but make sure you are both quiet.'

We try creeping up the stairs, but my shoes echo on the marble. Why had I been so vain? It was not a good idea to wear my new high heels.

We show our tickets and are told to wait, but through the doors we can hear the booming of Beethoven's Ninth. I'm so annoyed with Inge, even though I understand why she was late. The famous Wilhelm Furtwangler is the conductor tonight; so far I have only heard him on the radio, and this is my chance to see him in person, but we are the other side of the door. I might as well have saved my money and stayed at home.

When the Ninth is over the doors open, allowing us inside, we excuse ourselves and make our way to our seats. On my puny savings, I can only afford a reservation up in the gods, tucked behind a marble column and well out of view of the orchestra below.

Nevertheless, from where we sit we can examine every detail of the magnificent chandeliers, which have the reputation for shimmering dangerously every time the kettledrums crash. Inge is always concerned about people in the seats below: 'I know you think I am silly, but what will happen if it falls?'

'Inge, hush, people will hear you.'

Each time we come here she talks through the music; I am not really sure why I invite her. Several of the audience turn their heads, looking my way. Chastised, I try to ignore Inge and enjoy the second half of the evening, but my mind wanders. Looking around the concert hall, I am struck by how much it has changed; Mutti used to bring me here for matinee performances on a Sunday afternoon. Back then it resembled a fairy palace, with its glittering chandeliers and soft yellow marble. Ornately painted figures danced amongst the flowers high up on the ceilings. If the matinee music went on for too long I would lean my head back and make up stories

about the fairies in the sky. Years later I watched them twirling in their easy innocence, unaware of the changes going on below.

Today, every column is swathed in red banners, all bearing a swastika. And scattered amongst the audience below are Party members sitting next to their well-dressed wives. Their presence gives the delicate ornamentation of the theatre a military air. The magic has gone. I have come here for a holiday, but war is everywhere. I look at the chandeliers, and find myself wishing that a loud percussionist would set them free. Then I could watch them hurtling downwards, smashing the party below …

18. Sunday visiting

It was a German tradition – Sunday visiting. I was keen to see Lucie again and today Manfred was going to act as my interpreter. I had to know more, and with his assistance I planned to slip one more piece into the puzzle.

On the corner of Kopenicker and Lange Strasse was a florist. Manfred and I stared uncertainly at the flowers. Last time I had given Lucie a bunch of roses, the showy offering of an uncertain visitor, but today I wanted to get down to business. There must be no distractions; she was one of the few people left who could tell me more about my mother. We came away with a small pot of white fuchsias.

Together we walked down the street, Manfred acting as my guide and pointing out various landmarks while I hurried along, anxious to get to Lucie's. My every step was full of urgency, as if my rather frail adopted aunt might die before I arrived. But no such calamity had taken place. When we rang her apartment bell she called us up immediately, as if she had been sitting by the intercom since lunchtime.

Her sitting room held a surprise visitor; it was Gerhard, Lucie's son. He was a thin man, pale like the wallpaper behind him. Last year his wife had died of cancer, and was stooped by grief his body, still, we greeted each other in a hearty German fashion and sat around an overflowing afternoon tea table, making conversation. That is to say, the others made conversation; being the only non-German-speaking person in the room was my disadvantage. I smiled and sipped my coffee, managing to make out occasional words, but in the end I just felt stupid.

Manfred must have noticed and came to my rescue as he began interpreting their chatter, and gradually we moved towards the past and the reason for my visit. With Manfred by my side, I didn't want to waste this opportunity of hearing my mother's story through someone else's eyes. We set up a three-way communication triangle, and I wrote down everything in case I forgot and Lucie had gone.

‘I lived opposite your mother in the same apartment building in Warschauer Strasse. We were on the first floor and below us was a shop that sold cigarettes and vegetables, all sorts of things. My mother made hot chocolate for us both and cooked eggs for our tea if your Omi was working. After school, we rode our bicycles on the promenade. Your grandmother had a milk shop in Ziemendach Strasse.’

‘I have never heard about that, are you sure? I can’t imagine Omi selling milk.’ This new knowledge threw me off course. Lucie’s story opened up new gaps in my knowledge, making me realise how little I knew.

‘Your grandmother was not wealthy; after your grandfather died she did many things to pay the bills.’

Then I asked Lucie if she had been friends with the Cohens, Mum’s Jewish neighbours.

‘Yes, the Cohens had a leather shop, they sold everything for mending shoes, and I remember my father going there to buy supplies. I was aware that Jews were being taken and their shops closed, but I didn’t become involved, Hitler’s propaganda worked on me and I wasn’t really politically interested. My father worked in the railways, so I had to join the BDM, otherwise he would have lost his job, but your mother didn’t join. Our group marched and sang songs, collecting money for the war effort.

‘In 1942 I went to live and work in Mitte, so I didn’t see your mother after that. I worked in a printing company during the war. When the Russians came, I went to the River Elbe to avoid them and get in with the Americans. We tried to cross the river, but the bridges had been bombed and the water was very cold. Many people died. After the war, we had peace but nothing else. The valuables we had hidden before the end were missing; and now people had nowhere to live.’

Then I posed the question I was always nervous to ask, the one that usually brought justification and tears.

‘After the war, when you realised what had happened to the Jews, how did you feel?’

She looked straight at me, no uncomfortable silences, no shifting in her chair.

‘After it was over we had to find things to eat, somewhere to live. That was our only focus. We had lost everything. On February third, 1945, our apartment building in Warschauer Strasse was completely bombed. The fire continued to burn inside for weeks afterwards. When we tried to go back to Berlin the soldiers turned us away, there wasn’t enough to eat and we were made to go back to the country. When we were finally able to return, our place had been let to others so we all had to sleep together in the same room. We had no toilet, no heating. The building was still under construction; it was a very cold winter.

‘Then I became a Trummerfrauen, working for food tickets, not money. I shifted rubble at Alexanderplatz. I worked at night with a special group who took building materials for Russian factories, copper pipes, that sort of thing. It was all done in secret. Then, in 1947 your mother and I found each other, people had been writing on stones, asking if friends or family were still alive. So many women were waiting for their husbands and sons to return.’

She trailed off and I got a signal from Manfred that she was getting too tired to continue.

I listened to Lucie’s story, imagining it could have been my mother’s. At the beginning, they were the same age, two little girls playing handbags on the stairs. Then Hitler arrived and changed everything. That afternoon Lucie was Mum’s ventriloquist, filling the silences left vacant by my mother; it was as if they were both

talking – telling me about their search for food and shelter, and their desperate longing for safety.

Lucie's frail body hovered over our china cups as she offered us another coffee. And as I looked across at this small, bent body I tried to imagine her marching in the BDM, fleeing from the Russians across the Elbe and scrubbing bricks to make a new Germany. Who was I to question how she managed her war? She had survived; did she hurt anyone? Was looking the other way such a harmful occupation?

Lucie invited us to stay for dinner. She looked longingly at us sitting around her usually empty flat, but Manfred had another appointment so we said our farewells. As Manfred and I walked along the path towards Kopenicker Strasse, we turned towards Lucie's apartment to wave a last goodbye. Lucie and her son stood on the balcony, eager to catch sight of us before we turned the corner. My hopeful imagination allowed me to see a third figure, waving also.

19. Berlin diaries

Each night, before turning out the light, I had got into the habit of reading until my eyes grew weary. My book of the moment was *Berlin Diaries, 1940 – 1945* by Marie Vassiltchikov, which I had bought at an English bookshop on Friedrichstrasse, in the hope that it would give me some more clues. Marie was Adam von Trott's secretary; and part of Stauffenberg's 20th July plot to assassinate Hitler. She describes with intimate detail the people united by the belief that they could kill Hitler and return their country to order and compassion.

This group of rebels had become my night-time companions. Lying under my quilt after a day of museums and other sites of shame, their courage lifted me from my despair as I began to align myself with them. I was back in my childhood bedroom, making up adventures after reading 'The Girl's Own Manual', only von Trott's mission was deadly serious. On the day of the plot to assassinate Hitler, Marie wrote:

'I went back into my office and dialled Percy Frey at the Swiss Legation to cancel my dinner-date with him as I preferred to go out to Potsdam. While I waited, I turned to Loremarie, who was standing at the window, and asked her why Gottfried was in such a state. Could it be the Konspiration? ... She whispered, "Yes! It is done. This morning!" … Still holding the receiver, I asked, "Dead?" She answered, "Yes, dead!" I hung up, seized her by the shoulders, and we went waltzing around the room. Then grabbing hold of some papers, I thrust them into the first drawer and shouting to the porter that we were "dienstilich unterwegs" (off on official business), we tore off to the Zoo station.'

Marie and Loremarie thought Hitler was dead, that the Konspiration had succeeded. They were off to celebrate, waiting for news from their colleagues about the new government that would take over now that Hitler was gone. But this hadn't

happened. Once more, Hitler had managed to escape injury, and all those involved in the plot became the butt of his fury. How dare they attempt to annihilate God's chosen leader; how could they deprive the German people of their rightful place as conquerors. Hitler's revenge led to the execution of two hundred people, and thousands more had been imprisoned.

Now, I wanted to discover what had happened to my night-time conspirators so I decided to pay my respects by visiting Plotzensee Prison, the place where many of them had met their deaths. Hitler had been so infuriated by their audacity that he chose to prolong the agony of his would-be assassins' deaths by ordering them to be hung like cattle.

Leaving Beusselstrasse station, I followed the signs to the prison. Traffic flowed alongside me with noisy reassurance. Here was a different part of Berlin: no cosy jazz clubs or cafes, just factories and warehouses. The prison entrance was down a side alley lined with weeds and broken bottles, but the place I was looking for hid behind much quieter walls. As I entered the sombre courtyard a bird cried out, startling the spirits that must have haunted this place. I walked around the outside of the buildings, frightened to look inside. But, why was the manner of von Trott's death any worse than the pain inflicted upon millions of Jews? Maybe, my search for 'good' Germans was about something else. It allowed me to believe that if I had been alive during the war I would have been one of them.

I walked into the whitewashed room lined with pictures of people who had come face-to-face with the wrath of their leader. They had gathered in secret, standing up to all that was wrong; in the end they found themselves in this room, waiting for a guillotine that was fully occupied, watching their co-conspirators hanging from hooks screwed into the ceiling, dangling from pieces of piano wire that had been wrapped around their necks.

Walking slowly around the edge of the prison, I read each picture, searching faces and listening to stories. Not everyone who died here belonged to that group of revolutionaries. One man was murdered for picking up a handbag in an empty bombed-out building. He was looting, so, the ‘thief’ was hung alongside those wanting freedom for Germany. It was not the first time such incongruities had taken place.

Next door, meat hooks still hung from the ceiling. Their cruelty pierced my defences as I imagined the pain inflicted by those bent pieces of metal. These displays had affected other visitors similarly; the flowers on the floor had turned this place into a shrine of belated mourning. Even the surrounding streets had been renamed. Adam von Trott Strasse stood in recognition of a futile audacity that had ended in his death.

I was about to leave when three white coaches pulled into the car park. A profusion of tourists broke the stillness. I stood by, watching the quiet cemetery turn into a theme park, and I was grateful for some time alone with my night time heroes.

20. The guest list

What did I expect, a quaint china factory with samples of their best work sitting behind a bow fronted window? Not to mention my dreams, where Mum's old boss coming out to greet me, arms outstretched, saying: 'Yes, I hold such fond memories of your mother! Marianne was one of our best workers.'

In the back streets of the old east, where some places still looked like bombsites, this dream was not possible. Resurrection of the past was a tedious and expensive business, so why was I surprised to find an overgrown patch of land in place of the china factory where my mother had worked.

Each day my mother had travelled to a china factory in Rummelsberg; its name had been on her identity card, but it didn't tell me whether she had been on the production line or in sales, or she could have been their receptionist. I couldn't remember if she had told me and there was no one left to ask. The weather was desolate. Battling with my inverting umbrella, I wandered up and down the streets looking for Markt Strasse. Under the eaves of a battened-down coffee shop, a young man stood sheltering from the storm; I could feel his eyes watching me as I struggled with my sodden map. He walked towards me and in his schoolboy English he pointed in the direction of Marktstrasse. When he realised that I didn't understand, he patiently took me by the arm as if I was an old lady.

'Come with me please, I will show you.'

Together we walked to the corner and from there he pointed the way while rivulets of rain streamed from his black fringe and into his open mouth.

I thanked him and hurried across the street to look for number fourteen, only it wasn't there. Tears surfaced, not that you could tell in the rain. This visit was more important than I had realised. My mother's work place had become a vacant block – a building site strewn with planks of wood and pieces of broken brick. There was no

one left to tell me about her employment – no delicate china, and no hearty, welcoming boss. I stood under a tree and waited …

Berlin, August 1941

Herr Boehm called me into his office this morning and I knew there would be trouble. Last Friday, as I was leaving work, that snaky woman, Gretel Schmidt, greeted me with the Hitler salute as I was coming down the stairs. Of course, these things always seem to happen when one is running late. In one hand was my coat and the other one held my shopping basket. Mutti had asked me to get some bacon on the way home; neighbours had told her that the butcher was about to receive a new order. This meant that both my hands were full. I know I should have put my coat down and done things properly but I was in a hurry. Mutti would be less than pleased if I came home without her bacon. So, I just blurted out a 'goodbye' and dashed down the stairs, hoping my indiscretion would go unnoticed.

Obviously, Gretel decided to take the matter further; maybe this was revenge because I had not invited her to my birthday celebration last month. Now she was translating her anger into action and I was standing outside the manager's office.

'Enter,' Herr Boehm called out as I knocked on the glass of his door.

'Ah, Fraulein Szelasack, please take a seat. I will be with you in just a minute.'

My palms began to sweat as I waited for him to finish. On the wall opposite was a large photograph of Hitler staring down at me. His eyes burrowed deep and I looked away.

'It has come to my attention that you did not return the official greeting. Do you realise this is a government offence?'

‘I am sorry, Herr Boehm.’ What was I going to say? He was looking directly at me and I could not detect any sympathy for my situation. Damn that Gretel; now I was in trouble.

‘I believe this is not the first time you have failed to give the official greeting. I can no longer overlook such behaviour; it is time we called the police.’

My heart hit my chest wall with such a thud I thought I would fall off the chair. I had heard what could happen to people who did not follow the rule; they were locked away. But this was impossible; my only offence was failing to raise my arm in greeting; hardly a significant one. What would Mutti say? She would understand my choice in not saluting Hitler, she is not fond of him either, but she would worry so.

‘I have taken the liberty of ringing the local police. They want you to come around to their headquarters straight away.’

There was no time to tell anyone where I was going, and I wondered if I would I see them again. I wanted to tell Mutti what was happening, but there was no time. Herr Boehm watched me walk down the stairs and out of the swing door, as if he did not trust me to do my duty.

The police station was not far from the office, but I took every step slowly. I felt sure Herr Boehm would telephone to confirm my arrival, and if I did not show up it could mean trouble for Mutti. But what was my crime? I had not hurt anyone, but in this new regime, harm had taken on a different meaning. To disobey the Führer was to hurt him. He was our father, with the nation’s best interests at heart, and it was our job to obey him without question.

Once inside the station a policeman told me to wait. I sat for a long time, my heart thumping to the beat of the station clock. Eventually, I heard my name. I followed the voice that led me into a small brown office. Behind the desk sat a lanky

man wearing a uniform. Carefully I greeted him with 'Heil Hitler' to which he replied by briefly raising his arm, as if it was of little consequence.

'Sit down.' He indicated a chair opposite his desk. I sat on the edge of the seat, waiting to see what would happen.

'Your supervisor has reported your failure in acknowledging your fellow workers with the required salute. What do you have to say?'

What did I have to say? Good question. I could hardly tell him that my hands were full, that Gretel wanted revenge, and that Hitler could manage quite well without everyone acknowledging him at every turn, so I sat there, quiet.

'Well, what do you have to say about this accusation?' His eyes pierced my quietness, but they did not look so frightening.

'Well, sir, I was running late for the butcher. My mother had asked me to buy some bacon and the ration queues are quite long after work and Mutti is someone who does not like to be disappointed. When I met Gretel on the stairs my hands were full so it was difficult for me to salute her, but I meant no harm.'

It all came out in a rush, and I decided not to mention that Hitler should be able to fend for himself.

'Well, as far as I can see, this is the first time this has happened, but you can imagine that from now on we will be watching you, so make sure this is the only time you forget to raise your right arm on the stairs at work.'

Was that all? Where was the lecture, where was my punishment?

'You can go now, there is nothing more, but I would appreciate it if our talk was confidential. Perhaps you should tell your fellow workers that you have been asked to pay a fine.'

Mutti found it difficult to believe my excuse when I came home without her bacon, but when she looked into my face she must have seen a mixture of fear and relief because she understood.

'My poor Marianne, it is never wise to leave people off your party list. Nobody likes to miss out on a celebration …'

21. Cleaning up the mess

Everything was a muddle. It was time to clean up my apartment again. Crusting food made patterns on the rims of my dishes, my bathroom was covered in soap scum and I owned a toilet to be ashamed of. It all needed to be put to rights; my Aunty Eve was coming and she was my mother's deputy.

Each time my mother came to visit when she was alive, I rushed round the house like a dervish, clearing everything in my path. When she knocked on the front door I welcomed her in, pretending that my house always looked like something out of *Home Beautiful*, but she was not fooled. I could still see her fingers running along the edge of my mantelpiece:

'We haven't dusted lately, have we Barbara?'

I had been caught. The bathrooms were spotless and the children's rooms looked like military barracks, but Mum had found the one spot that escaped my belated zeal. I was left mumbling 'sorry' and feeling inadequate. My mother's house always looked as if she had stayed up all night ironing towels and scrubbing the taps; nothing ever escaped her attention.

And now Mum's representative was coming. Eve was my mother's childhood friend, her stand-in sister, and I didn't want anything to be out of place. Underneath the surface, this could be a delicate visit. I was not just the daughter of Eve's old school friend. Because of my background I belonged to the people who had attempted to annihilate the Jews, forcing Eve to leave Germany on the Kindertransport.

Every time I saw a memorial to the Jews I thought of Eve. In the Jewish barracks at Sachsenhausen her image had been on every wall, with her huge dark eyes and long brown hair hanging down in plaits. Eve was every Jew. Now she was coming here with her two daughters, back to the place where it had all begun.

In reality this was the third time Eve had been to Berlin since the end of the war. For many years she was unable to return, fearful of her anger and resentment as she faced the past. The Berliners were her enemies, but they had also been her neighbours and her friends. Even though Eve was a Jew, she was German, and eventually her longing to come home won through. The government of Berlin, in an act of apology, welcomed her and her daughter Rachel as if they were royal visitors. They stayed at the top end of town – Kempinskis – were given elegant pieces of Meissen china as parting gifts, and generally encouraged to feel that the Germany of their fears had receded into the shameful mists of history. Slowly, Eve uncurled her fists as her anger was soothed. She had been wooed like a lost lover with gifts and sweet voices, while the government of Berlin hoped that 'Sieg Heil' had become a distant memory. Now she was coming again, and together we would revisit the past, the Jew and the German trying to understand each other, so that the dust could finally settle.

Last night I opened the long awaited email from Beate Kosmala, the director of the Silent Heroes Museum:

'I would be happy to meet with your Aunt and record her story for our archives. I hope you will understand that we do not have enough room to display every story, but yours will be available for research.'

Thank God the email had come before Eve arrived, but my excitement was tinged with guilt. Maybe, I had bullied this poor woman into meeting with Eve and acknowledging my family's efforts in saving her. If I had then it was a guilt I was prepared to live with. This interview was the main reason for my aunt's visit – she wanted to honour my mother, my grandmother and their efforts to rescue her. Our story would be in print and undisputed; my family had not stood by idly during Kristallnacht. They had helped Eve to escape. And, as they had done that, then

maybe Mum and Mutti had rescued others, people I had never heard of. It was possible. I realised that my redemption hung on a thread, but I was prepared to take my chance.

Eve and her two daughters had booked into a hotel in Savigny Platz, not far from my apartment. I walked over there just after three, laden with welcoming flowers and a basket of fruit. That morning I'd got up early and walked down to the grocers near Charlottenberg railway station. Carefully, I had picked out some pears and bananas, four red apples and a small punnet of strawberries. My 'family' was coming and I wanted to welcome them.

You may have wondered why I referred to them as family; after all, we were not officially related, but we had always been united by this persistent story of rescue …

* * *

Summer holidays in England, 1960.

Eve's daughters had come to stay. We spent our days walking to the warren looking for swans. Sometimes we lay together in a ditch across the field from our house, that place was our secret cubby. We had lined the dirt floor with straw, and a low hanging willow formed the ceiling. We met on the straw and sat long into the afternoon, each one taking on a different character from our make-believe stories. Rachel and I were the eldest, so naturally we became the prefects of St Gertrude's Grammar. Annette and Carol, as the youngest, were our underlings and the butt of our bullying. Under that low green roof we became Emily and Cynthia, Sybil and Jasmine, boarding school friends just like the ones in our 'Judy' comics and 'Girls Own Annual'.

One day we decided to hold a midnight feast, just like the girls in our stories. They had stolen food from the boarding house kitchen, but we had to rely on Mum's pantry. At the back of her cupboard sat a lonely block of Cadbury's chocolate, which I managed to hide in my pocket. Rachel slid some custard creams into her skirt, while Annette and Carol, who were two years younger, took some bread and jam. By the time we displayed our stolen goods on my bedside table their bread had begun to curl and Annette had a sticky red mark on the pocket of her blouse.

'Now, make sure you bring torches and something to drink.'

I was always the bossy one, but I could get away with it because I was the head prefect.

At midnight Dad's old alarm clock buzzed underneath my mattress. I threw my pillow at Rachel's head to wake her up; then we gave Carol and Annette a firm shaking before they joined in the game. We were no longer in the top bedroom of 61 Grove Road; we belonged to the upper fifth form of St Gertrude's...

'Sybil, can you chuck over the chocolate?'

Sybil, who was actually Rachel, hurled the chocolate like a grammar school discus thrower. I tried to catch it, but it flew past my right ear and out of the open window.

'What did you throw it so hard for?' I scolded, 'Now we won't have any!'

We all peered out of the bedroom window; Carol managed to see a rectangle of purple lying on the small roof just below the window ledge.

'It's too dark to get it now. I'll try in the morning.' I moaned.

Next morning we all slept in. That hadn't been part of the plan; I was supposed to get up early, before anyone else. By the time I climbed onto the roof to retrieve the Cadbury's, Mum was up and doing her morning jobs.

Quietly, I climbed over the windowsill and edged my way towards the chocolate. Rachel hung onto me from inside the bedroom. My fingers were just about to curl around the purple package when Mum called out:

‘Barbara, what on earth are you are doing on that roof? Get down from there before you kill yourself.’

I tried to tell her about the fallen chocolate, but she insisted. Rachel hauled me back over the window ledge while the others discussed our possible punishments.

‘Don’t worry. I’ll go down and explain. I’m sure she’ll understand.’ Though why I was so sure was not obvious. Mum wasn’t known for her easy attitude towards childhood pranks. Everyone looked worried as I walked down the stairs and into the garden.

‘What were you thinking of, don’t you know how flimsy that roof is? If you’d stayed up there any longer it would have given way and you could have fallen to your death.’

My Mum was a touch dramatic.

‘I know it’s your holiday, and you like freedom, but it’s obvious you can’t be trusted. You’re supposed to be the eldest, but you’ve got no sense. I was going to take you to One Tree Hill for a picnic but now you’ll have to stay here!’

Rachel attempted to save me.

‘Please, Aunty Marianne,’ she pleaded from the safe distance of our back door, ‘it wasn’t Barbara’s fault; we were all in it together. If you punish her we should all stay here and get bored …’

* * *

My mother left Germany after the war, traveling to England, a frightened and naïve girl searching for acceptance in the country of her enemies. When she arrived Eve welcomed her childhood friend, remembering how it felt to come to a strange country, unsure of your place. Later, both Marianne and Eve gave birth to two daughters, and we became each other's 'sisters'; four girls from opposite sides of the divide, unaware of our mingled history.

Now I was standing at the entrance to their hotel, hesitating, but they saw me from the reception window and rushed out.

'Barbara, how wonderful to see you again, is this fruit for us? It looks lovely, but I don't think we will starve now.'

Eve had shrunk since the last time we were together, but at eighty-six she continued to defy her children's worries by hiking, travelling and actively supporting England's Kindertransport Association. As Eve stood back, Rachel, Annette and I embraced, silently aware that the fourth member of our sisterhood was missing. Our loss remained unspoken, but we felt the gap left open by Carol's death. She was sister number four, and like a table with only three legs we felt rather wobbly.

That evening, over black beer and sauerkraut, we talked about our legacies. 'I never felt as if I fitted in,' said Rachel, 'growing up in England, but feeling European, looking Jewish, eating different food, being aware of Mum's story, it all came together to make me feel like an outsider.'

'Apart from the Jewish part of your background, our stories sound so similar,' I told her.

'We both belong to the second generation, carriers of our parents' past.'

'Yes, I think it has made us over-anxious and needing to please,' said Annette. 'It's as if we had to make up for all their sadness.'

The line that separated us was barely visible, and once again we were children, lying under the willow and swapping stories. At the end of our meal we planned the next meeting. Tomorrow would be May 22nd – my mother's birthday. We would travel back to Warschauer Strasse and relive Eve's past.

22. The grass verge

‘And this is where we played together, your mother and me, out here on the grass verge.’ Eve’s sweeping hand took in her surroundings – the grass, the weeds and the tall protecting trees.

‘I was always the adventurous one. If allowed to, I would have joined the BDM. They presented such a positive image; campfires, singing, dancing, it all seemed very attractive.’

How strange; my mother’s Jewish friend was banned from joining the BDM, but was keen to belong, while my Aryan mother was compelled to go, but refused because it was against her family’s principles.

‘I am not sure why I wanted to join,’ said Eve, ‘everywhere people were chanting “we shall live and die for the Führer”, it was mass hysteria, nobody thought for themselves any more, even me.’

We walked across the street and found a table outside a small and familiar restaurant. Eve continued with her story.

‘I can remember the street fighting along Warschauer Strasse just before Christmas, between the Nazis and the Communists. They stood on opposite sides of the street, shouting slogans and shooting each other. I watched it from my balcony. Later, when it was over, we came down stairs and found bullet holes in the walls.’

If my Mum recalled any Christmas street fighting, it was not a story she passed on to me. So, when I heard about the fighting between Communists and Nazis I started to create a picture that would satisfy my need to understand. My mother must have seen the fighting too, but maybe she didn’t want to remember. After all, it was Christmas …

Berlin, December 24, 1932

I know it is late. If Mutti catches me she will be cross, but I must write in my new diary. What a happy evening it has been, my favourite night of the year. Our flat is so brightly decorated and everyone is smiling, and then there is the Christmas food: roast goose, sacher torte and pfeffer nusse, enough for everyone. Mutti has been cooking all week.

This afternoon Uncle Hans and Aunt Bertha came, bringing with them all the good smells of Christmas. When I lifted up the tea towel covering Aunt Bertha's basket I could almost taste the marzipan and cinnamon cakes. And somewhere, hidden from sight, was the smell of pine. Of course, I was not allowed one bite of her Christmas treats:

'Be patient child, they are for our supper.'

But surely they could have given me one piece of marzipan?

After luncheon Mutti told me she was tired (that is not like her!) and suggested that Uncle Hans take me out for a walk. He proposed a stroll along Warschauer Strasse to see the Christmas lights. My Uncle Hans is a jolly man, always joking and teasing, so I was happy to go with him. We walked together, arm in arm, looking at the brightly lit shop windows. People were rushing everywhere, some with parcels under their arms, and others carrying freshly cut pine trees. The snow was hard on the ground, and I know it is mean, but it was funny to watch the shoppers slip along the pavement as they ran from one store to another, trying to buy everything all at once.

Then the wind started to blow, and my coat just didn't feel warm enough, so Uncle Hans suggested we go to a restaurant for hot chocolate. We found a very posh one and he treated me just like a lady, helping me with my coat and guiding me towards a cosy window seat. It was our secret hideaway and we sat together, sipping

our hot, sweet milk. I couldn't help laughing at Uncle Hans when his glasses steamed up. He was so funny, pretending to be blind and almost knocking his Black Forest cake to the ground.

Then, out of nowhere, people began to run past the cafe window, shouting and looking frightened.

'Uncle, what is happening?'

'I am not sure, my puppala. Sit here and I will have a look.'

I was too frightened to let him leave, so he just poked his head out of the shop door. When he came back he was laughing, but I could see he was worried:

'Nothing to be anxious about my dear, just some young Communist thugs indulging in a little street fighting, we are safe in here.'

But after our fright I finished my chocolate quickly. I wanted to get back. Uncle Hans was careful on the way home; we walked down the small streets, trying to avoid the fighting on Warschauer Strasse.

When we arrived home, I forgot all about the street fighting, for there it was. A Christmas tree stood by the window covered in candles and lametta. I jumped up and down so hard that Mutti told me to stand still before I knocked the tree over.

'Did he come? Did Saint Nicholas visit while we were away?'

'I suppose he must have done,' said Mutti. 'But he was so quiet. Aunt Bertha and I were enjoying an afternoon sleep and didn't hear a thing.'

I put my face close to the tree; it smelt of sunshine. And there lying under it was a small parcel wrapped in silver paper.

'Mutti, this has my name on it, can I open it now. Please?'

This was breaking the rules; presents must wait until after we have eaten. 'Well, you should really open your gifts after supper, but I don't suppose there is any harm in it.'

Inside the silver paper was a small book, a new diary. On its brown leather cover there was a large embossed "M", its empty pages waiting for me to write my stories …

As a child in England, Mum's German Christmas traditions stood out from the rest. When Christmas Eve arrived this was Dad's sign to take us out; Mum always made excuses not to come. When we came back from the pictures our home had been transformed into a fairyland. Santa Claus had swooped through our house like a magic sprite, leaving behind a decorated tree, wrapped presents and a table full of food. We never suspected Mum, always giving Father Christmas the glory. Outside the first flakes were falling, but we were snug and together. Mum served a German Christmas Eve dinner – potato salad and bratwurst. Then presents. After the excitement she rested on the couch, Dad turned on the radio and we listened to the German Christmas broadcast of 'Stille Nacht'.

Back on Warschauer Strasse the others had finished their coffee, but mine had grown cold. I had been away, missing out on the discussion about tomorrow. We planned to visit the Silent Heroes Museum, where Eve could tell her story:

'We'll walk down to Charlottenberg station and meet you there, Barbara. Then we can travel to Hakescher Markt and you can show us where to go for the interview.'

For once I was grateful to Rachel for taking charge; I had been lost between the past and the present. Tomorrow was an important day. It was time for Eve to tell her story.

23. The girl in the red coat

‘My name is Eve Cohen and I was born the fifth of May 1923. My father was a shopkeeper in Warschauer Strasse and I went to the local primary school. We kept some Jewish festivals, but we did open the shop on the Sabbath. We were known as secular Jews, not Orthodox.’

Eve was telling Dr Kosmala her story while we listened.

‘I had a sister and a brother, both younger than me. When I went to school the four Jewish girls in the class had to sit on a segregated bench at the back of the classroom. We were not allowed to speak to the others. If I went to visit Aryan friends after school my mother did not tell my father. If I had been caught he could have lost his job. And, neighbours were not allowed to speak to us in case they were seen.’

I scribbled this down, not wanting to waste a word.

‘My father supplied cobblers’ shops and shoe manufacturers with leather. He was a popular man and very friendly. Just before Kristallnacht a customer warned him to get out. My father didn’t want to hide by himself in case his family were held hostage. So he looked everywhere for a safe place for all of us. Nobody was prepared to help. So, my dear school friend Marianne – her mother’ and then Eve pointed to me, ‘this women’s grandmother took us in.’

I lowered my head with pride; Eve’s telling was enough.

‘They only had one room and a kitchen, so Marianne’s mother sat up in a chair for the next three nights.’

I closed my eyes and saw my grandmother there – tough, determined and ready for anything.

‘The Szelasacks were a strong family. School children were being racially indoctrinated, but Marianne stood up in front of her class and told them: ‘My best

friend is Jewish'. Marianne's mother revelled in telling anti-Hitler jokes, and her friends worried in case she would be picked up.'

After all I had learnt about the Nazi regime I understood how dangerous this was. My grandmother had risked her life to tell a joke!

'When Kristallnacht was over my father had to sell his shop at a very low price. The bank confiscated our money and we were only allowed to take out a small monthly sum. My parents sold two other properties, but never received any money for them. We also were expected to pay the 'Jew Tax' as reparation for Kristallnacht.'

Eve continued, 'Later I left Germany on the Kindertransport and went to England. I felt it was my responsibility to bring out my parents from Germany because they were caught in a very vulnerable situation. When the war was over I sent food parcels from England to Marianne in Germany because I had heard that in Europe there was nothing left to eat. After all, it was Barbara's family who helped me to have a positive feeling towards some Germans, because Germany is actually my home. I am German.'

I almost dropped my note pad. Eve had admitted to her nationality. To be German was to belong to the nation who had terrorised her people; it was to acknowledge the complexities of prejudice, to see the possibility of being caught up in a political fervour that could overcome doubt and discrimination. The possibility of evil was within us all.

'Now, as I visit Berlin, the town I knew is no longer, so my negative feelings about it have also gone. I recently visited the Oranienberger Strasse Synagogue to discover it was empty. This was where my family had worshipped, but our congregation had disappeared. There was nothing left.'

Eve went on to tell Dr Kosmala that when the German government paid her four hundred pounds restitution money for lost educational opportunities, she used it to complete her teacher training in England. She did not talk about the problems she encountered when she first arrived in England on the Kindertransport. That was a quiet family story, best left for another time. It was sufficient to say that she was treated like a servant and her weekends were spent knocking on doors trying to find someone who was prepared to bring her beleaguered family out of Germany.

As the interview drew to a close I left the table and stood by the window, looking down at the alleyway through brimming eyes. Before I knew it Rachel was by my side, arms around me, hugging silently. Both of us understood the magnitude of this telling and the impact it had on our lives.

'You must be so proud of your family. I don't think we would be here today if they hadn't sheltered my mother.'

And for a moment I basked in my grandmother's courage and called it my own. Rachel's embrace signalled her forgiveness, temporarily assuaging my guilt. We had never discussed these feelings; Rachel would have seen them as indulgent and unnecessary, but I could vouch for their hold over me. And now I watched them slipping away like a winter coat that was too heavy now that spring had arrived.

After the interview was over the director thanked Eve and left the room. We looked at the rest of the museum, but the stories on display subdued our excitement. This place stood as a witness against the belief that all Germans had blindly followed Hitler. Sepia photos spoke of lives changed forever because of war. A farmer, who had hidden his Jewish neighbours in the loft, refused to tell the police of their whereabouts, even under torture. Other Jewish rescuers had died in Plotzensee Prison.

In comparison, our story was insignificant. But, at the time, Omi didn't know the future – that worse times were coming and that her Jewish friends and neighbours would be rounded up and sent to their deaths. Until then, Kristallnacht had been the epitome of the civil indecency. Omi was outraged by the persecution of those she loved, and felt compelled to act. Now, many years later, this small white room in the museum held a gathering of people brought together by Omi's defiance. We were small bit players in the symphony of resistance, but we had been heard.

I began to wonder what Mum would have made of this group. She was a shy woman, and not keen on entering the spotlight. Would she have thought this fuss unnecessary, or would she have been secretly relieved that her family had been identified with the other silent heroes of Germany.

We walked back down the winding stairs and into the truncated sunshine of the alleyway. Eve and her family discussed the possibility of going next door. They wanted to see Otto Weidt's Workshop for the Blind. This man had also hidden Jews. Eve was on the resistance trail and she wanted to know more, but my heart wasn't in it. I made my small claim: 'Why don't we go for a drink first?'

We found a small outdoor café and drank our coffee in silence, overwhelmed by the revelations of the morning. A large group of school children broke into our reverie; like bright birds they perched on the shallow walls, eating their sandwiches and fruit. At such an early age they were travelling into the deep crevasses of their country's past. Judging by the posters stuffed into their backpacks they had just come from the Anne Frank museum at the end of the alley. In spite of their morning's undoubtedly gloomy lesson, they were whispering giggling secrets and playing chasey. It was almost as if they had never heard about the plight of Anne, a young girl, a little like themselves, whose laughter had been silenced.

A strong cup of German coffee and a piece of sweet plum cake fortified me sufficiently to tackle Weidt's Workshop for the Blind. Once more we wound our way up another set of stairs to the whitewashed rooms that had once hidden a group of people at the top of Hitler's extermination list. Not only were they Jewish, but they were blind; that was a double calamity in the eyes of the National Socialists. Within these walls Otto Weidt gave shelter to those singled out for extermination. As we wandered from room to room we found small alcoves that had hidden Weidt's workers when the Nazis came searching.

This workshop had stood like an impudent David in the face of the Goliath death camps. But, as we continued our tour we found out that many of Weidt's brush makers had ended up in the ovens. This ending obliterated my feelings of release. The fury of the Third Reich had returned to sit on my shoulders like a scavenging vulture. I longed to run away, but I felt it was wrong to search for an escape route. That option hadn't been available for so many others.

I watched from a distance as Eve and her children peered into one display case after another, looking into the eyes of their people, the ones that hadn't made it. How did it feel to be a Jew who had survived – were they also consumed with guilt? My head was like a traffic jam – too many questions hurtling along the highway and so few traffic lights telling them to stop. I yearned for a measure of self-acceptance. A while ago, in the Silent Heroes Museum, there was peace, but now it had gone. I felt nothing but relief when Eve pointed at her watch – time for lunch.

We sat in the afternoon sun listening to a group of jazz musicians, blowing and drumming their entertainment to the people passing by.

'Look,' said Rachel 'isn't she sweet?'

In front of the musicians was a small girl with bouncy yellow ringlets, dressed in a white skirt and blouse with fancy red gumboots on her dancing feet. The

music picked her up and carried her along, and she only had eyes for the musicians – her musicians. Her mother watched from a distant table, sipping her coffee, unperturbed by the sensation her daughter was creating. The saxophone player decided to incorporate his latest fan into the act. He leant down low and serenaded the little girl. She bobbed and curtsied in response to his admiration, but too much adulation disturbed her enchantment, crying, she ran back to her mother's table. As the crowd applauded she buried her head in her mother's lap. The jazz band continued without their star attraction.

I felt as if I was in a movie. In my mind, the dancing star was the little girl in the red coat, running and hiding through the ghettoes of Spielberg's *Schindler's List*. She hadn't stood a chance. But our dancing star's attention was now focused on a strawberry ice cream and she remained unaware that she reminded me of hopelessness. Maybe it was time to go home, back to Australia. To stay in Berlin was to be continually confronted with images of the past – my past and my mother's. I missed the gums, the scrabbly trees of my backyard, and my daughter's smile.

I couldn't leave now; Eve and her daughters had come here to be with me. But how would I get through the rest of my trip when a small child evoked so much sadness. I brought myself into the present. Here was my Jewish family, sitting around our derelict lunch table, eager to see one more story. This was not the time to turn away. We looked at the map and realised that Rosen Strasse was close by. It was another place of courage, a place where a group of Aryan women had stood outside a prison for long days and nights while their Jewish husbands remained locked inside. These women refused to leave the people they loved, calling out to them, yelling at the guards, and demanding that their husbands be set free.

In one corner of the park stood a group of figures carved in stone. Here was another story of fear and release. These figures were for ever caught in the act of

determination. Our fingers gently traced along their bodies as Eve translated the German inscription:

‘The strength of civil disobedience,
The vigour of love,
Overcomes the violence of dictatorship,
Give us our men back!
Women standing here defeating death.
Jewish men were free!’

‘To know that some Germans acted with such courage does me good,’ said Eve.

She seemed overcome by this display. It must have stood in direct contrast to all she had known to be true. I watched as Rachel sat near the figures, lost in her own thoughts. She had carried feelings of anger against Germany for most of her life, but who could blame her. To be Jewish was to see Germans as evil; there was little room for another story. The war was her mother’s pain, the loss of potential. Rachel never knew those aunts and uncles who had died in the camps, or the nieces and nephews who were only a dream. She had lived with the knowledge that to be Jewish was sufficient reason to be annihilated.

‘I have never heard of this story,’ whispered Rachel.

This place of quietness held a different breath from the other memorials. Watching my Jewish family, thinking about my mother I played out another Rosen Strasse story …

Berlin, February 1943

For once our apartment building is quiet. Above us lives a family with two small and rather noisy children, Marta and Jakob. Sometimes, on a Saturday morning, when I am not working, their mother asks me to watch over them while she does the shopping. They love playing with my old dolls, especially when I bring them in my wicker pram. I am much too old to worry about my china babies, so I usually keep them tucked away in my bedroom. Marta always grabs Pupala first, dressing her in a white lace bonnet from my moth-balled collection. Then it is Jakob's turn. He likes to push the pram up and down the corridor. He is so gentle you would have thought he was already a Papa. Every now and again he bends down and whispers something into Pupala's china ear. How he loves that doll.

About that time a fight breaks out:

'Jakob, you have pushed her for long enough. Now it is my turn. Marianne, tell him to give me a go, I am the eldest.'

I watch as Jakob hands the pram over to his sister. He has the look of a sorrowing father, saying goodbye to his favourite child. Thank God this is normally the time when Frau Guenther comes back from her shopping trip.

'Thank you, Marianne. Shopping is much easier when I can do it alone. And, I don't like the children to disturb Joseph, they make so much noise, he can barely think.'

'They are no problem, I am happy to do it, Frau Guenther. After working all week in the factory with my sour faced boss this makes a nice change.'

'The queues were so long today; I almost gave up. Would you like to stay for a cup of coffee? Just let me unpack these things.'

'Mama, did you bring anything for us?' the children beg. And after she gives them a small nod they burrow through her basket until they find two shrivelled pears.

‘It’s not much I know, but Joseph doesn’t get many orders these days.’ Then we sit together around the kitchen table, watching the children giving Pupala pieces of pear, which she daintily refuses.

One afternoon, I meet Frau Guenther on the stairs. Her hair had slipped out from under her hat and her coat is undone.

‘What’s wrong?’

‘They’ve arrested Joseph. He is being held at Rosenstrasse. They came this morning with the papers. Marianne, will you take care of Marta and Jakob for me? I must go to him.’

And this is the beginning of it. Each day Frau Guenther stands outside the place where her Joseph is being held, but at least she is not alone. In the evenings when she comes back to her children she tell us about the others who stand alongside her.

‘Our numbers are growing as word gets around. We stand and shout “Give us our husbands back!”

‘Sometimes I am frightened, but so far we are lucky. The SS guards have not harmed us.’

All the residents from our apartment help to take care for Marta and Jakob. Old Frau Krupps on the top floor usually complains that the children give her a headache, but now she cooks lunch for them, which is not such an easy thing to do, given the rationing. And, somehow the children survive – and so does their father.

One afternoon, at the end of March, Frau Guenther walks through the door of the apartment building with her husband by her side. He is not easy to recognise, but I can tell by her smiles that he is safe:

‘Marianne, Joseph is home!’

I rush forward to shake his hand; it is full of bones and not much else. Then his children come running:

'Papa, papa! You've come home!'

Together they drag the poor man up the stairs, past each apartment. They are too busy to notice that every door is ajar. The children's temporary babysitters look out at their antics with relief. It is over …

Each of us had been lost in our own thoughts when Annette called out.

'Let's go. Enough of the past for one day – I need a drink.'

She echoed my thoughts exactly.

'Why don't you come home to my place for dinner? We can pick up something from the supermarket, and then I can show you some photos from home.'

Eve was looking around my flat, but I wanted to pretend she was my mother. So, it was Mum who walked out on to the balcony and surveyed the tree-lined street. From there she followed me into the kitchen, watching me as I gently fried the onions for the spaghetti sauce. Her face had softened and the harsh lines of disappointment had smoothed. There was no flash of anger when she saw me spill the wine. But when Annette walked into the kitchen Mum vanished.

'Can I make the salad?'

'Sure, that would be great; the knife is in the top drawer.'

As she was slicing the tomato Annette suggested a change of plan. I caught the tension in her voice:

'I need a break from all of this. I'm not like Rachel; it's getting too gloomy for me. Surely you must be sick of it by now; that's all you've been doing for the last month!'

‘I guess you’re probably right. But, it’s as if I am on a quest. I wanted to see the places that would answer the questions about my Mum and why I feel so guilty to be thought of as German.’

The red wine had loosened my thoughts, and I gave them to Annette.

‘Barbara, why are you always so serious? Let’s go out tomorrow and have some fun.’

‘OK,’ I sighed. ‘What do you suggest?’

‘Why don’t we take the train to Potsdam? It’s sort of in the country, and then we can see the castle Sans Souci and have some lunch. The weather is supposed to be clear.’

‘Why Sans Souci?’

‘Apparently the name means “no worries”. Don’t you think that’s appropriate?’

We spent the evening eating pasta and trying to avoid spilling tomato sauce on my photos of home. Rachel and Annette gave an ongoing commentary about my family, but when I looked across Eve was asleep.

‘Rachel, I think you better take your Mum home. She is worn out.’

24. The place of no worries

The day was perfect for pleasure, and the Third Reich seemed far away. We met at the Charlottenberg railway station like a group of children setting out on a picnic. On reaching Potsdam station we sat together at the railway café and indulged once again in kaffee und kuchen. All thoughts of our broadening waistlines were forgotten as we watched the waitress dollop an extra spoonful of cream on our cake; the day had started as we meant to go on.

We were taking part in a memorable German tradition – eating with great pleasure. This was one of the fond memories I held of my mother: tinkling china, strong coffee and plum cake with cream, all spread out on a starched white tablecloth. She was recreating a small piece of Germany in her new home, Australia. This was her way of showing me that things should be done properly or not at all. For Mum there were no casual coffee mugs to be drunk at the breakfast bar. Eating and drinking was supposed to be an occasion, a chance to celebrate and be together. And here we sat in Potsdam, because of her. But there must have been so many times when she had gone without …

Berlin, July 1945

My stomach has been rumbling all night, echoing like an empty cave. Mutti and I searched the apartment yesterday and all we could find was some pearl barley, long forgotten at the back of the kitchen cupboard. We managed to turn it into a watery soup – at least it was warm!

At lunchtime today we sat by the window of the kitchen table, remembering the meals we had shared in that sunny room. It was not a helpful pastime. When Mutti recalled the roast goose we usually ate at Christmas time my stomach gave out

a roar and my mouth tasted the fatty sweetness of the bird, but our table stayed empty. No amount of remembering would put food on our plates.

Quiet listlessness took hold, but then we heard a shout from the street. We looked out and saw a man kicking a fallen horse. He was yelling at the poor animal.

'Get up, you lazy brute, don't just lie there. Move!'

The horse moaned and rolled his eyes, his twitching legs unable to find the strength he needed to stand up. His owner bent down beside him, helpless. Gradually the street began to fill with our nosey neighbours, all hoping for an interruption to their anxious existence. We ran downstairs, just in time to see the owner trying to lift the animal. Naturally, it was beyond him; the poor thing was dying, anyone could see that. Finally, the man gave up and walked away. We stood around watching the poor thing, unsure of what to do. Frau Keller thought of it first:

'Horse meat would be good for stewing!'

Her eyes held a dangerous glint as she ran back to her apartment and brought out a menacing kitchen knife. It did not take long for others to realise what she was planning. Bedlam broke out as people ran into their flats, returning with their knives and plates.

The air was noisy with distant gunfire, but that did not interrupt our determination; the thought of food drove us into a forgetful frenzy. I am sure the poor horse was still alive – when Frau Keller plunged her knife deep into his side he let out a pitiful cry of pain. But for us this animal was no longer a living thing; he had become the answer to our hunger. We slashed and hacked, pushing people out of the way in desperation. Mutti managed to cut a big slice from the horse's back leg. Blood spurted over our clothes and hair, but nobody noticed. Hunger was our driving force; we had become like vultures feeding from a giant carcass.

With our plates loaded with horsemeat, Mutti and I walked back to our apartment covered in blood.

'Ah, Marianne, who would have thought we would come to this, taking meat from a dying animal. We are nothing but heathens.'

I should have been upset but I could not help myself; I began to laugh. My poor Mutti looked like a butcher's assistant; she even had blood dripping from the end of her nose. Then, without giving a thought to her appearance, Mutti began to dice the rump of horse meat and fry it on our camping stove.

By the middle of the afternoon, we were sitting down to a meal of horsemeat with some onions given to us by Frau Keller. Thank God that poor horse had decided to collapse outside our front door! Now his carcass lies in the empty street and our grateful neighbours sit at their kitchen tables, eating dinner, too happy to hear the pounding of distant guns …

It was not easy for me to imagine that type of hunger; my mother always made sure of that:

'Barbara, eat it all up please, there are children in India who would be grateful for the scraps from your plate.'

'Fine,' I retorted, 'why don't we pack up the leftovers and send them over?'

Then Mum pulled out the big guns, reminding me about the war, about real hunger and how I should be grateful. I even remembered the times she had cried if I did not finish my dinner.

My mother's cupboards were always full; tins and packages stood in military rows of precision, 'just in case'. In the role of providing mother, she marched down the hill to the supermarket as if she was going into battle. The carefully made out shopping lists were her plan of action. Once inside the supermarket she would scour

the shelves for specials, finding small ways of stretching the tightness of our family budget. Sometimes there would be a little money left over, enough to buy a tin of 'Tania' hairspray or a pair of 'Black Cat' stockings.

Back home, the food battle continued. As a small child, I was unaware of the deprivation my Mum had endured after the war. It was only after reading *Berlin – the Downfall* that I started to understand. When I was a child we kept having arguments about food. It became our weapon; it was my chance to say no and retrieve some power from my mother. I was too young to know that she had probably been so hungry she had resorted to eating a dying animal. But I was glad she hadn't told me; my life had been coloured with enough gloomy clouds that stories of dying horses being hacked by hungry housewives would have done little to help me along my way.

As we followed the San Souci crowds through one gilded room and into another, I realised that Annette had been right. I was a million miles away from Mum and her pain. Then Eve whispered to me that she used to come here as a child, and again I thought about mum, and began to wonder whether she had tagged along. I was at it again, examining every whisper as if it contained a secret. I gazed out of the window draped in blue to the gardens beyond. I was determined to play the role of tourist for a while, not fill my head with wartime thoughts. But Eve was watching me.

'Barbara, why don't you come with me to the museum shop? I want to look for some presents to take back to England, will you help me choose?'

We retreated from the castle and into the overflowing gift shop where miniature replicas of porcelain, glass and silverware stood on every shelf. In a quiet corner of the shop my mother tapped me softly on the shoulder,

‘Barbara, walk along to the next aisle, look there, behind the bronze statue of Kaiser Wilhelm, do you see it? Be careful, isn’t it fine? So delicate. I still remember beauty, in spite of all the hardship. I worked in a china factory – remember? Each day I was allowed to handle the thin, translucent cups painted with tiny blue flowers. I packed cream and gold vases that reminded me of alabaster. If you hold this vase up to the light the sun will shine through. Best not touch it though; the price tag is beyond you. Here is the china of my memories, the beauty that softened the hardness that was springing up all around me. But that cushion was taken away … ’

Berlin, 1943

I have been forced to leave the factory. Those in power have decided that making china is not essential to the war effort. I must make flags instead. Now my job is to sew Nazi banners, one after the other. The more land the National Socialists over take, the more flags are needed. My decorations are hanging everywhere, in schools, in shops, in universities, and railway stations. This job keeps me busy, but my heart isn’t in it. Instead of sewing those horrible red and black banners I want to return to my delicate china, packing it carefully into boxes; swaddling it between sheets of tissue paper before sending it out into the world. Instead I turn out flags for the Führer: banners that serve as a constant reminder of his power. These are flags to take your breath away, but I am not proud of my work. How I wish I was strong enough to resist, but for the most part I keep my head down and get on with it …

Like so many others, my Mum probably had to work for the Nazis towards the end of the war. She was made to sew flags, banners to stir the hearts of soldiers as they grew weary. Even though this was my imagining, her betrayal disappointed me. I tried to convince myself that it was only a job, giving her the money she needed to live. That

should have been enough to satisfy me. Who was I to constantly question her, to call her to account. But nevertheless, I wanted her to sew loathing into every stitch.

As I listened to my mother I thought of my own country. Our soil had been soaked with blood, Aboriginal blood. Those people had been in our way when we invaded a land and planted the English flag. We thought the country was empty – Terra Nullius – free to be taken. I lived in a land where Aboriginal people filled our jails, dying young, and carrying the burdens of their painful past into the boltholes of drinking and domestic violence.

And just like the Jews, their past would not leave them. They lived with the knowledge that somebody had wanted them gone. William Cooper was a symbol of the similarity between Aboriginal people and their Jewish counterparts. He was a Yorta Yorta man, born in 1861. His people knew him as a keen letter writer, particularly when it came to speaking out against injustice. He sent letters to everybody – consulates and MPs, those in power. He wanted to right wrongs, and as an Aboriginal he understood discrimination when he saw it.

Cooper was the leader of the Aboriginal League in Melbourne at the time of Kristallnacht; he was the only person to stand up and say, 'This is wrong!' He believed that if people knew the truth about what was happening in Germany, someone would stop the injustice. So, at the age of seventy-eight he marched to the steps of the German Consulate in Melbourne, protesting against Germany's treatment of the Jews.

'We are all indignant of Hitler's treatment of the Jews, but we are getting the same treatment here,' said Cooper when he heard about the harsh intolerance that was happening on the other side of the world. Of course the German consulate, full of theories about racial hygiene, refused to see him, but Cooper was someone who

knew what it was like to be persecuted, and the fact that nobody was willing to listen was part of his experience.

This man became an Australian hero, and the Israeli government recognised his compassion by inviting his descendants to a tree planting ceremony, held in Cooper's honour, in Israel's Forest of Martyrs. It must have been a strange sight watching William Cooper's family carrying water from the great Murray River, and soil from the Yorta Yorta land, across the sea to Israel. Once there, the family planted their ancestor's remembrance tree with elements from the land that Cooper had treasured. During this ceremony a great bond sprang up between the two groups of oppressed people. Both had suffered at the hands of those who wished them harm, and their pain flowed like a river between the first generation and those who came after.

Sadness enveloped me once more, and like a guilty child I willed myself to look over at Eve, her stooped figure bending over a pile of neatly folded tea towels. Carefully she selected one, and I knew by the colours that it would match her kitchen in Watford. She seemed more tolerant of these memorial visits than I had imagined. Maybe there was an accepting graciousness that accompanied old age. I hoped so! I had no wish to go to the grave still shaking my fist.

'Look Barbara, this is such a pretty towel, easy to pack too. Are you going to get one? They are good value for the price.'

This was just the sort of statement my Mum always made as she scoured the shops looking for value. It was the Depression talking, and the War; it turned people into magpies, storing and hoarding, just in case.

'Why don't we sit outside for a while, it's a pity to waste the sunshine.' Eve pointed to a bench under a tree, its spindly branches letting in enough light. She continued, 'Barbara, why are you doing this, all this questioning?'

‘I’m not sure any more; it all seemed obvious at the beginning. I wanted to find out more about Mum, to see if she was guilty.’

‘But I don’t understand, guilty of what?’ Eve looked puzzled.

‘Eve, you must know. The Germans did terrible things; many, many people died. I had to know if she was involved in some way.’

‘Why, so you can feel better about yourself? This certainly isn’t about your mother.’ Eve’s voice had taken on her schoolmistress tone. I remembered a similar quality when I was a child.

‘Your Mum was one of the kindest people I knew. She even cried over the death of a bird. There was nothing she could do about the war. It was too big and it came too fast.’

Eve’s criticism had met its mark, but that wasn’t such a bad thing. She was right – this trip was about my guilt, not my Mum’s.

I was relieved when I heard Annette and Rachel calling out. They had had enough of gilt ceilings and velvet. We made our way back to Charlottenberg station and said our farewells. Eve was so tired she could barely stand, but she was determined as ever to walk back to their hotel instead of catching a taxi. After saying goodbye I walked along the now familiar street of darkened apartment buildings and sweeping trees, past the empty playground, which backed onto the station. Tomorrow would be our last day together. Regret filled me momentarily. Had I asked the right questions? Eve was old; anyone could see that. Maybe I didn’t know enough. She was my last true link with the past and with my mother. But it was my story now. I would no longer judge so harshly. Mum had lived her life – now it was up to me.

In the middle of the night I woke for no reason. Everything was still, but someone was in the room. I lay there quietly, wanting it to be a dream. It was dark,

but I could feel her breathing. When the moon passed from behind a cloud I caught a glimpse of her. The woman in black was sitting at the end of my bed. We didn't speak, there were no questions and no answers, but we *saw*. Our thoughts were a mutual transfusion, travelling back and forth until we both knew. Then she was gone.

25. Lighting a candle

Tomorrow was here, and the sky echoed my sadness with heavy clouds ready to burst. My family had chosen to spend our last day at the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church. Walking along the street, all we could see of this once imposing building was its western spire standing alongside a huge Mercedes Benz emblem. Together these two symbols told the story of Germany's past. One represented a company that had helped to build the Luftwaffe, Germany's battle force of the air during WWII. Its workers had been so exploited under Hitler's control; they decided to strike for better conditions. Their only reward was a trip to the camps. Standing alongside this emblem was another symbol, a reminder of reconciliation: the church spire. These two wordless testimonies spoke fluently about the way many Germans understood their past. People saw themselves as both victims and perpetrators – the maltreated and the monstrous. These contrasting roles must have caused a great disturbance in the national psyche, leaving behind both feelings of anger and sorrow.

We walked into what was left of the church and discovered that the walls were covered in pictures of bombed-out Berlin. Eve stood next to me. 'I had no idea it was this bad ...'

Berlin, February 1945

Small shards of Mutti's blue and white china cup scrape against my leg. Stupid, stupid, stupid! How could I be so ridiculous? Nobody else faints when they hear a siren. They just hurry to the nearest shelter. But me – no! I fall down in the middle of the street, making a scene and tripping people up on their way to safety. Now I have broken the blue and white cup and saucer set I bought for Mutti's birthday. The shopkeeper had wrapped it so carefully:

‘Fraulein, please be careful on the way home. So many pot holes in the pavement, you might trip.’

Now I lie in the street, the contents of my bag spread across the pavement for everyone to see, but no one seems to care; they are all too busy rushing to the shelter. At last someone stops to help me, and together we walk to the nearest underground; how messy I must look, dust on my coat and my hat falling off. My rescuer offers me soothing words that make me even more embarrassed:

‘Please, do not be upset, such a sweet girl is naturally terrified by this terrible bombing.’

As we hurry along the street, I hear somebody say that a bomb has hit Warschauer Strasse. Mutti! She stayed home today. I have to get to her, but they won’t let me through. As I stand at the barrier, it is hard to tell where the smoke is coming from. Is it our building or further down? I plead with the warden to let me through, but he refuses me adamantly: ‘No!’

Then another siren screams out, and the warden pushes me towards the shelter; I have no choice but to leave Mutti alone. A better daughter would have broken down the barriers and run past, trying to save her mother, but once more I faint! When I finally reach the bomb shelter, my neighbours offer to soothe my tears with a cigarette.

At last, the ‘all-clear’ sounds and we are allowed to leave. I run home past broken buildings and fire wagons, terrified of what I might find. The building across the street is so badly hit I can see the privacy of their sitting room gaping open for everyone to look inside. I race up the stairs and there she is, standing at the top of the landing, waiting for me. How Mutti and I embrace. Then she smells my breath.

‘What is this, cigarettes?’

Now I smoke a cigarette whenever I can get hold of one; my fetid breath is just another casualty of war …

Thank God Eve hadn't witnessed what had happened to her childhood friend. Because she left Germany at the beginning of the war, she had missed out on the destruction of her home. Eighty per cent of Berlin was turned into rubble. We walked along with whispering feet, unwilling to intrude on other people's memories.

Within this memorial room, people had formed a queue. Each one was waiting to light a candle. As I stepped into front position I felt the others pressing in, but they must wait. This was our moment. I wanted to light a candle for my mother, my sister, and anyone else affected by that terrible war. By my calculation that included just about everyone; the pain of loss rippling across the gene pool, touching every last one of us. Watching the glistening flames, I remembered a phone call from Australia, received at one a.m. on Sunday morning. My friend Gordon was having trouble with time zones. Of course, we ended up discussing my constant preoccupation:

'If what you say is true, then, because you were closer to your Dad and your sister was more linked to your Mum, it stands to reason that Carol would have adopted more of your Mum's sadness.'

He was right. Over the years I had looked for reasons to satisfy the questions surrounding my sister's suicide. She had always fought with depression. Even as a child she had been quiet and brooding, carrying none of my compulsion to cheer. Sadness had been her daily companion and, like my mother, she always felt as if she didn't quite fit. Carol wore her sensitivity without protection; each nerve ending was exposed to the elements. The world's anguish became hers, and the evening news was her trial by fire. But she made herself watch. It was important to suffer alongside

others, and not look away. Given Gordon's theory, it was possible that her placenta had been filled with amniotic fluid tainted by trauma. Hers was a sadness that was impossible to shake, and eventually it swallowed her up.

People were waiting to light their candles. I moved away, looking for a sheltering place. Opposite the stand of glimmering candles was a small stone alcove and I slipped inside. Everyone in this ruined church wanted to light a memorial – for the past, the present or the future. From my place of silence I witnessed testimonies of ongoing grief – the rippling effect of tears that had been passed on from generation to generation.

I looked up and saw Rachel signal; it was time to leave. Eve wanted to take us to Kempinskis for our farewell lunch. The meal started with laughter. Kempinskis was a very posh hotel. It was where Eve had dined, courtesy of the German government, when they brought her back to visit her old home. We anticipated silver service. Outside under the awnings, our reserved table was waiting, with its snowy cloth and polished silver cutlery. But a strong wind blew as soon as we settled into our seats, shaking the awnings so hard they rattled in their brackets. Soot covered our pristine table. This was not German cleanliness as we knew it. The country had changed, and we laughed in thankfulness, but before long a waiter dashed up to our table to sweep away the dirt, reassuring us that it would soon be set to rights. But the dusty wind was a precursor to rain. Large drops splashed on to the pavement, and even though we were under canvas we were still getting wet. So we retreated inside.

I felt so comfortable with these people; their acceptance had swept away my feelings of shame. I was part of their family, no matter what.

'If it hadn't been for your family none of us would be here right now!'

Over the last few days we had shared our past, unravelling stories, and making them public. Now it was time to say goodbye. We finished our meal with a

strong cup of coffee. There were promises of phone calls and letters, visits between Australia and England. But I was not my mother; regular letter writing was not a habit I had inherited. I knew I would have trouble keeping to my end of the bargain. Still, underlying our promises was a desire to continue, closing the gaps in our togetherness.

We hurried along Kurfurstendam. The sky was black with rain and we were without our umbrellas. By the time we reached Eve's hotel the sky had broken, but we managed to squeeze together under the hotel awnings.

'Well, my dear, this is goodbye, we have to get up early tomorrow.'

I hugged this small wiry Jewess, this survivor, not wanting to let her go.

In the morning my 'family' would be gone and the time had come for me to return home. Home, what a strange word; I wasn't sure where that was any more. All I knew was that Berlin felt comfortable to me now. For all its terrible history seeping out of the ground and into my bones, it was still my mother's birthplace and part of me.

Instead of seeing Mum as a pawn of war, I had come to Germany to accuse her of injustice, but now I realised that it was not for me to judge. I had been travelling in circles, wanting to discover reasons for my shame, but in the end all I had found was a terrible sadness. The time had come to leave it all behind. I sat on my bed stuffing underwear and socks into my suitcase. Then I did a reconnoitre of my drawers and discovered my carefully folded green T shirt with the words 'I Love Berlin' standing out boldly on the front with no place to hide. I had bought it on a whim during one of my wondering days. It was in the window of a rather dejected shop, but I was experiencing one of my up moods and decided to flaunt my newly discovered national pride. This shirt would tell the world that I no longer felt apologetic for being German. In fact, I loved Berlin! But when I got back to the

apartment I slipped the shirt into my bedroom drawer and there it had stayed. I was too embarrassed to wear it. Had anything really changed?

I spent the rest of the day vigorously scouring the bath; trying to escape the demons of doubt by doing just what my mother had done when faced with uncertainty - clean. I was disturbed by a knock on the door:

'Ah Barbara, I can see that you are getting ready to leave Hektor Strasse. Home beckons.'

Manfred hearty frame beamed with a joy I could not feel.

'When you come back to Berlin you must have some fun, forget about the war and your mother. There is so much more to this country than misery.'

Next time. Would it be possible to try again, put aside my anxiety and embrace modern Germany? I thanked Manfred for his help, for acting as interpreter, messenger and friend. His smiling face had always been welcome. My bus to Tegel airport was leaving early in the morning so this was our chance to say goodbye. We promised to keep in touch, but, when I arrived home, I imagined my life closing over this visit the way skin covers a cut.

That night I slept on a bare mattress, covering my body with a rug. I had washed the sheets in preparation for Margarete's return, but the bed prickled and I was restless, worrying that I might sleep in and miss the plane. Eventually I got up and scoured the bookshelves; of course most titles were in German, but I found one English book to keep me company during the night. It did not guarantee a restful night, but I could always sleep on the plane. I went back to bed with my inevitable cup of warm milk and Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man.*

All through the night I read about Levi's descent into the hell we have come to know as Auschwitz. I listened to his pain, his devastation, and the very loss of himself:

‘Then for the first time we become aware that our language lacks words to express this offence, the demolition of a man.’

The Germans took everything until Levi became a bundle of rags. Now the same hands that had stolen Levi’s humanity questioned my decision to suspend judgement. Over the last four weeks I had begun to believe that my shame had been misplaced and unnecessary. The past was the past. But how could anyone have done this? Easy answers about Bosnia and Rwanda fell away in the face of Levi’s anguish. As I lay on my scratchy mattress I recalled the memorials to Jewish suffering that had been my travelling companions for the last four weeks. I returned to Sachsenhausen, to the Jewish barracks; I stood between the cold grey blocks of the Holocaust memorial in the heart of Berlin; I stared at the golden stones that recorded the Jews of Hektor Strasse. And finally I walked amongst the spirits of Grunewald station, platform seventeen, and waited with them for the train that would take them to their unknown.

And in my mind I argued the case for the suffering of the German people, the invasion of the Russians, the lack of food, persuasive Nazi propaganda, and attempts to rescue—but the magnitude of Jewish suffering won. Early morning light made its way through the red curtains. It was time to catch the bus to the airport and leave this city behind, but who was I kidding? My German shame was portable, ready to be unwrapped at a moment’s notice, willing to accuse me, a member of this country’s second-generation, of complicit behaviour. And the belief that my Mum had not been a perpetrator did little to diminish my guilt.

I had come here to question my mother about her wartime activities, to rid myself of Mishka’s ghosts; but instead of finding shame I’d uncovered sorrow. But my discovery didn’t mean that Germans were innocent. It was all getting too complicated – my head was wound up in knots of uncertainty. All I knew was that I

could no longer blame Mum for the anxiety I carried. The war was over and it was time for this gloom to recede.

I put Primo Levi's book back on Margarete's shelves and closed the door. Through the early morning cold I dragged my wobbly case across the Charlottenberg pavements, one bump at a time. I had only a few moments before the airport bus whipped me away.

Epilogue

I sit in the kitchen looking at the photograph of my mother. If my trip to Berlin has meant anything at all then I must go back into the hallway and dismantle my Christmas shrine. Why would I give my daughter the task of keeping the family flame alive? It hadn't done me any good. My mother's past is my present, but I do not want it to become Zoë's future. I leave my cold tea on the kitchen table and walk back to the hallway to extinguish the candles. Their faces darken as I blow out the flames. If they are pleading with me to keep them in the light I resist. Picking up the photographs, I put them in an empty drawer in the bedroom cupboard, but I can't bring myself to close it. I leave a gap, just wide enough for them to hear our voices. From there they can still smell the turkey, and tonight I will play them Stille Nacht, just in case.

All my life I have tried to get closer to Mum, doing anything to feel the warmth of her smile; I even adopted her pain and made it my own, thinking it would create a shared sense of suffering, but my mother avoided such entanglements. Now I realise that she probably wanted to protect me from the outrage of her past, hoping that I would live my life forwards. Was this the reason for her silence? I had always interpreted her reluctance as a mixture of shame and sadness, but maybe it was parental restraint, guarding me against her unhappiness and her tortured view of a world at war. Her life had been hard; surely she deserves a little quiet now. I walk back to the half-closed drawer and gently shut it.

From the darkness I could hear her say:

'Thank you.'

Introduction to Exegesis

My thesis project began when I met a Jewish man whose family had died in a Nazi concentration camp. As I listened to his story I encountered inexplicable feelings of shame that threatened to overwhelm me. My mother had lived in Germany during WWII, so anxiety about my heritage had always been part of my life. After this chance meeting, I recognised that the time had come to reconcile with my disturbing past. Accordingly, my thesis has become a pilgrimage of understanding and forgiveness as I choose to make peace with my inheritance of shame. Of course, once I started reading and researching for my project, I discovered that there are many Germans who are consumed with shame about the past, even though the majority of people living in Germany today were not involved in the atrocities of WWII. Maybe their burden is actually guilt by association, because it was their parents and grandparents who had been implicated in the attempted genocide of the Jewish race. Nevertheless, it is the second-generation Germans who must deal with a guilt that is not rightfully theirs but continues to haunt them nonetheless.

It is because I belong to this 'guilty' second generation that I feel humiliated by my Aryan legacy. Whenever I watch movies or hear stories about the attempted obliteration of the Jews, I feel implicated, as if I was one of the perpetrators. The need to apologise has marked my life, and, as I stand in the shadow of my German mother, I want to know why.

My need to understand the past has encouraged me to imaginatively create my mother's fictitious wartime diaries and respond to them from the vantage point of a second-generation witness who attempts to comprehend the choices my mother made while living within Hitler's Nazi regime. From this, I will construct a combination biographical and fictional account of my mother's life. My mother's imagined diary will span the period just before the War to the time of the Russian

invasion in 1945. And, as I 'read' her Berlin diary, I will respond from present day Germany, as I undertake a journey of understanding and mourning for my mother's sadness. By doing this, I hope to highlight the way in which her struggles have affected me, and in some cases, have become my inherited 'memory'.

In reality, my memory was not shaped by my mother's diary. She did not keep a journal; however, she did bequeath me a trunk full of photographs. These black and white faces speak to me of lives marked by war and loss, and I am left to imagine their stories; if only they could speak. Their brooding faces serve to stimulate my imagination and so provide another resource for my work.

During my project I search constantly for information about war-time Germany because my ability to recall my mother's stories is patchy and full of holes, but in order to deal with my legacy of shame I need to retrieve these vague reminiscences. My recollections are also incomplete because my mother told me so little about her war-time experiences; therefore, in order for me to be able to construct a story that will help me to heal my burden of shame, I must first fill in the gaps of my mother's account. By creatively filling in her silences to form a whole and complete story, I hope to understand the legacy my mother bequeathed to me. For too long I have lived under the shadow cast by the Germans of WWII. I believe that it is only through creatively imagining my mother's story, and responding to it as her daughter and a witness to her pain, that I will finally be able to dispel the shadow of guilt.

Because my project is an attempt to relinquish my unwanted inheritance, I will construct an ongoing conversation with the spirit of my dead mother, to ask her why she could not do more to save the Jews of Berlin or stop the war. In reality, these conversations were unlikely ever to have taken place; my mother did not share her innermost feelings with me; they stayed in the repressed gloominess of her war-

torn memories. Therefore, in the absence of real conversations with my mother, I must project my memory of her on to our fictionalised conversations. To do this I will imagine I am my mother, living in Berlin during WWII. How would I have responded to Hitler's ranting or the constant bombing of my home town? As I use imagination and empathy to understand my mother's life, I anticipate it will be as though we are working together to explore what it means to be German, then and now. She has furnished me with a skeleton of events, but I, through the process of empathic imagination, will supply the emotion that she chose to repress for many years. In this way we will travel to the past together, two lives becoming one.

In pursuit of personal understanding, I will also interview both first and second-generation Germans. The information I glean from these discussions will afford me a unique insight into their difficult pasts. At the same time, I need to question the ethics of this pursuit; what right do I have to stir up past memories when many people have chosen silence? In spite of this, I wonder how long can a traumatised people avoid or conceal their past. I acknowledge that many Germans, including victims, perpetrators and bystanders, simply want to forget; they have had their fill of memories and nightmares. Nevertheless, Dori Laub, a psychologist who listens to the painful memories of Holocaust survivors believes that: 'the "not telling" of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny.'[1] With these words in mind, I enter this project believing that my ethically constructed questions may be of benefit to people who habitually suppress their stories. Laub believes that in a setting which includes a caring and sympathetic listener, the traumatised person may be able to gain mastery over their narrative, and go on to see themselves as survivors.

My creative project will be a blend of biography, autobiography, fiction and history because I believe that it is this combination that will allow me to fully explore

[1] Shoshana Felman & Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (Routledge, NY, 1992), p. 79

my disturbing inheritance. My hybrid writing style will also contain a conscious shaping of my mother's past; nevertheless, I believe that my construction will be true to her intention. I will shape our story because this is a restorative text, a narrative constructed to help me relinquish my guilt.

Of course, my reconciliation comes at a price, and as I begin researching and writing about this traumatic period of history, I know that I risk being overwhelmed by grief. Reading details of the Holocaust will probably serve to intensify my sense of shame about my German legacy, and thus my anger with my mother may increase. However, I will use my anger as a source of determination to deal with the source of my discomfort—I will no longer push it away simply because it is too painful to explore.

My understanding of this traumatic period in history will be complemented by interviewing people who were alive during WWII, as well as talking to second-generation Germans like myself. These interviews with family and friends will afford me further insight into my mother's generation, as well as contributing to my understanding of German second-hand shame. However, the major source of my understanding will come from my journey to Berlin. This undertaking will enable me to see my mother's home, and visit the local Friedrichschain museum to view photos of the wasteland that Berlin became after Allied bombing. I wonder whether these activities will serve to increase my sense of empathy for my mother—how did she cope in such turbulent times.

This anticipated wide array of information, gleaned from my travels and my research, will assist me to create my mother's life and explore my response to it as someone who still feels implicated in the events of the past. But, ultimately, I must

rely on my own ever-shifting memories; the scant offerings to a child who was trying to understand her rather sad, stern mother and the world she left behind.

My mother was born in 1923, a time of severe financial crisis in Germany, and grew up in Berlin during WWII. Many of the family's friends were Jewish. She, along with my grandmother, hid some of these friends after Kristallnacht (The Night of the Broken Glass, which took place on November 9-10, 1938) so they could escape to England on the Kindertransport. Later, personal survival became my own family's main focus, especially because my mother was not allowed to join Hitler Youth or utter 'Sieg Heil'. Finally, the war came to an end, but this subsequently heralded the Allied invasion of Germany when the Russians 'liberated' Berlin. Many women were raped during this time as a way of making people pay for their country's war crimes[2]. In 1949, at the behest of my anxious grandmother, my mother left war-torn Germany and moved to England, but the shadow of Germany's regime continued to haunt her.

In my exegesis I will examine how I have adopted my mother's pain and made it my own. As a result of this questioning my critical response will investigate issues of inherited memory, as a way of understanding my burden of second-generation humiliation. During the early stages of my investigation I have been encouraged by literary theorists who believe that creative projects can act as a vehicle for managing this unwanted legacy of humiliation, thus liberating people from their painful pasts. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in particular consider that engaging in the act of autobiography can assist people to deal with overwhelming feelings:

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[2] Anthony Beevor, *Berlin: the Downfall*, (Penguin Books, London, England, 2003), p. 410.
The author states that 'estimates of rape victims from the city's (Berlin) main hospitals ranged from 95, 000 to 130,000.'

> For those suffering from traumatic or obsessional memories, autobiographical acts can work as therapeutic interventions… speaking or writing about trauma becomes a process through which the narrator finds words to give voice to what was previously unspeakable. And that process can be cathartic.[3]

Their belief is corroborated by Rosamund Dalziell who acknowledges that, 'the autobiographical act (can be) … a linguistic expression of therapeutic renewal for the narrating self'.[4] James Pennebaker has also investigated the therapeutic effect of writing, and suggests that this is a method for dealing with painful events can make them more manageable. Pennebaker states that, 'Good narratives or stories … organise seemingly infinite facets of overwhelming events. Once organised the events are often smaller and easier to deal with.'[5] Michael White's theory of narrative therapy, as expounded by Alan Carr[6], also discusses the importance of externalising interior problems or beliefs. The construction of a story moves the internal concern to the outside. This process separates the anxiety from the person experiencing it – thus making it more manageable.

As well as exploring the therapeutic nature of autobiography, my critical response to my creative narrative will also be devised to enable the reader to situate my story within the wider historical and cultural perspective of post-war shame. With this in mind, I will show how this legacy of humiliation stems from Germany's involvement in WWII. This war was a defining time in world history, because it was during this period that six million Jews were murdered, the cities of Europe devastated, and an entire generation shaped by the atrocities of battle. Consequently,

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[3] Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narrative* (University of Minneapolis Press, Minneapolis 2001), p. 22

[4] Rosamund Dalziell, *Shameful Autobiographies: Shame in Contemporary Australia Autobiographies and Culture* (Melbourne University Press, 1999), p. 242

[5] James Pennebaker, *Opening Up: the Healing Power of Ex otions* (Guildford Press, NY), p. 103

[6] Alan Carr, 'Michael White's Narrative Therapy' in *Contemporary Family Therapy*, Vol. 20 No. 4 (2004), 485-503 (p. 7)

regardless of the true facts, many people lay the blame for this tragedy at the feet of the German people as a whole. The Nazi desire for domination of Europe and the extermination of the Jews are the hallmarks of this time and, as the brutality of Nazi concentration camps were laid bare to the astonished world; the German people were marked as inhumane, evil and beyond redemption.

My exegesis will then comment on Germany's gradual change in attitude as many individuals converted their private blemish into public shame. It will also observe how this shame was reinforced by a national acknowledgement of guilt. This consideration will be complemented by recognising the role played by media, art and literature in fashioning the stereotypical image of the evil German. These images contributed substantially to feelings of guilt, which resulted in many post-war Germans apologising for their parents' wartime behavior, and acknowledging a deep sense of regret for the terrible acts committed before they were born. Even though the next generation were not accountable for their parents' crimes, many people still felt contaminated and believed that the post-war generation should somehow accept responsibility for their past. This sense of accountability became, for many, an unbearable burden. Consequently, the second-generation sought to understand their past and look for redemption through various acts of contrition. Yet no matter how much these younger Germans tried to appease their shame, many members of the second generation have been left with the pain of inherited guilt.

How can individuals manage such an inheritance? I attempt to answer this by exploring how members of a traumatised second generation can deal with their individual unwanted legacies. This project will observe that many children of Holocaust survivors have turned to writing as a way of trying to understand their transmitted pain. For them, imaginatively recreating their parents' memories has been a way of reaching into the past to comprehend the aftermath of genocide, a

spectre which continues to affect them today. In some cases this creative process has led writers to adopt their parents' persona as a way of understanding the family's influence on their identities. The second-generation writer achieves this through the practice of creative biography, ultimately becoming the main character within the narrative. In this style of writing the author becomes both the traumatised parent and the burdened child, thus enabling the creator to understand what it might have been like to live during another time and, through empathy, discover the reasons for their parents' behaviour.

Nevertheless, while choosing this style of writing, I question the ethics of adopting my mother's voice for my own benefit. Will the healing I, hopefully, gain merit this act of ventriloquism? Morally, where do I stand in my pursuit of understanding; where does her truth end and my fiction begin? In pursuit of recovery, second-generation writers, when entering their parents' experience through the portals of imagination, empathy and historical reading, hope that they may experience the potent combination of identification, understanding and possible forgiveness, both for their parents and themselves.

The search for understanding and forgiveness is usually a personal struggle; however, there are many external signs in Germany that demonstrate the nation's concern and distress over their difficult heritage. This preoccupation with the country's disgraceful past has led to a proliferation of memorials and museums, each one attempting to commemorate the nation's wartime disgrace. Streets are marked with plaques, which memorialise the many dishonourable incidents that occurred during the war, and museums dedicated to the Holocaust are a favourite spot for Sunday outings. Meanwhile, many tourists travel across the globe to view former concentration camps as part of their holiday itinerary. In view of this, my exegesis will discuss this growth in Holocaust remembrance, and debate whether it serves to

increase Germany's sense of shame, or whether these state-sponsored creative projects may act as a vehicle for national healing.

Exegesis Outline:

Chapter One

I want to know why I am ashamed of my German heritage; correspondingly, this chapter examines theories of shame, trauma and memory in order to understand why this difficult legacy still causes problems for people not directly involved in the atrocities of World War II. What is second-generation shame, where does it come from, and what are its consequences?

This chapter will discuss the nature of shame, a powerful and painful emotion that is strongly linked to our sense of identity. I explore how shame is passed on to the next generation by examining the intricate journey that messages make from their point of origin to the receiver. To enhance my understanding of trauma transmission, this chapter will examine how Holocaust survivors have passed their anguish on to their children. This understanding will be augmented by discovering how my story fits into the milieu of post-war fiction and life writing.

Chapter Two

Whether our parents' suffering was spoken or hidden, we of the second generation have gradually become aware of our parents' pain and adopted it as our own. Chapter Two will examine this process as the background to writing my mother's and my own story, a narrative that deals with the transmission of shame and trauma from one generation to another. Initially, I will discuss how I constructed a narrative out of my mother's silence, using imagination to fill in the gaps, to eventually create a story that deals with my inherited shame.

While reviewing my past, I fall into the 'blaming mother' trap, and assume that her wartime difficulties are the reason for my problems. I then move from blaming to over-identification and empathy, and consequently look at Marianne Hirsch's concept of 'post-memory',[7] which has been coined to describe the second generation's involvement with their parents' stories.

I also explore whether or not it is ethical to appropriate my mother's voice for my own healing, by examining the work of theorists who suggest that the road to understanding shame is via the path of creativity. And, finally, I discuss the nature of my writing—a hybrid text that marries fiction, history, travel writing and interviews to create a complete and balanced narrative, one that is true to my mother and me.

Chapter Three

To many, reconciliation with such an overwhelming catastrophe as the Holocaust must seem unattainable. However, this chapter will begin by discussing the possibility of healing from such trauma, by considering the option of creative writing as a vehicle for releasing people from the burden of traumatic memory.

I will then go on to examine how the process of autobiographical writing can give shape to disparate incidences by creating a complete narrative. This style of writing can give shape to one's humiliation and enable it to become a more manageable part of a person's life. One way of assisting people to view themselves as separate from their problems is by engaging imaginatively with their internal beliefs and expressing them in an outward form. This chapter will examine the work of therapeutic writing theorists who believe as stories are told they become separate from their creator. Once separated, the outward form of the idea allows for different

[7] Marianne Hirsch, 'Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy' in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. by Mieke Bal et. al (Hanover University Press, New England, 1999), p. 8

interpretations to occur, thus enabling a new understanding of the original internal narrative.

As part of my reconciliation with the past, I have chosen to face my internalised feelings of shame and expose them. I have never really faced them before, but now I will bring them into the light. However, given the destruction caused by the Holocaust many may still wonder whether it is right for a person of my heritage to look for healing. These people fear that if modern Germans cease to remember their past, the conditions that led to the Holocaust could rise again. But most creators of Holocaust stories do not forget or trivialise that tragedy. This chapter will acknowledge that many individuals are undertaking the act of incorporating their memories of the past into their present as a way of managing the long shadow of the Shoah. I then go on to discuss recent representations of Germany's wartime past, which have been created by post-war authors. They often include the authors' own childhood memories, rather than being anchored in traditional and/or historical aspects of cultural and national memory. This intuitive healing practice has been achieved through re-imagining the past. However, these creations have ignited debates—whose story is it and where are the facts? When a person imaginatively recreates the past, it is possible for them to re-author their story and subsequently alter the narrative that has caused them so much heartache.

If this is the case, then, just as creative projects may liberate individuals from a painful past; it may also be possible that engaging in creativity on a state level could release a nation from the shackles of traumatic memory. This chapter will end with an examination of state-sponsored creative acts that are designed to promote the country's understanding of its past. The chapter then discusses whether it is possible for institutions such as museums to act as catalysts for national healing by dealing with the past in a symbolic and artistic way.

Chapter One – the getting of shame

I am sitting on the couch with my daughter, reluctantly watching Spielberg's *Schindler's List.* The hype that surrounds this film prepares me to be humiliated – once again. There, in black and white, sits the camp commandant Amon Goeth, shooting Jews for his morning entertainment. This cruel man is a German – he was alive at the same time as my mother, and this realisation makes me wonder if the injustice that made Auschwitz could possibly have trickled down to reside in me. I live far away from the scene of that horrendous crime, but I have fashioned my life in opposition to my German heritage. I stand alongside asylum seekers as they search for a home in this 'wide brown land'; I march down the streets of Adelaide, calling out to passers-by, asking them to recognise indigenous issues and give the original inhabitants of this land a fair go. I am known as a soft touch, a bleeding heart. So, how can I reconcile my identity with the knowledge that I am a second-generation German, linked by familial ties to perhaps the greatest crime in history? Where are my liberal values now?

* * *

These questions and uncertainties have encouraged me to embark on a pilgrimage of understanding; I want to know why I am ashamed of my German heritage – how has this shame shaped my life? Correspondingly, this chapter will examine theories of shame, trauma and cultural memory in order to understand why this difficult legacy still causes problems for people not directly involved in the atrocities of World War II.

My sense of humiliation about my German identity is a difficult burden to manage as I seek to understand why I feel ashamed about a past over which I have no control. Yet no matter how hard I try to comprehend my legacy, I am still confused by my inherited guilt. Australian cultural historian, Rosamund Dalziell, talks about the distress caused by feelings of shame:

> Shame is the most crippling of emotions. Guilt tells us that what we have *done* is wrong. Shame tells us that we are *wrong*; that our entire being is defective, that *there is no health in us* (italics in text).[8]

As Dalziell acknowledges, shame can be traumatic, and this is the emotion experienced by many post-war Germans who are concerned that they are associated with the perpetrators of WWII, and that therefore within them lies the possibility of creating another war. This ongoing psychological pressure is difficult to speak about for most second-generation Germans, particularly when many people's sympathies understandably lie with the victims of the Holocaust.

The psychological pressure created by shame suggests that it is a powerful and painful emotion that is strongly linked to our sense of identity. In a recent interview with a second-generation German woman, now living in Australia, I understood, once more, how traumatic shame can be. On a trip to Melbourne, her friends suggested that she visit the Holocaust Museum. She was not prepared for her response, because she rarely thought about the past. As she viewed the exhibition, unexpected tears came streaming down her face. Just before leaving, she went up to the museum reception desk where a group of elderly Holocaust survivors were acting as voluntary guides. This woman stood in front of them and apologised for being

[8]Rosamund Dalziell, *Shameful Autobiographies: Shame in Contemporary Australian* (Melbourne University Press, 1999), p. 253.

German.[9] Eve Kofsky and Adam Frank, in their exploration of shame, underline this woman's experience – they also consider that humiliation is a difficult burden to bear:

> Shame is felt as an inner torment, a sickness of the soul. It does not matter whether the humiliated one has been shamed by derisive laughter or whether he mocks himself. In either event he feels himself naked, defeated, alienated, lacking in dignity or worth.[10]

Kofsky and Frank acknowledge the torment created by feelings of humiliation, and the effect that these emotions can have on one's identity. This belief is extended further by Michael Lewis, a developmental and clinical psychologist who has conducted further studies on shame and discovered that people feel mortification when their negative actions have been exposed, or when they evaluate their own behaviour and find it wanting:

> Shame can be defined simply as the feeling we have when we evaluate our actions, feelings or behaviour, and conclude that we have done wrong. It encompasses the whole of ourselves; it generates a wish to hide, to disappear, or even to die.[11]

Consequently, as Lewis suggests, when the shamed person has been exposed, he or she may experience ridicule and a reduction in public esteem – the person's pride has been wounded to the extent that they want to vanish. However, for those born after the event, such as second-generation Germans, this emotional response seems out of place, given that they were not the original perpetrators of the crime.

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[9] Interview with author, May 2011

[10] Eve Kofsky & Adam Frank, eds. *Shame and its Sisters*, (Duke University Press, Durham, 1995), p.133.

[11] Michael Lewis, *Shame: the Exposed Self* (Free Press, NY, 1992), p. 3.

How can such powerful emotions be felt by people not involved in the initial event? My exploration of inherited shame will be supported by determining how adopted emotion is formed. This will be achieved by referring to the cultural story that surrounds WWII, and the impact this has had on individuals. I will explore how my story fits into the milieu of post-war fiction and life writing by examining some of the cultural representations of the Holocaust that have played a major role in transmitting shame to subsequent generations. Cultural theorist and critic Mieke Bal believes that: 'Cultural memory can be located in literary texts because the(y)… are continuous with the communal, fictionalization, idealising, monumentalising impulses thriving in a conflicted culture.'[12] As Bal suggests, some texts may act like symbols for a significant event because they are able to refine, question and in some cases fictionalise times of personal and societal devastation. Consequently, as I examine these texts, my knowledge of the events that have caused me such disgrace increases. It is widely acknowledged that World War II was a catastrophic turning point in history, but it was the deliberate attempt by the Nazis to annihilate the Jews of Europe that became the overwhelming point of reference for that period. The deaths of six million Jewish people cast a long pall, and this shadow has been represented by countless stories, which attempt to understand the nature of genocide. This literary exploration, which has continued into the twenty first century, is testament to the fact that the spectre of war continues to affect countless lives. Holocaust survivors and their children have vigorously explored their anguish, creating a body of knowledge about trauma and its transmission to the following generation. I admit that I rely heavily on their findings, though some may question the ethics of using Jewish experiences to assist post-war Germans. However, it seems as though the German-Jewish connection is a complicated knot that is difficult to

[12] Mieke Bal, Jonathon Crewe & Leo Spitzer (eds.), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present,* (Hanover University Press, New England, 1999), p. xiii.

undo. Sara Horowitz, director of the Centre for Jewish Studies at York University, acknowledges this entanglement:

> Metaphorically, German history and the history of Jewish suffering is inextricably connected, as are the identities of second-generation (and third) Jewish 'survivors' and German people more broadly.[13]

As Horowitz suggests, victims and perpetrators of the Holocaust are inter-connected, their identities being shaped by their relationship to each other. Her assertion about the Jewish-German connection encourages me to explore the accumulated wisdom of the Jewish post-war generations in order to understand how German shame is transmitted.

Post-war Holocaust survivors have gained significant insight into the nature of second-generation memory by vigorously exploring their traumatic inheritance. This perception is reflected in Holocaust scholar, Shoshana Felman's belief that WWII is:

> A history which is essentially *not over,* a history whose repercussions are not simply omnipresent (whether consciously or not) in all our cultural activities, but whose traumatic consequences are still actively evolving … in today's political, historical, cultural and artistic scene.[14]

According to Felman, the legacy of WWII continues to develop, thereby creating a cultural narrative, within both Jewish and Gentile post-war memory, that is still being explored by writers and film-makers.

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[13] Sara Horowitz, 'Auto/biography and fiction after Auschwitz: Probing the Boundaries of Second-Generation Aesthetics' in *Breaking Crystal: Writing & Memory after Auschwitz,* ed. Efriam Sicher, (University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1998), p. 274.

[14] Shoshana Felman & Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (Routledge, NY, 1992), p. xiv.

Holocaust literature has gone through many phases, but all are grounded within the Jewish imperative to remember, ensuring that the deaths of six million will not be forgotten. However, representing trauma is not simple. How does one describe the attempted annihilation of an entire people? Who can find the words for an act that lies outside our understanding?

Primo Levi, a chemist, writer and Auschwitz survivor, proposes in his book, *If this is a Man,* that people have difficulty finding the words to convey the suffering they experienced in the camps: '...our language lacks words to express this offence, the demolition of a man.'[15] Within this statement, Levi seems to imply that by the same token, the environment of organised annihilation requires a new idiom, a different language, one that is able to convey a place without moral values and beyond human comprehension. Writers have struggled to record this unimaginable place; nevertheless, they have felt compelled to document their experiences, to make sense of their suffering and communicate it.

However, in 1948, after Paul Celan wrote *Todesfugue,* a poem about life in a concentration camp, sociologist Theodor Adorno responded by suggesting that it was 'barbaric' to create art out of such pain.[16] Holocaust scholar, S. Lillian Kremer believes that many post-Holocaust writers were influenced by Adorno's statement:

> Influenced by Adorno's early dictum, the prevailing view of many writers and critics was that language was unable to convey the Nazi world and that it is, perhaps, immoral to attempt to write about the *Shoah* imaginatively.[17]

Reluctance to make art from suffering meant that some early post-war writers remained silent, and refused to engage creatively with the Shoah. Those who broke

[15] Primo Levi, *If this is a Man,* English trans by Stuart Woolf, (Orion Press, England, 1959) p.26.
[16] Theodor Adorno, 'An essay on Cultural Criticism and Society' 1949, trans. into English by Samuel & Sherry Weber for *Prisms,* (MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967).
[17] S. Lillian Kremer (ed.), *Holocaust Literature: Agarin to Lentin, An Encyclopaedia of Writers & their Works* (Routledge, NY, 2003), p. xxiv.

with this reserve decided to write factually about the camps, choosing not to explore the issue imaginatively. Primo Levi's Holocaust memoir, *If this is a Man*, was completed in 1946, but he had difficulty finding a publisher and only a few copies were sold. Over a decade later, in 1957, Levi's book was published once more and this time it received a far wider audience as more Germans were beginning to accept that the Holocaust had occurred. This record of the author's life in Auschwitz is an example of the style of writing that emerged during the early post-war era as authors attempted to construct an accurate portrayal of their suffering by recounting actual events through the media of diaries and memoirs.

This initial reluctance to explore the Holocaust from a creative point of view goes hand in hand with the silence of the German people. After the war many Germans focused their energies on rebuilding their shattered country, dealing with Allied occupation and putting their shame behind them. The German writer WG Sebald discusses his country's reluctance to speak about the past. He suggests that the 'unparalleled national humiliation felt by millions in the last years of the war never really found verbal expression.'[18] Germans had trouble finding words that encapsulated their war-time experiences; their reticence was partly based on feelings of humiliation, but was compounded by the trauma experienced during their defeat. Instead, they chose to focus their energies on rebuilding their devastated cities, rather than look back to their country's time of disgrace.

However, there were a few instances when German writers broke their self-imposed silence to explore the effect of war on their country. Heinrich Böll wrote *The Angel was Silent* in 1952, but it was considered so bleak it was not published until 1992.[19] Another German writer who explored the effect of the Nazi regime on ordinary Germans was Hans Fallada. *Alone in Berlin* is based on a true story of a

[18] W.G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, trans. by Anthea Bell (Hamish Hamilton, UK, 2003), p. Viii
[19] Sebald, p.10

couple who leave postcards around Berlin urging people to resist the Nazi Party. Fallada's book highlights the fear people lived with on a daily basis.[20] *A Woman in Berlin* is another book written just after the war. It gives an intimate account of the sacking of Berlin by the Russians. This personal record was written by a woman who experienced many instances of rape. She eventually realised that the only way to keep herself safe was to become the mistress of a Russian soldier. The author of *A Woman in Berlin* was roundly condemned for slandering German women's honour. The book was consequently published anonymously in 1954 in England, and five years later in Germany[21].

In spite of ordinary Germans being forced to live through such terrible times, it has generally been considered problematic to portray Germans as victims. Nevertheless, when I interviewed older Germans for this project and asked them about their war experiences, I discovered that many of them indeed saw themselves as victims of Hitler's campaign. They assured me that they had not known the extent of Jewish suffering because they were consumed with their own survival; consequently, they did not feel responsible for their country's crimes. This concept is highlighted by historian Michael Balfour when he discusses the way many Germans viewed their involvement with the Nazi government:

> The term 'collective responsibility' was deliberately chosen as indicating that, although all German adults must be regarded as having contributed to the history of their country, many of them did not recognise or foresee the consequences of their actions while others tried to make that history take a different course but were unsuccessful. They should not therefore all be regarded as morally blameworthy, although they must expect to have to share in the present and future consequences of their country's past.[22]

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[20] Fallada, Hans, *Alone in Berlin*, trans. by Michael Hoffmann (London: Penguin, 2009, first published in 1947)
[21] Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin*, trans. by James Stern (Secker & Warburg, 1955)
[22] Michael Balfour, *Withstanding Hitler in Germany, 1933-45*, (Routledge,London & NY,1988) p262.

Balfour believes that not all war-time Germans should be considered guilty; certainly it is true that the perpetrator label does not sit always easily with them. Many believed that because of their personal suffering they should be afforded the label of victim along with those who died as a direct consequence of the Holocaust. This belief stands in direct contrast to many younger Germans' conviction that their parents were guilty, and in many cases had gone unpunished.[23] But for those caught up in WWII, is a sense of victimhood an unreasonable view?

At the end of the war, many Germans had lost everything: their homes were obliterated, and their husbands and sons had been killed on the Russian front. Then the Allies discovered the piteous truth of the concentration camps and wanted to make the German people pay as a result. Finally, when it was all over, their country was divided like spoils in a card game.

Though few would argue that it was understandable for Germany's enemies to seek revenge, the havoc and suffering caused by the incoming troops makes the Germans' belief that they were also victims seem plausible. In the early days of the Allied victory, women were a particular target. Another historian, Anthony Beevor, focuses predominantly on the Russians' desire for vengeance:

> Berliners remember that, because all the windows had been blown in, you could hear the screams every night. Estimates from the two main Berlin hospitals ranged from 95 000 to 130 000 rape victims… Altogether, at least 2 million German women were thought to have been raped, and a substantial minority, if not a majority, appear to have suffered multiple rape.[24]

[23] See Appendix, page 211
[24] Anthony Beevor, *Berlin: The Downfall, 1945* (Penguin Books, London, 2003), p. 410.

My mother never admitted to being raped, always reassuring me that she had managed to avoid it. But the possibility is there, a secret perhaps too devastating to share. However, if she avoided being attacked, she was surely threatened, and a witness to the rape of women around her.

Still, no matter how much the German people endured during the war, the post war-generation – and indeed the rest of the world – were convinced that the Germans as a whole had been perpetrators and should pay for their crimes. Of course, in comparison to the Holocaust, German suffering was insignificant. Nevertheless, many traumatised Germans were unable to ask for help because of their humiliation. In spite of Germany's own war-time anguish, many Germans believed that they deserved the bombing meted out by the Allies at the end of WWII. Sebald emphasises this conviction, by saying 'quite a number of those affected by the air raids ... regarded the great firestorms as a just punishment.'[25] The German people's acceptance of Allied revenge reinforced their function as perpetrators, and this assisted in creating an identity of German shame. It was this belief that was transmitted to those who were born after the war.

For second-generation Jews, the war cast a more profound shadow, as they developed symptoms of stress that were linked to their parents' suffering. The extreme trauma experienced by Holocaust survivors had been unwittingly passed onto the next generation, and many younger Jews struggled under this burden. Marianne Hirsch, an academic interested in cultural and personal memory, describes this second-generation legacy as a 'post memory', a type of remembering based on imagination, because the truth is either too awful to comprehend or not readily available.[26] As a way of dealing with their unwanted legacy many second-generation

[25] Sebald, p. 15.
[26] Marianne Hirsch & Leo Spitzer, 'War Stories: Witnessing in Retrospect' in *Image & Remembrance: Representations and the Holocaust*, eds. S. Hornstein & F. Jacobowitz (Indiana University Press, 2012), p. 139.

Jews began to write imaginatively about their family's past. This is exemplified in Art Spiegelman's *Maus,* a graphic novel that portrays the story of the Shoah. Spiegelman represents the Jews visually as helpless mice and the Nazis as predatory cats. Woven throughout the original story of life in the camps is the author's reflection on his own, post-war life, and how the Holocaust became a living presence within the Spiegelman household.

However, some Holocaust literary critics have found these second-generation texts disturbing. They are concerned that children of Holocaust survivors are appropriating their parents' suffering for their own purposes. This anxiety is clearly expressed by American literary scholar, Victoria Elmwood:

> The danger of trivialising the effects of trauma is of primary concern here. If the line between the traumatised and those affected by their traumas is blurred, we risk reducing the significance of the truly life-and mind- threatening borderline experiences that we designate as 'traumatic'.[27]

Here, Elmwood suggests that it is vital to keep the initial trauma separate from its after-life, lest second-generation 'memories' subsume the first person witness of the Holocaust and thus engender a type of forgetting. However, in spite of Elmwood's warning, the second-generation of Holocaust survivors have not felt as constrained as their parents in telling their stories of trauma. Whereas first-generation survivors and writers of the Holocaust have been extremely careful to portray events as accurately as possible, the following generation have employed a variety of imaginative modalities to explore their past, and the various ways their parents' history has impacted on them.

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[27] Victoria Elmwood, 'Happy, Happy Ever After: The Transformation of Trauma between the Generations in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*: A Survivor's Tale', *Biography*, 27.4 (Fall 2004), Biological Research Centre (p. 718).

In some cases this has led post-war writers to look for meaning and redemption in the pain and suffering of so many. This is exemplified by Jane Yolen's 1988 novel, *The Devil's Arithmetic.* This book later became a film, and tells the story of a teenage Jewish girl, who feels overwhelmed by her family's memories of the Holocaust, time-travels back to a concentration camp, where she experiences the suffering that is part of her Jewish legacy. Later, she is transported back to her family's Seder meal with renewed interest and sympathy for the suffering her elderly relatives have endured. The film *The Freedom Writers* is a similarly reflective story, which explores the response a group of troubled teenagers have when reading *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank. Their teacher hopes that Frank's book will inspire her class into changing their anti-social behaviour. They are so taken with Anne's story that they invite Miep Gies, the woman who hid Anne and her family, to come and speak with them. These stories are emblematic of the overwhelming response in the US to Holocaust-related issues.

Jewish suffering has been depicted in films, books and museums that continue to enshrine this event. Each depiction attempts to explain why so many people suffered during the Holocaust, and to give a sense of meaning and redemption to this seemingly inexplicable act. However, Tim Cole, a Holocaust scholar, delivers a warning:

> History is … a complex reality and thus notoriously difficult to draw … simple lessons from. However, at the end of the twentieth century, '*Shoah* business' is quick to draw lessons from this past. And yet the lessons drawn are in reality lessons inspired much more by present needs than understanding of the past. There is a misplaced optimism at present, in the redemptive potential of engaging in this event we call the 'Holocaust' and learning lessons from this past … because the assumption is that

> engaging with this past will make us better citizens.[28]

In spite of Cole's caution, the United States Holocaust Museum encourages visitors to engage in a variety of interactive displays, which will enable them to empathise with the victims of National Socialism. They believe that this empathy will teach them a lesson, and as Cole indicates, make them better citizens. As a result, the Washington Holocaust Museum is now a highlight of America's tourist itinerary and the Holocaust has come to symbolise suffering for many Americans. Not only has the suffering of the Jews been the focal point of many American museums, but it has also been portrayed regularly in television and film.[29] In 1978 NBC showed a mini-series, *Holocaust*, to 120 million American viewers. A year later the same programme was aired on West German television. This broadcast ignited a heated conversation around the country. Alf Ludtke, a German social historian, suggests that for many German viewers, this was the first time they had been faced with the realities of Jewish suffering and they were ashamed:

> On four consecutive evenings West German television showed the U.S. made film *Holocaust* … the networks had prepared the ground … weeks before the actual dates, preparatory broadcasts and press reviews partially outlined the film and its story … viewers were offered open-ended opportunities to phone in and ask questions … Panels of specialists were available…The very scene is memorable … Not just hundreds but thousands of questions almost flooded the personnel who received the calls … thousands of people cried on the phone … voices attempting to express their utter bewilderment and despair in public: How could it have been? How could it happen?[30]

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[28] Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: from Auschwitz to Schindler, how History is Bought, Packaged and Sold* (Routledge, NY, 1999), p. 184.

[29] Anna Douglass & Thomas Vogler, *Witness and Memory: the Discourse of Trauma* (Routledge, NY, 2003), p. 21

[30] Alf Ludtke, 'Coming to Terms with the Past: Illusions of Remembering, Ways of Forgetting Nazism in West Germany' in *Journal of Modern History*, 65.3 (Sept. 1993), 542-572, (p. 543).

Research conducted by the network after the programme's airing revealed the level of shame felt by the audience. Germans openly expressed their outrage and humiliation – the time for silence and repression appeared to be over.

Within this milieu of trauma consumption, books and films about the Nazi past are avidly devoured. One of the most watched films in recent times is Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993). This harrowing film graphically portrays the details of concentration camp life; nevertheless it is eagerly consumed and was awarded seven Oscars. Representations of the Holocaust inexorably require our empathy, but as viewers watched each gruesome detail of the victims' experiences, one might question whether they are engaging in this tragedy from an empathic impulse or if their approach is purely voyeuristic. However, in the twenty-first century, voyeurism may have stemmed from 'compassion fatigue' as people are no longer able to respond with heart-felt emotion to continuous representations of trauma.[31]

In Germany, compassion fatigue in response to the Holocaust seems inevitable. As the country continues to examine its Nazi past through literature, film and architecture, many third-generation citizens no longer want to accept their identity of national shame, passed down to them through various cultural representations and family memories. Now, a united Germany has begun to see a tentative growth in everyday narratives, which tell the stories of ordinary Germans, living through the war. People feel more able to discuss their Hitler Youth membership, or how they suffered the days and nights of Allied bombing. These personal narratives stand alongside the hegemonic national discourse of shame and regret. Unfortunately, some see them as problematic because of the potential to

[31] Susan David Bernstein, 'Promiscuous Reading: the Problem of Identification and *Anne Frank's Diary*' in *Witnessing the Disaster: Essays on Representation and the Holocaust,* eds. Michael Bernard-Donals & Richard Glezjer (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 2003), p. 149.

portray Germans as victims, and this is an unpopular concept when held up against the story of Jewish genocide. Historian Bill Niven discusses this difficulty:

> Equally depressing is the thought that the current explosion of memory of German victimhood in the public realm might represent the triumph of private over the public, of emotion over enlightenment, and of uncritical empathy over pedagogy. In the past, how the memory of German suffering was remembered (or not) was determined by politics, now perhaps, how it is remembered is determined by an invasion of the public realm by the private memory.[32]

Niven's belief that the public realm has been invaded by private memory is well represented in Günter Grass's controversial book, *Peeling the Onion*, published in 2006. Grass, a Nobel Prize winning author, had in the past berated the German people for denying their collective guilt. In *Peeling the Onion* he confesses that he enlisted in the Waffen SS shortly before the end of the war – a fact he had hidden for most of his life. In his latest book he describes the end of the war, as he, along with many others, fled from the liberators. He remembers corpses swinging from lamp posts – a cruel fate for deserters – as he was surrounded by the fantastical landscape of a shelled and blazing city. He has defended himself to critics by saying that he never fired a shot during the war. Nevertheless, 'there were demands that Grass be stripped of his Nobel Prize. Lech Walesa, the other great son of Danzig/Gdansk called for Grass's honorary citizenship to be revoked.'[33] Regardless, Grass's memories are a useful example of how personal stories can invade the public realm as previously described by Niven.[34] He is concerned that the stories of trauma experienced by post-war Germans may overcome the political pedagogy of a contrite

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[32] Bill Niven, ed., *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany* (Palgrave MacMillan, Hampshire, 2006), p. 20.
[33] Tim Garden, 'Peeling the Onion: Confessions of a Super Grass', in *The Observer*, 24 June, 2007, as cited in <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/jun/24/biography/guntergrass.htm> [accessed 4 July 2008].
[34] Niven, p. 20.

Germany. However, *Peeling the Onion* may well be an example of the German literature of the future, as people decide to honestly explore their past, believing they are free from the mores of suppression and guilt that has plagued post-war Germany for so long.

Today, it seems possible to give a more complete picture as stories of the German perpetrators, onlookers and victims stand alongside dominant Jewish Holocaust narratives. It is within this current milieu that my own story has been made possible. It is an expression of second-generation witnessing; a story of German shame and suffering, which stands alongside other recent fictional works such as Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader*, and Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*. Zusak's book is a family narrative, which tells the story of Hitler's regime through the eyes of a young German girl. At the end of the book, her home is bombed and her people die. Without doubt, Liesel and her family are victims, both of Hitler's rhetoric and Allied bombing. The time appears to have arrived when German stories of trauma can stand alongside Jewish memory. This recent acceptance of everyday stories encourages me to talk about my mother's life. She was born in Berlin in 1922, and witnessed Hitler's rise to power and the subsequent atmosphere of madness that his dictatorship engendered. Her story is not outstanding, in that she did not perform any feats of heroism. I imagine that she adopted every stance possible in order to survive: that of onlooker, perpetrator and rescuer. I am left to imagine her experiences of war because she told me very little. However, I have filled the space left open by her silence with various cultural narratives, which all point to the idea of German guilt. Initially, I accepted these narratives without question; my mother was guilty, and if she was guilty, then by association, so was I – simple as that. This acquiescence became part of my identity: a second-generation German filled with

shame. Holocaust scholar Efriam Sicher addresses this burden of second-generation memory:

> The burden of collective and personal memory presses on the children of victims and perpetrators … because of their lack of knowledge, because of their need to imagine the unimaginable and to fill the gaps in national and family history.[35]

As Sicher suggests, my imagination has 'fill[ed] the gaps', thus creating an identity of shame for my mother and myself, but now I want to reconcile with this legacy of shame. My reconciliation, however, cannot begin until I understand how I adopted a shame that does not belong to me. Consequently, I want to examine how stories about the past are transmitted from one generation to another.

The intricate journey that messages take from their point of origin to the receiver makes it impossible to say exactly how second-generation Germans have taken on the responsibility for the crimes of their parents and grandparents. However, it seems likely that personal/family stories have joined with national perceptions of WWII to form a shared cultural 'memory'. This national story, which is a culmination of individual memories, then goes on to inform people's personal beliefs. Thus, a link is created between individual and collective memory, as each one reinforces the other. Hirsch discusses this link when she explores how cultural and second-generation memories are created:

> It is a question of adopting the … memories – of others as one's own … as experiences one might oneself have had, and of inscribing them into one's own life story. It is a question of conceiving oneself as multiply interconnected with others of the same, of previous and, and of subsequent generations.[36]

[35] Sicher, p. 3.
[36] Marianne Hirsch, 'Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy', in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. by Mieke Bal, Jonathon Crewe & Leo Spitzer

Here, Hirsch highlights the way in which another person's memories are adopted as one's own, until it becomes difficult to delineate where one story ends and another begins.

The multitude of ways in which second-generation memories are formed is also illustrated by a Holocaust survivor in *Witnessing the Disaster*:

> This post war generation … cannot remember the Holocaust as it actually occurred. All they remember … is what victims have passed down to them in their diaries, what survivors have remembered to them in their memoirs. They remember not actual events but rather the countless histories, novels and poems of the Holocaust they have read, the photographs, movies and video testimonies they have seen over the years. They remember long days and nights in the company of survivors, listening to their harrowing tales, until their lives, loves and losses seemed grafted onto their own life stories.[37]

Here, the author proposes that second-generation memory is formed by a variety of narratives and expectations, until it is impossible to distinguish them from one's own life narrative. I can attest to the way in which first-generation memories can be grafted onto one's own story. During my younger years I received various ideas about what it meant to be the daughter of a German woman – a mixture of my mother's memories of war, schoolboy teasing, television programmes and classroom history lessons. This combination of information has shaped my understanding of what it means to feel ashamed about a past that in reality does not belong to me.

Because of my interest in the process of memory 'adoption', I recently interviewed a German man now living in Adelaide. His father had belonged to the Wehrmacht during WWII. Throughout this man's childhood, his father was often

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(Hanover University Press, New England, 1999), p. 9.

[37] Michael Bernard-Donals & Richard Glezjer (eds.), *Witnessing the Disaster: Essays on \ Representation and the Holocaust* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 2003), p. 26

away on business, and when his Dad came home his son felt that he was emotionally unavailable. It was only later that he realised his father, because of his reluctance to enlist in the Wehrmacht, had been assigned the lowliest job available. He was given the task of sorting through the bodies of dead soldiers and civilians.

This revelation helped the young man to understand why his father had been so withdrawn. The past was too painful to reveal. Now, though, his father was ready to speak; their talks went long into the night. Finally, the son began to understand his father's reluctance to talk about the past – he had been so ashamed of his involvement in such a horrendous war with its many far-reaching consequences.

This single story of shame can be multiplied many times over to create a concept of collective shame and the associated trauma that accompanies second-generation witnessing. This man went on to adopt his father's pain wholeheartedly to the extent that he calls himself a European, no longer wanting to be identified as German. He does not wish his life to be linked with so much suffering. As previously stated, my childhood understanding of what it meant to be a guilty German was partially shaped by the television I watched. In 1965, CBS Paramount showed a comedy series about a prisoner of war camp. *Hogan's Heroes* is a comedic representation that tells the audience that Germans are stupid. Smart American POWs manage to continue their covert operations under the nose of Sergeant Schulz, who apparently notices nothing. But this programme stands alongside other films, such as *The Sound of Music* and *von Ryan's Express,* in which Germans are portrayed as vindictive and evil. I, as the daughter of a German mother who had lived through WWII, received this cultural message and added it to the pain of taunts about my 'Nazi' mother from bullies at school.

These cultural and personal transmissions of shame and trauma meshed with the aura of sadness that seeped out of my mother whenever she talked about her past.

She was always concerned about the state of our pantry, overly watchful about our health, and reluctant to deny the accusations made at school about my German heritage. Therefore, it is possible that I became the unwitting witness to my mother's past. Social anthropologist Carol Kidron explains how these transmissions operate in some families:

> First generation practices or 'narratives in motion' … (are) strategic scenarios of survival, and a meaningful commentary on a world where such practices were essential. The child 'responsively involved' with parental practice – for example at the dinner table, when cold or when sick – can in this way 'tacitly and practically understand' that they must eat well, avoid danger and remain healthy.[38]

In my childhood home, such practices were regularly observed. I was cautioned to eat everything on my plate; if I refused, my mother would cry about the waste, causing me to be consumed with guilt. In the argument that followed, she would allude to her suffering during the war and tell me that I would never understand genuine hunger. My mother's larder was overflowing in case something terrible might happen; she stock-piled food in readiness for another catastrophe. I remember row upon row of packets—sugar, flour and powdered milk. She was always ready. Now, I wonder how her wartime fears have contributed to my adult self. I too feel anxious about food, mainly buy discounted items and never waste anything. Surely, this is part of my legacy that has been handed down by my mother. Kidron acknowledges my concerns in her belief that the second generation obtain everyday information about the past through the unspoken and silent actions of their survivor parents:

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[38] Carol Kidron, 'Towards an Ethnography of Silence: the Lived Presence of the Past in the Everyday Lives of the Holocaust Survivors and their descendants in Israel', *Current Anthropology,* 50.1 (Feb 2009), p. 17.

> They only know that events routinely occur that signify experiences that they (the second generation) don't know about, although their own life-worlds are saturated with the instrumental practices that together constitute that knowledge.[39]

This information can be inferred by the way a parent looks at a photograph, or listens with sadness to a piece of music, and, as previously discussed, can also be transmitted through their endless concerns about illness and food.

Of course, it is not only the German community that has passed on their trauma, like a baton in a relay race. In my creative writing, I link the extermination of the Jews with the genocide of Aborigines in Australia. These two groups of victimised people exemplify the legal definition of genocide as decided by the 1948 UN Genocide Convention, which states that genocide is 'a proven intent of the perpetrators to destroy a human community, in whole or in part.'[40] Australia's genocidal attempts have included the forcible removal of children from their Aboriginal communities. This decision was encouraged by an '1867 Queensland newspaper [who] urged "a war of extermination as the only policy to pursue".'[41] Australia's strategy of genocide has left many shattered lives in its wake, and as with the Jewish community, second-generation Aborigines have inherited their parents' pain, thus perpetuating the cycle of trauma.[42] Throughout history, in similar ways, the Jewish community has repeatedly experienced attempted annihilation until it has become part of their cultural understanding and religious practice. Like Indigenous Australians, they know what it is like to feel completely powerless; it is etched on to

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[39] Kidron, p. 17.
[40] Robert Gellately & Ben Kiernan (eds.), *The Spectre of Genocide: Mass Murder in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 15.
[41] Gellately & Kiernan, p. 24.
[42] Judy Atkinson, *Trauma Trails: Recreating Song lines. The Transgenerational Effects of Trauma in Indigenous Australia* (Spinifex Press, Melbourne, 2002), p. 86

their memory and shapes their response to the world. Jewish author Michael Fogenblat tells us:

> 'I am … aware of how Auschwitz casts its shadow on day-to-day life. Who can dissect why this one was depressed? Or how deep was the lament that ran through a thousand sighs. You could read it in the way a mother fed you, as though this would be the last morsel, or nursed your common cold in case it would develop into tuberculosis.'[43]

Though it is difficult to completely understand the process of trauma transmission, I believe that this creative reflection expresses best the way in which messages about the past can be transferred from parent to child: 'You transmitted to me the smell of the little death, perhaps in the milk, perhaps in the blood, perhaps in a dream.'[44]

What is the result of these inherited feelings of shame and trauma, the 'smell of death in the milk', particularly as it relates to the concept of German shame? Lawyer and author, Bernhard Schlink, has closely examined the concept of Germany's guilt about the past, and states the following belief:

> Collective guilt is understood as a psychological phenomenon where guilt spreads itself from the perpetrators over the broader human and even physical landscape into the surrounding areas, seizing houses, villages and woods where the crimes took place; it is irrational as it is primal.[45]

Here, Schlink suggests that German guilt is not a rational belief; rather, it is an inexplicable feeling, borne from an accumulation of post-war messages that all point to Germany as an evil nation. This primal concept of inherited guilt has gradually

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[43] Michael Fogenblat, Melanie Landau & Nathan Wolski (eds.), *New under the Sun: Jewish Australians on Religion, Politics and Culture* (Black Inc., Schwarz Publishing, Melbourne, 2006), p. 250.

[44] Nava Semel, p. 80 (1985), cited in Dina Wardi, *Memorial Candles: Children of the Holocaust* (The International library of Group Psychotherapy and Group Process, 1992), p. 48.

[45] Bernhard Schlink, *Guilt about the Past* (University of Queensland Press, 2009), p. 9.

become a part of the nation's psyche and has resulted in many post-war Germans carrying a heavy burden. Roy Brooks, a professor of Law at San Diego University attests to this:

> Germans have been forced, and have forced themselves, to face their guilt with deep humility and penitence. So painful and enduring is the moral stain on the German soul that it may lend some truth to Socrates' argument that it is better to be the victim than the perpetrator of an injustice.[46]

According to Brooks, shame is an unenviable burden; nevertheless, it has become part of what it means to be German. But, why do younger Germans continue to feel guilty about their parents' past? They were not alive at the time of the atrocities, yet many still carry the scars of their parents' wartime experiences. Holocaust academic, Ellen Fine, writes about trans-generational memory and its effect on those who come after:

> Members of this generation have been marked by images of an experience that reverberates throughout their lives. They continue to 'remember' an event not lived through. Haunted by history they feel obliged to accept the burden of collective memory that has been passed onto them and to assume the task of sustaining it.[47]

Fine's statement underlines Brooks' belief that many Germans feel that they have been charged with the task of facing and sustaining their shame as a way of illustrating their regret. An example of this is demonstrated by a display in the Wannsee Conference Centre just outside Berlin. Within this centre a room has been

[46] Roy L Brooks (ed.), *When Sorry isn't enough: the Controversy over Apologies and Reparations for Human Injustice* (NY University Press, 1999), p. 3.
[47] Ellen S. Fine, 'Transmission of Memory: The Post Holocaust Generation in the Diaspora' in *Breaking Crystal* (p. 186).

made available for second-generation Germans and Jews to reflect upon their experience of the Holocaust. It is here that one German reveals her burden of shame:

> My father's guilt is part of my life. I live and therefore I bear responsibility. I can only stand it by being prepared to keep confronting this past and by taking these horrific events seriously.[48]

This woman feels compelled to maintain vigil. It was her father who lived in Nazi Germany, but she believes that it is her responsibility, as his daughter, to confront her past and ensure that it does not return.

In a documentary broadcast on the ABC in 2008, another second-generation German speaks of her inability to continue living in the country of her birth. Goering's great niece now resides in New Mexico in the U. S. As a young woman, she left Germany when she understood the dishonour associated with her family name, and, in order to ensure that the Goering blood line would not continue: she was sterilised. Bettina has lived her life in response to her uncle's politics. Her fear has prevented her from living freely, casting a long shadow across her future.

As previously stated, many post-war Germans continue to live under the shadow of the past they inherited from their parents. As each new museum and memorial is built, as each new film and book is created, people's fascination with the subject grows until an event we once called the holocaust, without capitalisation, becomes a constructed entity entitled 'The Holocaust'. Tim Cole suggests that this event has been manipulated to meet our contemporary needs:

> The Holocaust has been transformed in the last fifty years into the myth of the 'Holocaust.' That transformation has been undertaken in response to the sheer horror of the mass murders, to meet

[48] Wannsee Conference Centre, Second-Generation Remembrance wall, Berlin, viewed May, 2009.

> contemporary needs, and as an attempt to find meaning in the murder of six million Jews.[49]

This transformation has encouraged second-generation Germans to continue feeling responsible for their parents' crimes and they are left wondering whether their German heritage means that within them is the possibility of committing genocide.

Ian Buruma, author of *The Wages of Guilt,* questions if shame is a useful response for Germany's second generation:

> A good number of people born after the war felt ashamed to be German. It would appear to confirm Christian Meier's thesis that history is 'in our bones' that we carry the sins of our fathers on our backs that history is in our blood. It is true that Germans were responsible for Auschwitz. But is shame in future generations of Germans a suitable or even useful response?[50]

If, as Buruma suggests, shame is not the best way of responding to past events, what then is the most appropriate way of reacting to the Nazi legacy? Given that our political and cultural understanding of WWII rests on the idea that Germany is to blame, it is difficult to respond with anything less than guilt. Today's Germans are under pressure to uphold their parents' and grandparents' legacy. Post-war Germans have been told that they must never forget the crimes of their past, in order to ensure that the Holocaust never happens again, Now, modern Germans carry the moral responsibility for their country's future. It is as if by connecting with their violent past, and accepting the mantle of shame, only then will they be able to ensure a peaceful future.

However, for some first-generation Germans, the mantle of shame did not fit comfortably. They had been strongly influenced by Hitler's rhetoric about Aryan

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[49] Cole, p. 4.
[50] Ian Buruma, *The* Wages *of Guilt* (Vintage, Random House, London, 1995), p. 91.

superiority; they had been told by their Fűhrer that they were the master race and could do no wrong. This belief was severely compromised when the German people were confronted with the truth about the Holocaust. This dilemma is discussed by psychiatrists Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, who suggest that 'an epoch of maximum self-glorification now proved to be inextricably linked with the greatest crimes'.[51] An unwarranted belief in the greatness of the German people was juxtaposed alongside the nation's scalding humiliation.

Many Germans chose not to face their country's dishonour, and refused to look back at the crimes of the past. However, there were some who used this exposure as an opportunity to rethink their war-time behaviour. Wulf Kansteiner, a Holocaust historian, believes that 'after the war, most Germans came to recognise the unprecedented criminality and gigantic self-destruction they had taken part in.'[52] For those who were confronted with their failures and chose to think seriously about their national identity, shame could become a teacher. In *Shame and Pride*, psychiatrist Donald Nathanson suggests that humiliation can motivate the shamed to reassess their conduct: 'We may decide to use this particular moment of shame as the spur to personal change – an unexpected opportunity to make ourselves different.'[53] It seems as though Germany eventually used the Holocaust and its aftermath as an incentive to reassess and change its national image; consequently many individuals have been provoked by their mortification into rethinking their beliefs about the past. This concept is underlined by the historian Michael Balfour, who believes that: 'There is a good deal in German life today, such as the importance attached to human rights and

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[51] Alexander & Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principals of Collective Behaviour,* (trans. by R Placzek, Grove Press, NY, 1975), p. 25.

[52] Wulf Kansteiner, *In Pursuit of German memory: History, Television and Politics after Auschwitz* (Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio, 2006), p. 79.

[53] Donald Nathanson, *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex and the Birth of Self* (WW Norton, NY, 1992), p. 308.

the appreciation of the value of pluralism, which represents learning from the experience of life under Nazi rule.'[54]

But there are some Germans who believe that the time has come to cease engaging with their difficult past, and this proposition became the subject of a prominent historians' debate of the 1980s. Historians and philosophers engaged in a much publicised dispute, with some believing it was time to end their public engagement with national guilt, while others considered that Germans must accept their Nazi past as a part of their ongoing collective identity, and this acceptance should, in part, form the country's future. In *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity,* sociologist Jeffrey Alexander speaks of this cultural tension between remembering and forgetting:

> Generation after generation … engage in compulsive examining and re-examining, bringing up new aspects of the trauma, reinterpreting, re-evaluating and battling over symbolic significance…This produces a fascinating type of cultural accumulation – a non-ending, always expanding repository consisting of multiple precipitates (both negative and positive) of a continuous and pulsating process of remembering, coping, negotiating and engaging in conflict.[55]

This ongoing communal remembering and debate has, in part, served to perpetuate Germany's belief that it is guilty and must continue to pay for the crimes of the past. This acknowledgement eventually led to Chancellor Angela Merkel's addressing the Israeli parliament in 2008 about Germany's continuing sense of responsibility:

> Every German government and every chancellor before me was committed to the special responsibility Germany has for Israel's security…The mass murder of six million Jews,

[54] Michael Balfour, *Withstanding Hitler in Germany 1933-45* (Routledge, London, 1988), p. 253
[55] Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 2004), p. 53.

> carried out in the name of Germany, has brought indescribable suffering to the Jewish people, Europe and the entire world. The Shoah fills us Germans with shame. I bow before the victims. I bow before the survivors and before all them who helped them survive.[56]

Chancellor Merkel's speech highlights the ongoing nature of German shame, and how the country's legacy continues to reinforce an unremitting sense of responsibility.

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Schindler's List is over. I can feel my shoulders sagging as I get up from the couch. My humiliation is palpable.

This chapter has examined the concept of humiliation, and how it has become synonymous with Germany and the Holocaust. It has also considered how shame is transmitted, by examining my own story, and explored how this deep sense of mortification has implicated those not alive during WWII. As part of my exploration I have discussed the trajectory of post-war writing, which moved from repression through to present-day Holocaust texts that provide inspiration.

In the following chapter I want to explore my family's experiences of trauma transmission, so that I can understand what led me to create a narrative that deals with the past. I will also examine the process I undertook in my creative writing to deal with my legacy.

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[56] Angela Merkel (speech to the Knesset), on 17 March 2008, as reported in *The Jerusalem Post,* <http://www.jpost.com> [viewed 18 March, 2008].

Appendix

Acceptance of Shame in Post-War Germany

Germany's acceptance of its criminal responsibility passed through various stages, depending on the prevailing political philosophy of the time.[57] The post-war period in Germany was generally marked by a profound reserve when discussing the crimes of the past. However, in the midst of Germany's period of repression came the Eichmann trial of 1961, when Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi who coordinated the transport of Jews from all over Europe, sat in a court room in Israel and listened to countless witnesses telling their stories of suffering. This trial had a profound impact on the German people, as many second-generation Germans began questioning their parents' role in the war. Another wave of second-generation interrogation was instigated by the Auschwitz trial, held in 1963. Both court hearings exposed the fact that many ex-Nazis now held prominent positions in the post-war German government, and this knowledge horrified the younger generation.

It was not until the late 1960s, as part of the student protest movement spreading across Europe that young Germans began questioning their parents' involvement with Nazism. Those alive during the war were forced to account for their actions by a post-war generation convinced that Germany was still corrupt. Ian Buruma suggests that student unrest experienced in Germany occurred because post-war Germans began to understand the reality of their parents' past: 'Many young Germans rejected everything their parents stood for. They sat in judgement over their past, hated them for their silence and despised their philosemitism too.'[58] This resentment was coupled with a realisation that some lawyers and judges, who had belonged to the National Socialists, were still practicing. In response to this revelation, part of Germany's student movement became an active militarist

[57] Roderick Stackelberg, *Hitler's Germany* (Routledge, London, 1999), p. 250.
[58] Buruma, p. 19.

organisation.[59] Disillusionment and questioning followed and became fertile ground for rallies and riots. Hoping to influence post-war Germany along a more positive course, some activists gained positions in government, media and the economy, However, Dunstan implies that protest was not an effective way of dealing with their own past:

> (This) generation tricked themselves into thinking that they had dealt with the problems of the past, but in fact they had adopted an evasion method that allowed them to take refuge in abstract ideologies.[60]

Dunstan suggests that for those who were born after the war, dealing with their parents' revelations through ideological protest did little to change Germany's methods of managing their unwieldy and traumatic past.

[59] Brittany Dunstan, 'The German Student Movement of 1968', <http://www.unc.edu/~brittany/1968.doc> [viewed October 2011] (p. 2).
[60] Dunstan, p. 10.

Chapter Two – Life Writing and the legacy of shame

Where do the hauntings come from, the feelings that tell us everything is not quite right? On the surface all seems well. We get on with our lives. But just below the exterior, rocks of pain hold the secrets that touch our beings every day. Do our parents steer us away from these hidden dangers? In an effort to protect us from their past, have they decided to keep quiet about their stories of pain? But, regardless of such protective measures, their past is our past; we have inherited their narratives in a multitude of ways. It has influenced us like an unseen guest hovering over our dinner table. Whether our mothers' and fathers' pain was spoken or hidden, we, the second generation, gradually became aware of their suffering and adopted it as our own. Unable to lay it to rest, we became host to our parents' pain until it became part of our lives.[61] Two stories joined, becoming one.

Chapter Two examines this process of narrative adoption by discussing the background to writing my mother's story and my own, a narrative that deals with the transmission of shame and trauma from one generation to another. Initially, I investigate how some narratives are constructed out of silence, and, because of the gaps in my mother's story I explore how I use my imagination to deal with my inheritance of German shame. In the process of reviewing my past, I fall into the 'blaming mother' trap, assuming that her war time difficulties are the reason for my own problems. But, eventually, I shift from blame to over-identification and compassion, by inhabiting my mother's voice. Alongside my act of narrative ventriloquism, I question the ethics of appropriating my mother's speech for my own healing. This questioning is facilitated by an examination of the theorists who believe that creativity is the path to reconciling with shame. Hence, I am encouraged to

[61]Nancy Miller & Jason Tougaw (eds.), 'Orphaned memories, Foster writing, Phantom pain' in *Extremities: Trauma Testimony and Community* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 2002), p. 102.

create a fusion of writing styles that marry fiction, history, travel writing and personal interviews to create an instrument of healing for my mother and myself.

* * *

I imagine that my mother and I are sitting together by an open window, looking out on her spring garden. On the table is a white crocheted table cloth and a pair of delicate Meissen china cups, filled with a strong brew of German coffee. We talk. She speaks about the shadows that darkened her adolescence, cast by uncertain political times. I hear of the death of her friends, financial hardship and fear. Everyone around her thought Hitler was right, but her Mutti disagreed. And later, the bombs kept falling until her home was difficult to recognise. There was nothing to eat and soldiers watched her every move. And then she found out what really happened to the Jews sent to the East, purportedly on work detail. It all comes tumbling out, along with her tears, and I am holding her hand and crying too. We weep for her losses until there is nothing more to say. Evening comes and with it the rain, washing away the ugliness. We sit in silence, knowing all there is to know ...

If only this were true, but it didn't happen that way, and now, because my mother is dead, it is too late. Or is it? Maybe it is wishful thinking on my part, but I dream that my mother has given me permission to write this story, the one that was impossible to explore while she was alive.

Now that I have decided to embark on this journey, I am not sure how to gather her secrets together. However, once I start digging, information is not so hard to find; in fact it is everywhere. A global preoccupation with the Holocaust has given rise to a myriad of films, books and museums, whose sole purpose is to examine the Nazi era, and I use this information to fill in the gaps left bare by my mother's

silence. I am not sure why she chose to leave out parts of her story. Was she ashamed of her country's crimes, or did she just want to forget? All I know is that her silence has left me feeling uncertain of myself, and of my place in the world. Psychiatrist and expert in trauma studies, Dr Dori Laub, believes that, 'One has to know one's buried truth in order to live one's life'.[62] So, in writing this text I am constructing stories about my mother that help me to manage my legacy of German shame. This remedial process allows me to see myself as a separate individual, not someone who is guilty for the crimes of another's past. Nevertheless, I must understand the story handed down to me before I can forge new ways of behaving that do not include humiliation or an inappropriate sense of victim-hood. Cultural historian Rosamund Dalziell suggests that the act of auto/biography can enable the marginalised to be heard.[63] 'Autobiography may indeed serve as a means for the shamed to become visible and to criticise the social attitudes and conditions that have silenced or marginalised them.'[64] This is what I want for my mother: an understanding of the conditions that relegated her to the periphery. I also look to the remedial nature of auto/biography to help me to renegotiate my inherited sense of shame.

As I review my identity in the light of Dalziell's belief, I construct a story that helps me to understand my mother and the impact her life has had on me. However, giving detail to my mother's early experiences from my informed imagination is a heady responsibility, because in writing this story of healing I am tempted to create a person of extremes. Should she be a saviour of the Jews, risking all to supply false passports and food, or will she be one of Hitler's adoring party members, falling faint at the sound of his name? To know my mother would be to realise that neither of

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[62] Dori Laub, 'Truth and Testimony: the Process and the Struggle' in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1995), p. 63.

[63] Why some may doubt that Germans have been marginalised, I believe that the central story of WWII is the Holocaust. Consequently, stories of German suffering have been relegated to the side lines or seen as the perpetrator's just deserts.

[64] Rosamund Dalziell, *Shameful Autobiographies: Shame in Contemporary Australia Autobiographies and Culture* (Melbourne University Press, 1999), p. 256.

these extremes were true, yet her story has become mine to create and I find myself appropriating it as a way of strengthening my vulnerability. An academic in literary studies, Nicola King, believes that many children write their parents' lives as a path to self-discovery:

> In the past few years there has been a proliferation of family or parental memoirs in which the writer attempts to recover or reconstruct the lives of his or her parents, whilst also exploring the ways in which their lives and experiences might have helped form the writer's own sense of self.[65]

So, if my mother was a larger than life figure, this would surely increase my own self-esteem, but that is not how I remember her. The woman I knew was shy and self-effacing; she just wanted to survive; she was not the type to risk everything.

As her daughter I felt the impact of my mother's distress from my earliest times. I adopted her pain and made it my own. Now I want to be free of this inheritance. This means searching for the details of my mother's life, and when they can't be found, using my informed imagination to create a plausible and therapeutic narrative. Literary scholar, Richard Glejzer, believes that it is inevitable to shape our parents' story as a way of understanding their past and linking it to our present: 'This working through as we are remembering/writing – produces a reshaping, a refashioning of the memory – their story meets ours and becomes one.'[66] My mother's narrative joins with mine as I work through my second-generation identity of shame. As a result of this undertaking I find myself re-authoring my mother's life. Marianne Hirsch acknowledges that the act of belated witnessing enables the writer to create a new voice out of silence. 'This quality of being at one remove gives a

[65] Nicola King, *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self* (Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 6.
[66] Richard Glejzer, '*Maus* and the Epistimology of Witness' in. *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony and Community*, ed. by Nancy Miller & Jason Tougaw (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 2002), p. 127.

particular impetus to the artistic discourses of post-memory. The second-generation creates where it cannot recover. In the absence of direct memory, artistic forms supply the material of imagination.'[67]

Through the artistic form of creative writing, I take on my mother's identity and imagine myself as she. By doing this, I am able to understand her choices, and believe that in similar circumstances I would have acted in the same way.

It is within this atmosphere of understanding that forgiveness for my mother and healing for myself can begin. But, I cannot stand at a distance and hear her speak. I must fill my mother's shoes, put on her winter coat and wear it through the streets of Berlin. This was the reason for my journey to my mother's home town. I wanted to reconcile my relationship with her, and thus with myself. Once there I felt compelled to visit every traumatic site listed, in the hope that I could uncover my mother's secrets. Mum's quiet voice soon got lost in an abundance of information, so I decided to talk to family members and scrutinise photos, all the while berating myself for not knowing German. Eventually I was able to hear my mother more clearly, but she still had to compete with countless other voices that belong to this traumatised city. Historian Maria Tumarkin believes that Berlin is a traumascape:

> Traumascapes become much more than physical settings of tragedies: they emerge as spaces where events are experienced and re-experienced across time. Full of visual and sensory triggers capable of eliciting a whole palette of emotions, traumascapes catalyse and shape remembering and reliving traumatic events. It is through these places that the past, whether buried or laid bare for all to see, continues to inhabit and refashion the present.[68]

[67] Marianne Hirsch, 'Past Lives: Post memories in Exile' in *Poetics Today*, 17.4 (winter 1996), 659-689, (p. 664).
[68] Maria Turmarkin, *Traumascapes: the Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedy* (Melbourne University Press, 2005), p. 12.

As I experienced Tumarkin's 'palette of emotions' my understanding of what it meant to be a German during WWII was heightened. I became aware of the difficulties my mother experienced while growing up under a Nazi dictatorship.

My Berlin encounters fuelled the construction of my narrative, and my mother's imaginary war-time diary was written alongside my own childhood memories. Interviews with my uncle and Mum's old school friends also helped to fill the gaps. Her story began to take on a hybrid quality: part history, part memoir and travel log; a mixture of biography and autobiography. German scholar, Anne Fuchs, believes that these hybrid texts allow the personal and the public to relate to one another:

> By piecing together the jigsaw of family history with the help of photographs, albums, diaries and other stranded objects from the past; these narratives produce a patchwork of sorts, an historical *bricolage* that draws attention to the constructed nature of historical truth. They reproduce, re-arrange and scrutinize these biographical materials in order to set the personal and historical, the private and the public, imagination and fact in dialogue with one another (italics in text).[69]

As suggested by Fuchs, these different narrative strands have joined together as a way of exploring what happened to my mother during WWII, and as a possible explanation for her later behaviour.

I have often regretted my mother's reluctance to speak, but her silence might have arisen from her need to block out the horrors of war. This type of repression is acknowledged by psychiatrists, Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, when they suggest that some Germans after WWII were unable to talk about their past because a culture of forgetting was encouraged:

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[69] Anna Fuchs, *Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse: the Politics of Memory* (Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, 2008), p. 77.

> Working through the losses is a prerequisite to experiencing guilt and remorse. No such working-through occurred. Instead, the recollection of a whole segment of national history soon faded; and naturally on the individual level that meant losing segments of one's own life from memory—how one had thought, acted and hoped in them.[70]

As the Misterlichs suggest, my mother might have blocked out her past because a culture of forgetting was encouraged in post-war Germany. Unfortunately, I will never really know whether Mum kept quiet because she wanted to protect me or because she was unable to talk and, therefore, was unconsciously protecting herself.

Her desire to protect herself and others from the pain of the past is understandable; it was a time of terrible suffering. Maybe this is why I feel bound to fill the gaps in my mother's story with narratives of trauma. As previously mentioned, she told me very little about the horrors of her war, but because I am part of the twenty first century, a time when people are fascinated by suffering, I discover myself embellishing these tales. As a generation, we can't seem to get enough of other people's pain. Daytime television, night-time newsreels and bedtime reading all provide us with a diet of anguish. A scholar in cultural studies, Mark Seltzer, believes that we live in a 'wound culture' which he defines as 'the public fascination with torn and opened bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma and the wound'.[71] As part of this fascination, we become amateur analysts, trawling through our past to explain present day behaviour, looking for the possibility of hidden problems to justify our current neuroses. We also want to gather up our past before it is too late, so we record oral histories in case people die before we have heard their accounts. We build museums to enshrine the past,

[70] Alexander & Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn*, trans. by Beverly R. Placzek (Grove Press Inc, New York, 1975), p. xvi.
[71] Mark Seltzer, 'Wound Culture: Trauma and the Pathological Public Sphere' in *October*, 80 (spring, 1997), 3-26 (p. 3).

ensuring that our memories, carved in stone and recorded on tapes, will continue to inspire and influence. Generally, historical narratives are treated with great respect, and consequently, according to Smith and Watson, have the potential to shape the future:

> Memory is a means of 'passing on', of sharing a social past that may have been obscured, in order to activate its potential for reshaping a future of and for other subjects. Thus acts of remembering are fundamentally social and collective.[72]

As suggested, memories are often activated for their potential to inspire or teach, and communities look to stories of the past to give their present experiences significance. We exist in an era where some live vicariously, searching for personal meaning by engaging with other people's stories, particularly those filled with suffering. To associate with narratives of pain can add excitement to our own much quieter lives, allowing us to leave behind our everyday mundane existence.

Therefore, it seems natural to make my mother's story a narrative of suffering. She was frequently unhappy and given to bouts of melancholia and sometimes I wonder whether this could, in part, be explained by the information I read in historian Anthony Beevor's book, *Berlin: The Downfall, 1945.* At the end of the war, revenge was uppermost in the invading army's mind.[73] I discover my mother on every page, fleeing the bombs, making herself small and ugly when Russian soldiers walked by to avoid being raped, and eating scraps of food from the black market. It is hard to imagine her pain.

This burden of history is difficult to relinquish and the image stays with me, becoming part of my memory. I have adopted my mother's suffering and made it my own. Literary scholar, Richard Glejzer, in his examination of Art Spiegelman's

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[72]Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide to Interpreting Life Narratives* (University of Minneapolis Press, Minneapolis, 2001), p. 20.

[73] Anthony Beevor, *Berlin: The Downfall*, 1945 (Penguin, London, 2003), p. 17.

second-generation graphic Holocaust novel *Maus*, suggests that the children of victims of trauma try to fill in the blanks left by their parents' inability to articulate their pain:

> This post war generation … cannot remember the Holocaust as it actually occurred. All they remember … is what the victims have passed down to them in their diaries, what the survivors have remembered to them in their memoirs. They remember not actual events but rather the countless histories, novels and poems of the Holocaust they have read, the photographs, movies and video testimonies they have seen over the years. They remember long days and nights in the company of survivors, listening to their harrowing tales, until their lives, loves and losses seemed grafted onto their own life stories.[74]

This concept of moral hospitality suggests that children do adopt their parents' suffering. 'Alien' thoughts inhabit the child/host's body, and the parents' sadness takes over, leaving less room for the child to grow and individuate. In this atmosphere, blame and resentment may fester, immobilising children with guilt and anger about the burdens they must carry.

How is it possible then, for the second generation to heal from this 'alien invasion' that has left such a profound mark on them? It is tempting to lie down on the therapist's couch and blame our parents for taking over our lives. Their stories are bigger than ours, and, seemingly, more important. Hence in an attempt to strengthen our identities, we unwittingly adopt their trauma. Marianne Hirsch concurs with other theorists previously cited when she coins the term 'postmemory' to describe the assumption of another's story:

> Postmemory characterises the experience of those who grew up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories

[74] Glejzer, p. 26.

> are displaced by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can neither understand or recreate.[75]

However, because our parents' stories may have been shrouded in secrecy, this adoption process is not always straightforward. Our mothers and fathers may have lived their lives as if nothing dreadful had happened and the family's routine continued as normal. Nevertheless, many children harbour a suspicion that something is wrong, even though their parents have kept their painful past a secret.

And there are other parents who simply cannot remember. This is similar to Misterlisch's concept of repression. However, in this case people are unable to recall tragic events of the past because the memory of trauma is so overwhelming that it threatens to cripple the person's normal functioning. This is diagnosed as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, an illness in which the trauma is pushed away, as if it has never occurred.[76] In these cases, it is only when flashbacks and nightmares happen that we, their children, realise that the past has returned to haunt them, and by inference, us.

How are these influences felt? Firstly, there are the quiet ways, the everyday presence of something too hideous to mention. Many children of Holocaust survivors cannot remember the Shoah as a topic of discussion around the dinner table; their family's suffering was never mentioned, but they came to an intimate understanding of the family's history because of their mother's and father's behaviour. 'Often, children experience the symptoms and the pain of their parents without the knowledge of the trauma that gave rise to them.'[77] However, there were some

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[75]Marianne Hirsch, 'Projected Memory: Holocaust photographs in personal and public fantasy' in *Acts of memory: cultural recall in the present,* ed. by Mieke Bal, Jonathon Crewe & Leo Spitzer (Hanover University Press, New England, 1999), p. 8.

[76] Rachel Yehuda, 'Post Traumatic Stress Disorder' in *New England Journal of Medicine,* 346 (January 2002), 108-114.

[77] Dan Rowland-Klein & Rosemary Dunlop, 'The Transmission of Trauma across the Generations: identification with Parental Trauma in Children of Holocaust survivors' in *A&NZ Journal of*

children who felt compelled to hear endless stories of suffering, and came to understand each intimate detail of their parents' war. They knew the names of family members who had not survived, and came to believe that it was their job to fill in the gaps left open by death. These children came to be known as 'memorial candles,'[78] named after the dead relatives of the Holocaust, in the hope that these fresh lives could erase the sadness caused by their parents' early loss.

Individual narratives of grief and loss can go on to be reflected in a cultural legacy of war trauma and transmitted via our national institutions. Museums, monuments, remembrance days, TV and books, all serve to further our understanding of the past and the part our parents played in it. Therefore, we may watch the screen and imagine our family in the story; we see our father in the movie, starved and beaten, and there is our mother, carrying rocks with her bleeding hands. A scholar in cultural studies, Ross Chambers, defines these imaginings as phantom pain:

> I want to raise the issue of what it might mean for an individual to confuse the collective historical consciousness concerning outrageous events with painful personal memories: and to confuse them to the point of being *inhabited* (i.e. haunted) by the events *as though* he or she had actually lived through them (italics in text).[79]

Chambers infers that these overwhelming images may move us from understanding to entanglement. Identification encourages us to imagine we were there, with our parents, because second-generation survivors of trauma often belong to close-knit family units. Therefore, we want to join with our parents' pain and not be left out. Marianne Hirsch discusses the longing of the post-war generation to be involved in their parents' war-time experiences:

Psychiatry, 32. 3 (June 1998), 358-369, (p. 359).

[78]Dina Wardi, *Memorial Candles: Children of the Holocaust* (Routledge, London, 1992), p. 32.

[79] Ross Chambers, 'Orphaned Memories, Foster Writing, Phantom Pain: The Fragments Affair', in *Extremities, Trauma, Testimony & Community*, ed. by Nancy Miller & Jason Tougaw (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 2002) p. 92.

> We remain in perpetual temporal and spatial exile. Our past is literally a foreign country we can never hope to visit. And our post memory is shaped … by our sense of belatedness and disconnection.[80]

Nevertheless, if the second generation are able to bridge the gaps of belatedness, they may be rewarded for joining with parents who are overwhelmed by their traumatic past. Our post-war stories may seem pale in comparison to our parents' tragedies; we cannot compete with this giant shadow, so we merge with it, bonding with the suffering adult. Now, our quiet lives are enhanced by our connection to a more troubling past. This association also encourages us to join with our families by believing that the world is a harsh and unpredictable place. To openly challenge this assumption would only add to our parents' suffering, and for many post-war children, this choice is unbearable.

There are many second-generation children of trauma sufferers who believe that they should make up for their parents' anguished past. This was my experience. Growing up in a household where both parents had been traumatised by war, I felt that it was up to me to brighten their day and take away their sadness. I tried my best to please, but always felt unequal to the task.

I particularly felt responsible for my mother's distress. Her experience of wartime trauma caused her to be depressed and shut off, and, as previously mentioned, I believed it was my duty to rescue her and make her happy. But this sense of responsibility inverts the parenting role, causing resentment, because the child has taken on the job of mothering at an inappropriate age. This dilemma is common in children of Holocaust survivors who believe they have to make up for their parents' traumatic background. When Jewish scholar Tamar Fox interviewed

[80] Hirsch, 'Past Lives: Post memories in Exile', p. 663.

these children, she found a strong urge to live their parents' past: 'sometimes … she toyed with the idea of having the number (her mother's Auschwitz number), on *her* arm as a testimony to her mother (italics in text).'[81] But even though many children identify with their parents' past, they also resent them for being needy and inflicting the weight of their story.

Unfortunately, if a parent's sadness persists, despite all efforts to erase it, anger may set in on the child's part. This was my response to my mother during my adolescent years. Because of her experience with the invading army at the end of the war, I knew she hated everything Russian, so I taunted her by reading Dostoevsky and falling in love with Tchaikovsky's music. And, when I finally understood the immensity of Germany's crimes against the Jewish people, my anger towards my mother increased. Understanding was no longer an option. My mother could do no right. Later, I realised that if she had enveloped me in her war experiences, I would most likely have complained of overload, seeing myself as the suffering second-generation victim coping with an excess of grisly images about the Holocaust and Stalingrad. But, because she chose to tell me very little about the war, I protested that she held me at a distance.

My father acted in a similar way; his war experiences were also a secret, but I did not blame him; I forgave him, and tried to understand. Why was my relationship with my mother so different? I admit to falling into the 'blame mother' trap. As I look over the past, I recognise that no matter what went wrong, it was always my mother's fault. Mothers are often held responsible for people's difficulties – they can be seen as overprotective or uncaring, smothering or distant; somehow, they are always in the wrong.[82]

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[81] Tamar Fox, *Inherited Memories: Israeli Children of Holocaust Survivors* (Cassell, London, 1999), p.115.

[82] Fiona Joy Green, 'Patriarchal Ideology of Motherhood' in *Encyclopaedia of Motherhood* (Sage Publications, California, 2010), p. 970.

Now the time has come to put my juvenile resentment away, and as I begin to explore the background to my mother's story, my anger softens and is gradually replaced by understanding and forgiveness. However, this is not done lightly; the crimes of her generation are too numerous to be glossed over, but my research, my imagination and my memories enable me to stand in her shoes. Finally I am prepared to try empathy because blame and anger no longer work. I want to heal the rift between us, whilst also coming to terms with my second-hand shame. I hope that empathy will allow me to move beyond recriminations and regrets, but it is hard to look past the shame of the Holocaust. Dan Bar-On, the Israeli psychologist, who interviewed children of Nazis for his book, *Legacy of Silence: Encounters with Children of the Third Reich*, discovered that acknowledging and empathising with our parents' role in the war is not an easy process:

> Just imagine: turning as many people into ashes in one night as there are inhabitants in this village. In twenty-four hours they are all a pile of ashes! ... These are the dimensions that young people just push far away from themselves, they don't want to deal with it. And when they hear that those who did it were Germans, they just want to repress it. [83]

For second-generation Germans, constantly reminded of these images from their parents' past, compassion can seem impossible. But hanging on to hatred only fuels the burden of shame, leading to humiliation, anger and an inability to reconcile with the past. Empathy seems to be one of the few ways out of this burden of memory.

So, because I have chosen to write with consideration and compassion I have been able to slip into my mother's life and make it my own. When I think about her hiding from the invading Russians, it is as if I am in the pine forest, listening for the

[83] Dan Bar-On, *Legacy of Silence: Encounters with Children of the Third Reich* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1989), p. 22.

sounds of army boots, not daring to move. It is then that my heart goes out to her, and I find myself forgiving her for being German, and a part of Hitler's Aryan race. I have moved beyond criticism as I bridge the gap between my mother and myself. In an attempt to heal our shame I join with her story and adopt it as my own. But now I am faced with a dilemma. I began this journey feeling ashamed of having German blood in my veins, and now I am contemplating forgiveness, but do I absolve my mother too easily? Of course, I want my shame to be healed, but not at the cost of an unearned dispensation. I risk minimising the trauma of the past if I seek to create a spotless identity for her as a technique for healing myself. Social historian Tim Cole rightfully questions my project: 'Drawing lessons from the past is rather problematic. It is easy to project the lessons demanded by the present back onto the past, and rewrite it in such terms.'[84] By wanting to claim healing for myself, I have knowingly constructed my mother's story, but reconciliation should not come at any price.

This concern is highlighted by life writing scholar Judith Lutge Coullie, who discusses 'the desire to gloss over or suppress information that is likely to alienate a reader's sympathies for their principal biographical subject'.[85] By embarking on a reconstruction of my Mum's story, it is possible that I am on a rescue mission to save her from the consequences of German shame. Accordingly, I may also be attempting to rescue my mother from the discomfit of her past, and I am therefore more likely to suppress information that could cast her in an unfavourable light. So, how should I proceed? Rosamund Dalziell also questions this style of auto/biography:

> The narcissistic aim of contemporary confessing auto biographers may well be to convince the reader that the self on display in the text is a self-deserving of attention or worthy of admiration.[86]

[84] Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: from Auschwitz to Schindler. How History is bought Sold and Packaged* (Routledge, NY, 1999), p. 42.
[85] Judith Lutge Coullie, 'Telling the Life Story, Anxiously: The Memoirs of Teresa and Anna Campbell' in *Biography*, 33.2 (Spring 2010), 309-332 (p. 317).
[86] Dalziell, p10

Therefore, by creating a story of redemption I may be convincing myself and others that neither my mother nor I are guilty. This is an attractive concept, but unrealistic. These ideas, explored by both Coullie and Dalziell are reinforced by social anthropologist, Carol Kidron, who also believes that the process of auto/biographical writing belongs to a mission to repair the effects of a 'damaged' past:

> Testimony, talk therapy, or revisionist voice would turn the suffering survivor and descendant from passive objects into healed and redeemed subjects, and in the process contribute to the moral salvage mission of collective commemoration.[87]

As Kidron suggests, I am on a 'moral salvage mission', both for my mother and myself. This mission has been conducted respectfully, and in the absence of all the facts I have opted for the middle way. Yet, I wonder if respectfully valuing my mother's experiences has encouraged me to become too involved in her story.

Within the danger of over-identification with my mother's past lies the possibility of appropriation. Consequently, I am in jeopardy of becoming so immersed in my mother's past that our voices are impossible to distinguish. Of course, it is not feasible to ask her permission to engage in this act of narrative ventriloquism; she has been dead for more than ten years. Her voice lives on in my head, but we only speak of mundane activities. She tells me to dust the skirting boards or iron the towels, but imagining my mother's war time past is an entirely different matter. By writing her story I am placing the woman I know into an historical situation and setting her free on the page. But who is really there – is it my Mum or is it myself? We have become entwined; a typical case of 'My Mother

[87] Carol Kidron, 'Towards an Ethnography of Silence: the Lived Presence of the Past in the Everyday Lives of Holocaust Survivors and their Descendants in Israel' in *Current Anthropology*, 50.1 (Feb, 2009), 5-27 (p. 6).

Myself'.[88] I realise that there are ethical concerns surrounding the appropriation of her voice, and I worry in case I have turned her into a puppet, performing for my own benefit so I can heal my burden of shame. Nevertheless, this is to be expected; auto/biographers do not write in a vacuum, acting as a neutral go-between from one era to another. The current cultural and personal milieu in which I write shapes my memories; naturally, I will highlight certain aspects of my mother's life I consider important and relegate other memories to the background. Auto/biographical scholars, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, believe that 'the remembering subject actively creates the meaning of the past in the act of remembering'.[89] Because my creative act is to be an expression of reconciliation with my mother I have 'remembered' her voice in a particular way, in order to achieve my own healing. However, an academic in literary studies, Victoria Elmwood, questions the ethics of adopting and creating a parent's story:

> They (the second generation) must find ways to include their parent's trauma within their own story in a way that neither appropriates nor subsumes the parent's experiences, the second generation cannot lay direct claim to these, but only to their after effects, having experienced those by virtue of prolonged intimate contact with the first generation.[90]

Though it is tempting to adopt our parents' suffering and make it our own in order to embellish our identity, this can diminish the significance of their trauma, and, as previously suggested, turn us into second-generation victims. So, if I purposely imagine parts of my mother's story in order to re-author my identity, do I risk subsuming her experiences as a way of bolstering my flagging sense of self?

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[88] Nancy Friday, *My Mother, Myself* (Dell Publishing, NY, 1977).
[89] Smith & Watson, p. 16.
[90] Victoria Elmwood, 'Happy, Happy Ever After: The Transformation of Trauma between the Generations in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*: A Survivor's Tale' in *Biography,* 27.4 (Fall 2004), Biological Research Centre (p. 703).

As previously discussed, this need has encouraged me to re-author my history, and make my personal identity kit. My mother's silence has given me this opportunity, and though I can only guess at the reason for her reticence it has given me the freedom to invent my history, and fashion my own healing. Holocaust scholar Ellen Fine talks about the second generation and their construction of memory:

> The memory transmitted was often a selective memory, a veiled memory, a dispersed memory, or an absent memory. Members of the second generation invented fantasies and myths to fill in the blanks of the stories. In effect, they had to fashion their own version of the memory bequeathed to them.[91]

This concept of fashioning is given further emphasis by social scientist, Susannah Radstone, who considers that the production of memory is shaped at the time of its telling:

> Memories were … complex productions shaped by diverse narratives and genres and replete with absences, silences, condensations and displacements that were related in complex ways, to the dialogic moment of their telling. [92]

As I look back on the few stories my mother told me about her experiences during the war, and the context in which I received them, I can appreciate Radstone's belief that memories are formed at the time they are told. I can still hear my father's voice from the other room,

'What are you upsetting the child for? It is better to forget.'

Did my father's stern questioning alter the way Mum told me her story? And when I came home from school and asked her why the boys in the yard had called

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[91] Ellen Fine, 'Transmission of Memory: the Post Holocaust Generation in Diaspora' in *Breaking Crystal: Writing and Memory after Auschwitz,* ed. by Efriam Sicher (University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1998), p. 191.

[92] Susannah Radstone (ed.), *Memory and Methodology* (Berg Publishers, UK, 2000), p. 11.

me names because she was German, what was Mum's response? Did she try to soften my bewilderment, instead of explaining where their anger came from?

These encounters all contributed to the distance between my mother and I, but now this has changed. At last I am able to understand what really happened during those dreadful years of Hitler's leadership, and I am much more forgiving. If I had appreciated the burdens she was carrying, maybe I wouldn't have taunted my mother with my enjoyment of Russian literature and music. Her quiet moods and hasty outbursts would have been a natural reaction to the pain of the past, and I would have found them easier to bear. But, because I believe she wanted to protect me from the horrors of her early years, the Germany my mother conveyed to me during my youth was a place of advent calendars and Christmas trees, with paper parcels arriving in December, full of marzipan and gingerbread. We never discussed the Holocaust.

Now that I have embraced the hidden aspects of my mother's story, I have come to accept that the war will continue to cast its shadow over the following generations of Jews and Germans. This belief is highlighted by researcher, Tamar Fox, when she reports on interviews she conducted with second-generation victims of Germany's Nazis. This is a small selection from those interviews:

> I feel that I myself am a Holocaust survivor … the experience is very strong … It is totally seeped in me: I can't think of myself apart from it …
> It is inside whatever creates fear or courage in me: the Holocaust permeates everything.[93]

I acknowledge that whether we are Germans or Jews, we cannot shelter from the fall-out of the Shoah. It will always be a part of us. The memory of six million Jewish murders should not go away so easily. But now I am able to balance this

[93] Fox, p. 1.

understanding with another story. I acknowledge that I am associated with the crimes of Germany's past, but that does not mean that the possibility of such hatred resides within me.

* * *

This chapter has examined my creative writing process. Consequently, I have explored the reasons for my writing: to reconcile with my past, confront it and set my relationship with my mother to rights. For a time, during the process of research and writing, my shame increased. As I confronted the Holocaust and the possibility that my mother knew, I became angry and accusing. But, gradually, the creative process allowed me to lance the painful lesions that had formed during my youth and led me to reconcile with my mother and myself. Of course, this does not mean that the Holocaust has lost its power to disturb me. This is not what I seek. My writing is about confronting my shame, not denying it.

Chapter Three goes on to explore the possibility of creative projects liberating people from a painful past by examining therapeutic writing and other acts of creativity, which can be used to assist people to construct a new and reconciled identity.

Chapter Three – creativity as tool for healing

I want my shame to leave me, but is it possible to heal from such an overwhelming catastrophe? Reconciliation with the Holocaust seems unattainable, especially after having watched films that detail the heartbreaking life of Jews in Nazi Germany. If the film depicts children – innocent and suffering with round, worried eyes trying to fathom what they see – dogs barking, people yelling, trains impatient to leave, then at first I cannot watch. I cover my eyes, but in the end I force myself to look.

Is it feasible that by engaging in a creative project I can liberate myself from such an unwieldy past? This chapter will examine this possibility, both for individuals and for a nation. However, there are others who join me in questioning whether the search for healing is appropriate, particularly when the crime is the Holocaust. Chapter three will explore the debate that surrounds this quest for healing. There are some who believe that it is time to move away from Germany's preoccupation with the past, while others consider that true healing can only take place by incorporating the pain of one's heritage into the existing national identity.

This chapter will investigate these opposing views by considering both the needs of individuals and the German nation as a whole. Subsequently, it will investigate the proliferation of Holocaust memorials and museums, and questions whether they serve to perpetuate notions of shame, or whether they can act as creative projects, which may assist Germans in reconciling with their painful past.

* * *

Sometimes I wonder if it is wrong to think about healing. Surely I ought to feel ashamed and accept responsibility for my past, but the truth is that my shame makes me feel worthless. I do not want to continue carrying such a load of vulnerability so I

search for a way through this confusion – is it possible that writing about the past will release me from this burden? Smith and Watson believe that autobiographical acts can promote healing:

> For those suffering from traumatic or obsessional memories, autobiographical acts can work as therapeutic interventions … speaking or writing about trauma becomes a process through which the narrator finds words to give voice to what was previously unspeakable. And that process can be cathartic … Thus, narrators of trauma often testify to the therapeutic effects of telling or writing a story, acknowledging how the process of writing has changed the narrator and the life story itself.[94]

By shedding light on my unspeakable humiliation, my writing will give words to overwhelming thoughts and feelings, thereby shaping and contextualising experiences that have, up until now, lived in the shadows. Writing about a shameful past, according to Rosamund Dalziell, can be therapeutic, particularly when engaging in the autobiographical act, which has the potential for healing a legacy of shame:

> The threefold experience of risk, trust and release from shame that Lynd[95] identifies is crucial for the interpretation of the autobiographical act as a linguistic expression of therapeutic renewal for the narrating self.[96]

As Dalziell suggests, I hope that writing about my past will enable me to experience a sense of 'therapeutic renewal' as I undergo the process of 'risk, trust and release' as identified by Lynd. Through my writing I will seek acceptance and eventual reconciliation by making my private thoughts available to the public. This ongoing

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[94] Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narrative* (University of Minneapolis Press, 2001), p. 22.

[95] H. M. Lynd, *On Shame and the Search for Identity* (Routledge, 1958), p. 249, as cited in Dalziell, *Shameful Autobiographies.*

[96] Rosamund Dalziell, *Shameful Autobiographies: Shame in Contemporary Australian Autobiographies & Culture* (Melbourne University Press, 1999), p. 242.

process of confrontation and expression, as advocated by Lynd, can begin the process of healing from shame:

> If, however, one can sufficiently risk uncovering oneself and sufficiently trust another person, to seek the means of communicating shame, the risking of exposure can be in itself an experience of release, expansion, self-revelation, a coming forward of belief in oneself.[97]

As I lay open my private dishonour through the act of autobiographical writing, I am aware that I risk the disapproval of my readers. However, if my revelations are understood and accepted, then it is more likely that I will experience a sense of release from my burden.

It is possible that these revelations will be understood and accepted if a narrative is created – making a story out of the disparate pieces of one's existence. All of us have been involved in the act of creating stories from our earliest times,[98] and because of our fascination with narrative it seems inevitable that the separate incidences of our lives will be shaped during the autobiographical act to create a complete story. It is possible then that by creating a story about the difficult aspects of my life, I will give shape to my overwhelming sense of humiliation, thus turning it into a more manageable part of my life.

Being able to view one's life on the page also affords a measure of distance – a chance for the writer to become an observer of self, and consequently not so enmeshed in the traumas of the past. This distancing technique has been effective in the counselling practice of Narrative Therapy, as suggested here by psychology professor Alan Carr: 'Externalising the problem is the central therapeutic technique used … to help clients begin to define their problems as separate from their

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[97] Lynd, p. 242.
[98] Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why we Tell Stories* (*London*, Continuum, 2004), p. 2.

identities'.[99] This technique encourages people to create a new, healing narrative, one that allows them to move on with their lives, rather than being held back by their original, oppressive storyline. Carr acknowledges that this method can:

> Develop … therapeutic solutions to problems, within the narrative frame (that) involves opening up the space for the authoring of alternate stories, the possibility of which has previously been marginalised by the dominant oppressive narrative which maintains the problem.[100]

He believes that when a person's problem is externalised, they can begin to relate to it as separate from their identity.[101] People no longer identify themselves as the problem, because the difficulty becomes separate from the individual's personality.

One way of assisting people to view themselves as separate from their problems is by encouraging them to engage creatively with their internal beliefs and express them in an outward form. The idea or story is laid out on canvas, paper or sculpted in stone, and consequently becomes separate from the creator. It can now be viewed externally. The outward form of an idea also allows for different interpretations to occur, which enables a new understanding of the original internal narrative.

Imaginative separations also encourage a degree of creative license, which can mean that stories are shaped to allow for an alternate ending, and, particularly in shameful autobiographies, the possibility of healing. Within this process, the autobiographer can conceive of a narrative in which forgiveness and redemption may be possible. This notion is extended by James Pennebaker, an authority on therapeutic writing:

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[99] Alan Carr, 'Michael White's Narrative Therapy' in *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 20. 4 (2004), 485-503 (p. 7)
[100] Carr, p. 2.
[101] Carr, p. 7.

> Good narratives or stories … organise seemingly infinite facets of overwhelming events. Once organised the events are often smaller and easier to deal with. Particularly important is that writing moves us to a resolution … it becomes psychologically complete.[102]

As Pennebaker indicates, when we write stories we create an ending, which suggests a sense of closure for the writer. With this in mind, people writing their life stories may be able to minimise the hold that pain and trauma has over them, by creating a sense of completion.

A discussion about this style of therapeutic writing can be seen in the article *Art as a Way of Life,* written by women's studies academic Tuija Saresma. In preparation for writing the above article, Saresma read the story of Sirpa, a young, bereaved woman whose baby daughter died in her crib. The mother's grief was profound, eating its way into her identity until she convinced herself that she was a bad parent. In Sirpa's autobiography she explains why she had to create: 'I needed to write, to construct a new identity as a survivor.'[103] Sirpa externalised her story through writing, thus opening the way for a new, more hopeful interpretation. This young woman constructed a survivor identity, which enabled her to cope with her grief. As we can see through this discussion, writing allows us to create a story out of the shards of our experience, thus fashioning a narrative that will have a beginning, middle and most importantly, an end. Writer and literature academic, Marilyn Chandler, promotes the healing potential of such narratives:

> Designing and telling a life story is a purgative, reconstructive, integrative, transformative activity. The basic requirements of narrative—pattern, structure, closure, coherence, balance—

[102] James Pennebaker, *Opening Up: the Healing Power of Expressing Emotions* (Guildford Press, NY, 1990), p. 103.
[103] Tuija Saresma, 'Art as a Way of Life: Bereavement & the Healing Power of Arts & Writing'in *Qualitative Inquiry* 9 (2003), 603-620 (p. 615).

> all engage a writer in creating a whole out of fragments of experience.[104]

It is this process of creating a complete narrative from our fragmented experiences, which can contribute to a healed and reconstructed identity, which allows for the possibility of an alternative therapeutic ending.

Members of the second or third generation of Germany's victims and perpetrators have created such narratives, stories that emanate from their inherited pain. These chronicles have been carved in stone, acted out on the screen or stage, etched in a book or stretched out on canvas. They are all autobiographical acts that speak about the country's traumatic past and how it has transformed individual lives. In an act of therapeutic understanding the past is recreated, consequently bringing the story into the present, and making history immediate. These acts of creation come from a decision to speak—to make public the thoughts that were once unspeakable. Auschwitz survivor, Primo Levi, had this to say about the cathartic nature of his writing:

> My very writing became a different adventure … It was exalting to search and find, or create the right word, that is, commensurate, concise and strong; to dredge up events from my memory and describe them with the greatest rigor and the least clutter. Paradoxically, my baggage of atrocious memories became a wealth, a seed; it seemed to me, that, by writing, I was growing like a plant.[105]

As a survivor of the Holocaust, Levi witnessed many unspeakable acts; it would have been natural to suppress those atrocious memories, instead he chose to delve into his baggage of pain, allowing his reminiscences to act as a catalyst for his writing. The catharsis that came from this creative act allowed him to grow like a plant. Many

[104]Marilyn Chandler, 'A healing art: therapeutic dimensions of autobiography' in *Auto/Biography Studies*, 5.1, 4-14. (p. 6), cited in *Recuperating Writers – and writing: the potential of writing therapy*, by Ffion Murphy and Philip Neilsen, TEXT, 12.1 (2008), p. 14.

[105] Primo Levi, *Periodic Table*, Trans by Raymond Rosenthal (Schoken Books, NY, 1984), p. 153.

other survivors of the Shoah have been encouraged to explore their past, no matter how painful, as a way of healing long-term effects of their devastation. In 1979, Dr. Dori Laub, a survivor of the Holocaust and an Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Yale, co-founded the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies where thousands of Jewish survivors recorded their testaments. Laub later reflected on the importance of victims relating their stories of personal suffering:

> There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to *tell* and thus come to *know* one's story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life.[106]

Whereas Laub encourages people to confess their past as a way of living their lives more fully, French philosopher Michel Foucalt believes that, when human beings are encouraged to confess and seek absolution from those around them, this act creates an unequal power structure between the teller and the listener.[107] People who hear confession, such as stories of trauma and loss, are able to pass judgement and give absolution, much like the Catholic priest who sits in the confessional. The ability to hear stories of trauma and dispense understanding, and in some cases forgiveness, is an influential position and may lead to a continuing hunger for stories of trauma and shame in an act of voyeurism. This hunger has created an age of confession, a period when narratives that explore the difficulties of our lives are encouraged.[108]

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[106] Dori Laub, 'Truth & testimony: the Process and the Struggle' in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 63.
[107] Michel Foucalt, *The History of Sexuality: an introduction,* trans. from French by Robert Hurley (Vintage Books, NY, 1990), p. 59-60.
[108] Foucalt, p. 59-60.

Because I belong to this 'age of confession' I have chosen to face my inheritance of guilt, accept it and make its pain an integral part of me. I write because I want to make sense of it; to see it from every angle, because nothing should be left under its long shadow. I have never really faced it before, but now I will bring it into the light. Rosamund Dalziell encourages this encounter:

> Autobiographical confrontation with shame has the potential to open up festering wounds within society, overcoming denial and facilitating healing, tolerance and reconciliation.[109]

I am participating in the act of auto/biography as part of my healing process because I no longer wish to carry a shame that does not belong to me. My profound sense of disgrace stems from an understanding of what the Nazis did, but I will no longer let that knowledge repress me. This belief is underlined by literary theorist, Shoshana Felman, who asserts that 'the capacity to witness and the act of bearing witness in themselves embody some remedial quality and belong already, in obscure ways, to the healing process.'[110] Felman seems to suggest that bearing witness is an integral part of healing. The decision to expose our shame or trauma marks the beginning of our reparation, because our determination to speak indicates that we no longer want to bury or repress our pain.

Writing challenges the hidden burden of shame by exposing it and creating a story that allows for a new way of behaving. As previously mentioned, many critics have pointed to the cathartic role that story-telling can play in addressing shame and healing wounds.[111] Bishop Desmond Tutu has reflected on the work of South

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[109] Dalziell, p. 11.
[110] Laub, p. 4.
[111] For examples of this theory see James Pennebaker, *Opening Up: the Healing Power of Expressing Emotions*, 1990;Inger Agger, *The Blue Room: Trauma and Testimony among Refugee Women, a Psychosocial Exploration*, 1992; Alan Carr, 'Michael White's Narrative Therapy', in *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 2004; Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories*, 1999;

Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and now realises, 'how the act of telling one's story has a cathartic, healing effect'.[112] This is because the teller requires a listener, a reader – someone who has the potential to understand and possibly absolve.

But why do second and third-generation Germans look for absolution, and can the creative act provide this? The blood of the Holocaust is not on their hands; nevertheless, many continue to carry the millstone of shame associated with the death of so many. As previously discussed in Chapter One, shame is an intense emotion that challenges our identity, consuming us with a belief that we are flawed, and in some way faulty.[113] Law professor Roy Brookes examines the trauma that many Germans feel when experiencing feelings of shame:

> So painful and enduring is the moral stain on the German soul that it may lend some truth to Socrates' argument that it is better to be the victim than the perpetrator of an injustice.[114]

As previously indicated, many Germans are burdened with a legacy of shame about their parents' and grandparents' war-time activities, and this traumatic legacy has shaped the way they see themselves, both as individuals and as a nation. When Daniel Bar-On, an Israeli psychologist, interviewed sons and daughters of Germans alive during World War II, he discovered many stories of inherited shame. The following quotes are examples from his interviews:

> … I didn't comprehend them at all. That is an abyss I can't explain … The satanic dimensions

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Shoshana Felman & Dori Laub MD, *Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*,1992; Sara Haslan & Derek Neale, *Life Writing*, 2009; Nicola King, *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self*, 2000; Primo Levi, *If this is a Man*, 1959; Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide to Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2001.

[112] Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (Rider, London, 1999), p. 226.

[113] Dalziell, p. 253.

[114] Roy Brookes (ed.), *When Sorry Isn't Enough: the Controversy over Apologies and reparation for Human Injustice* (NY Uni Press, 1999), p. 3.

> become visible and manifest for me in this somehow … the terrible abyss, the horrible depths that can open up in a human being (p. 191).
>
> … this suffering became even more intense when I realised that I was a member of such a band of murderers and criminals (p. 207).
>
> … I would be afraid they would place me on the same level (as my father). That people would despise me; find me detestable, because of him (p. 280).[115]

Bar-On listened to these stories of humiliation and fear and heard how members of the German post-war generation had been shaped by their past. The burden of this difficult past is highlighted by Saul Friedlander, who argues:

> Nazism has become the central metaphor for evil in our time … the extermination of the Jews of Europe … is now widely perceived as the standard of evil by which all degrees of evil may be judged.[116]

Because of this label, the entire country has been linked to the shame associated with being German. I would therefore suggest that it is the country's collective identity which needs to reconcile with its past.

If this is the case, then, just as creative projects may liberate individuals from a painful past; it may be possible that by engaging in various forms of creativity on a state level, a nation can be released from the shackles of traumatic memory and its associated identity of shame. Rosamund Dalziell has suggested that writing auto/biographies about feelings of shame can act as a vehicle for coming to terms

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[115] Daniel Bar-On, *Legacy of Silence: Encounters with Children of the Third Reich* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1989), page numbers in text

[116] Saul Friedlander, 'History, memory and the historian: facing the Shoah', in *Disturbing Remains: Memory, History and Crisis in the Twentieth Century,* ed. by Michael S. Roth & Charles G. Salas (Getty Research Institute, LA, 2001) p. 276.

with a burden of humiliation.[117] This individual creative undertaking can be viewed as a personal act of redemption, but how does a country's identity heal from its difficult past? As Germany attempts to resolve the problems associated with Nazism, something may begin to take place that is akin to the autobiographical act, but on a national level. Just as participating creatively in stories about the past can assist people to reflect on their legacy, so can imaginatively expressing a 'national self-understanding'[118] of a country's history, through the creative building of memorials, assist the German community in coming to terms with the burden of a negative national identity.

However, given the trauma associated with WWII, one wonders if it is possible to use autobiographical and therapeutic writing to heal from such a burden. One may also question the appropriateness of seeking healing when the crime is the murder of six million people. This uncertainty was highlighted during an interview I conducted for this project early in 2011. I spoke to a middle-aged German man, now living in Australia; this was his response: 'I am ashamed of being German. I identify myself as a European – I don't mix with other Germans.'[119] This man felt deeply the humiliation associated with being German. He believed that the German people had no right to seek healing from their painful collective identity. The atrocities committed by his country should never be forgiven or forgotten.

This man's belief is underlined by some second-generation Jews who still carry with them the painful memories of their parents' suffering under Hitler's policy of genocide. They are fearful that if modern Germans cease to remember their past, the conditions that led to the Holocaust could rise again. This fear is exemplified by Louise Adler, who travelled with her Jewish mother to Berlin in an effort to lay the

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[117] Dalziell, p. 11.
[118] Graeme Davidson, 'What should a National Museum do: Learning from the World' in *Memory, Monuments and Museums,* ed. by Marilyn Lake (Melbourne University Press, 2006), p. 107.
[119] Interview conducted with author, 2011.

ghosts of her traumatic past to rest. Louise was advised by a friend to come to Germany with an open heart:

> Was she suggesting that the past was the past, that if the Holocaust was history I should let bygones be bygones? …What honour or respect or pity would I offer these victims if I let the past retreat? Is that what I owe to the memory of my family … Are all these victims to be set aside as an ugly chapter in the history of Western European civilisation? Or should they be kept alive, right at the centre of our hearts as an enduring cautionary tale? [120]

Obviously, for Adler, the idea of reconciling with the perpetrators of her family's sorrow was unthinkable. She was determined to carry with her the memory of her mother's pain. The Holocaust is a 'cautionary tale', and Adler is convinced that by forgetting the Shoah, the Holocaust could happen again. Unfortunately, carrying the pain of the past does not guarantee a future free from suffering, and meanwhile, the second generation are encouraged to 'remember' a story that is not theirs, in the belief that by connecting with their family's past they can expiate their shame, or make up for the trauma their families have suffered.

Adler's concerns seem to be underlined by those who say it is wrong to write about the Holocaust, to imagine it or to change it.[121] They believe that an event such as the Shoah should not be dealt with imaginatively; to do so risks minimalising its effect, and belittles the experience of millions of Jews who died at the hands of the Nazis. Nevertheless, as a second-generation German coping with my inherited humiliation, I concur with Margery Fee, who believes that:

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[120] Louise Adler, 'Return to Berlin' (Good Weekend), *The Age* (September 27 2008), p. 63.

[121] Numerous writers have been concerned about this, e.g. Theodor Adorno in his 1949 essay *Cultural Criticism and Society.* Victoria Elmwood also suggests in 'Happy, Happy ever after: the transformation of trauma between the generations in Art Spiegelman's *Maus'* that there is a 'danger of trivialising the effects of trauma.' *Biography*, 27.4 (Fall 2004), p. 718.

> The needs of the present generation must rank as important as respecting the needs of the past. Our hope lies in the future, a healing of guilt and shame, not tip toeing around the dead as if they are sacred objects.[122]

While Fee suggests that the needs of the present are as important as those of the past, there are some who continue to treat the Holocaust as sacred, approaching the subject with a high degree of reverence. It is therefore hardly surprising that, when some artists and writers choose to represent the atrocities of WWII creatively, they are accused of changing the past to suit their own needs. Nevertheless, their motives remain the same: to represent the events of war in order to make sense of their inheritance, and hopefully to draw lessons from their past. Most creators of the Holocaust story do not forget or trivialise that tragedy; rather, they are in the act of incorporating their memories of the past into their present as a way of understanding and managing the Shoah's long shadow.

It is difficult for those who came after the war to pinpoint a time when they first realised that their lives had been touched by the war's long shadow. However, that realisation marked a transition from naivety to understanding, as the post-war generation began to comprehend the immensity of the crimes they were associated with. James E. Young, professor of English and Judaic studies, comments:

> This generation of artists, writers, architects and even composers does not attempt to represent events it never knew immediately, but instead portrays its own, necessarily hyper-mediated experiences of memory. It is no longer willing, or able to recall the Holocaust separately from the ways it has been passed down.[123]

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[122]Margery Fee, 'Who Can Write as Others?' in *Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, & Helen Tiffin (Routledge, London, 2006), p. 170.

[123] James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art & Architecture* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2000), p. 1.

These artists know the 'story' of the Holocaust, but they also recall the moment when they first discovered their shameful legacy. Thus, the act of transmission becomes part of their story, as the present is blended with the past. Young believes that because of the mediated nature of their knowledge, these post-war artists inevitably create works that blur the boundaries between fact and the moment of its telling, which sometimes results in abstract creations that attempt to communicate the experience of belonging to Germany's post-war generation, who discovered vicariously the horrors of their parents' war. According to Young:

> Some will see such work as a supremely evasive, even self-indulgent art by a generation more absorbed in its vicarious experience of memory than by a survivor's experience of real events.[124]

This can be unsettling for those who expect realistic portrayals of their painful history. Abstract story-work may look as if it is trying to avoid confrontation with the truth of the Holocaust, but post-war artists are simply telling the story from their perspective, as the recipients of their parents' shame and grief. Young's belief is highlighted by an examination of David Levinthal's photographic collection entitled *Mein Kampf.* As a boy Leinthal played with toy soldiers. He believes this childhood pastime helped him to work through the horror of his parents' war-time experiences.[125]

Representations of Germany's war-time past have, by necessity, been mediated and at times, imagined, as those involved in WWII are no longer able to tell their stories. As seen by the Levinthal example, these new narratives, created by post-war authors, often include their own childhood memories and centre on the family, rather than being anchored in traditional and historical aspects of cultural and

[124] Young, p. 3.
[125] Young, p. 44.

national memory. These narratives explore the links between the public and private sphere, and how they relate to one another. As previously discussed, these family narratives sometimes explore the notion of Germans as victims, and emanate from the feelings of loyalty and understanding that the third generation has for its grandparents. Of course, other narratives have been written in a more accusatory style, such as Christoph Meckel's *Suchbild.* In this collection of stories, published in 1983, the author looks back critically, examining the impact of war on families' lives. Meckel writes evocatively about the legacy of war on post-conflict German families:

> The war had ruined the families. The fathers staggered back home, meeting their children who rejected them as intruders. They were exhausted and had nothing positive to communicate. The place that had been reserved for the father was now taken by a person who was alien and hostile or shattered and who assumed the role of educator—that was hardly credible. Damaged marriages and disturbed feelings, ruins, hunger and bad prospects, socks ten times darned and cold stoves—how could there have been a sense of joy in the families?[126]

Meckel paints a picture of the despair felt by the second generation, but now the third generation is sufficiently removed from the memories of war to narrate their stories from a different position. This healing practice has been achieved through the process of re-imagining the past. Anne Fuchs believes:

> It is important to note that the process of working through no longer requires historically verifiable remembrance of what happened, but embraces an imaginary mediation and recreation of the past.[127]

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[126] Christoph Meckel, *Suchbild* (Fisher, Frankfurt, 1983), p. 28.

[127] Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse: the Politics of Memory* (Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, 2008), p. 48.

However, such creations have ignited debates—whose story is it and where are the facts? These conversations question the legitimacy of dialogues with dead relatives, and are concerned that creations of fantasy may trivialise Jewish suffering.

In spite of this controversy, narratives of this type are still being written. Fuchs suggests that stories which explore the nature of families in post-war Germany have been constructed from a 'therapeutic impulse'[128]; a need to heal the burden of transmitted memory. Because of this concept of family loyalty, the desire for healing has been extended in some cases to the parents and grandparents, as some members of the younger generation have chosen to overlook individual crimes of the past. This concept is underlined by lawyer and author Bernhard Schlink:

> Tension exists especially for the perpetrators' children and grandchildren; they know their parents and grandparents should be condemned but they still love them too much, know them too well, not to want to understand them and in their understanding they tend towards clemency.[129]

Anne Fuchs also mentions this phenomenon in *Phantoms of War*, when she discusses an empirical study conducted by Harald Welzer in 2003, in which forty families were interviewed, all who had at least one member who was strongly involved with the National Socialist Party. It appears from this study that personal loyalty has softened the family's reaction to their parents/grandparents. The grandchildren's response has also been affected by the length of time that has lapsed since WWII; consequently, those shameful events have become distant and less threatening. This emotional distance from the event is reflected in their writing.[130]

This sense of emotional distance is not always felt by second-generation survivors. Louise Adler states the following belief:

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[128] Fuchs, p. 39.
[129] Bernhard Schlink, *Guilt about the Past* (University Queensland Press, 2009), p. 83.
[130] Fuchs, p. 5.

> No balance sheet can write off or make good this bad debt. Not that this logic has prevented the German government from attempting to put a line through the Holocaust, rule it off once and for all.[131]

For Adler, a second-generation Jew, the possibility of forgiving the German people is something she is unable to consider. Nevertheless, there are some Jews who believe that the time for forgiveness and healing has arrived—for themselves and for their children, and this is often achieved through the avenue of dialogue and story-telling. Because some Jews believe that forgiveness and understanding between victim and perpetrator are an important part of the healing process, they have created dialogue groups between Germans and Jews that can facilitate a process of reconciliation. These discussions appear to be having some positive outcomes, as suggested by one participant:

> The Holocaust is a significant point of Jewish history, but this atrocity does not suffice to define us, and we do believe that Germans cannot solely be defined by the National Socialist period.[132]

These dialogue groups take the form of individual story-telling, thus echoing the importance of narrative as a healing force. Many of these dialogues have been initiated by Jewish people who realise that they cannot move on with their lives until they confront and possibly re-construct the past.

As previously suggested, when a person imaginatively recreates the past in an act of autobiography, it is possible for them to re-author their story and alter the narrative that has caused them so much heartache. As a result, members of the second and third generation of Germans can now respond to their legacy of shame

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[131] Adler, p. 57.
[132] Ruth Goldman, *And these are Jews*, documentary, <http://www.AndTheseAreJews.com> [viewed on You Tube, 18/7/2011]

from the vantage of hindsight, and construct their own meanings from the trauma bequeathed to them. For many, this can mean taking part in the act of therapeutic story-telling, believing that the way forward is via the path of creativity, and as Annette Kuhn advocates, 'telling stories about the past, our past … is a key moment in the making of ourselves.'[133] Kuhn underlines the importance of telling stories, believing that it is an integral part of our identity-making process.[134] In an earlier section in this chapter, I illustrated how constructing stories can play a significant role in an individual's personality development; now I want to turn my attention to the construction of a national identity, with a particular focus on Germany. Is it possible that a country can externalise its repressed pain as a mechanism for reconciliation with the past? Can creative projects, which seem to be an effective tool for healing individuals, also assist nations in coming to terms with their painful history? One way of openly expressing the nation's preoccupation is through building memorials, which externalise the country's anxieties. In *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration,* the authors suggest that these visible representations of a difficult past may serve to reinforce a nation's identity:

> War memory … is a practice bound up with rituals of national identification and a key element in the symbolic repertoire available to the nation-state for binding its citizens into a collective national identity. On the other hand, war memory and commemoration is held to be significant primarily for psychological reasons, as an expression of mourning, being a human response to the death and suffering that war engenders on a vast scale.[135]

Within Germany, an external and national expression of mourning may assist those people, who are caught up in an ongoing grief, to realise they are not alone. This

[133] Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (Verso, London, 2002), p. 2.
[134] Kuhn, p. 2.
[135] T. G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson & Michael Roper (eds.), *The Politics of War Memory & Commemoration* (Routledge, London, 2000), p. 4.

difficulty is a national concern. Of course, memorials in Germany are obviously designed to serve a multitude of functions: as previously suggested, they are an expression of mourning, a way of remembering the terrible events of the past that affected so many; they have been built to sustain a sense of national identity, thus binding the country's citizens together. But there are some who question whether or not these war memorials actually achieve their aim. The wealth of public monuments, aimed at fostering awareness and creating responsibility may actually have the opposite effect, as people become desensitised through over-exposure.

A proliferation of these war memorials has been designed to act as reminders of Germany's guilty past, and has mainly been constructed by an anxious second-generation wanting to actively display its sorrow and regret. Memorialisation of Germany's guilt has also led to a wealth of museums and memorials being built in other parts of the world, as each nation begin to narrate the repercussions of WWII on their own citizens. Today, these memorials play an ongoing role in shaping wartime memories worldwide, as they continue to retell the stories of Nazi terror and Jewish victimisation. Jeffrey Herf, a specialist in European intellectual history, discusses the reason for building such memorials:

> The West German quest for post-war international recognition included increasing public memory of the crimes of the Nazi past … (they) understood that public acknowledgement of the truth about those crimes was a moral but also a practical precondition for international acceptance.[136]

Herf believes that international acceptance of post-war Germany has been conditionally tied to an obvious and external representation of repentance. However, some people are concerned that the number of Holocaust museums built across the

[136] Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: the Nazi Past in the two Germanys* (Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1997), p. 388.

world to remember the Jews who lost their lives during the Shoah, also serves to increase Germany's sense of shame, and is linked to the belief that post-war Germans must continue to pay for the sins of their parents. Many Germans believe that the time for an overt display of national contrition is over. However, the philosopher, Jurgen Habermas considers that it is necessary for his country to continue remembering its past:

> Our own life is linked to the life context in which Auschwitz is possible, not by contingent circumstances, but intrinsically. Our form of life is connected with that of our parents and grandparents, through a web of familial, local, political and intellectual traditions that is difficult to disentangle—that is a historical milieu that made us what and who we are today. None of us can escape this milieu, because our identities, both as individuals and as Germans are indissolubly interwoven with it.[137]

Habermas believes that Germans should not try to escape their inheritance. Their legacy is binding and inescapable. Those who agree with Habermas have gone on to ensure that there are visible reminders of the Holocaust throughout Germany that link people with their unruly past. Pavements contain markers called 'Golden Stones', each tablet commemorating the Jews living on that street who were taken by the Nazis. Railway stations display memorials to Jews transported on trains to their deaths. Cafes and restaurants hang plaques on their walls telling their customers that this business was once owned by Jews. And in the middle of Berlin stands a collection of grey slabs, designed to remind people of the terrors of the Holocaust. This Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is the size of a football field. As you walk through the corridors of grey, the footpath seems to slip away, and the precarious blocks look like they will topple, crushing you under their misery. This

[137] Jurgen Habermas & Jeremy Leaman, 'Concerning the Public Use of History' in *New German Critique*, spring-summer issue 44 (1988), 40-50 (p. 43)

latest testament to the evils of Nazi Germany is controversial, partly because of its size, but also because of its position in the centre of Berlin. While some agree with Habermas, saying that it is important to continue remembering the murder of six million Jews, others believe it is time to lay Germany's Nazi past to rest.

This deliberation about the best way to manage the country's past has seen a lively and extended discussion about the most appropriate way to manage Germany's legacy. Consequently, when James E. Young was invited to speak at a colloquium in Berlin in 1997, as part of the protracted debate which preceded the erection of the monument, he said:

> You may have failed to produce a monument … but … it is clear that the process has already generated more individual memory work than a finished monument will inspire in its first ten years. [138]

As Young suggests, the building of memorials is a way of turning private stories into national narratives, and these individual stories can have a far-reaching effect. The disputes, as recognised by Young, are as significant as the eventual construction of the commemorative monument. These discussions, which engage with a national recognition of shame, can assist individuals to express their feelings about their personal humiliation and this individual memory work, generated by a sense of uncertainty about the best way to memorialise the Holocaust, has encouraged personal engagement with the national story of regret. Each individual encounter eventually joins with the communal act of remembering, and this may lead to a national reconciliation with Germany's troubled past. In turn, these communal memories have begun to constitute a national story that can act as an aide to personal and collective healing.

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[138] Young, p. 193.

Some younger Germans, however, feel overwhelmed by the nation's constant engagement with its past. This has led to some third-generation Germans feeling unsure about the most appropriate way to relate to the Holocaust. What does it mean to constantly be identified with the country of your birth? Psychologists James Liu and Emma Dressler-Hawke believe that this is an ongoing dilemma for some young Germans, particularly as they relate to people from other countries.[139] How should they respond to a past given to them by their humiliated parents, and a country struggling to come to terms with its unruly heritage? School visits to concentration camps and Holocaust museums have formed an integral part of their education, saturating them with death camp images until the impact may be dulled.

The third generation's confusion is highlighted by Jens Pieper, editor of *Nobody Asked Us*, a book written by a group of young Germans:

> It could well be that, in the end; we arrive at the same fundamental meaning of the Holocaust as did the preceding generation. However … today, the way this must happen is by each individual understanding the Holocaust through a personal quest—not triggered by a forced confrontation with some pictures from Auschwitz, but from an education that makes us understand that Germans carry a particular responsibility because of a horrible past.[140]

Pieper suggests that understanding the Holocaust should be an individual quest, and the German people should not be continually confronted by public displays of shame. His ideas are echoed by Nancy Wood when she warns against the risks of keeping the Nazi past under the spotlight. She suggests that over-exposure can lead to

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[139] Emma Dressler-Hawke & James Liu, 'Collective Shame and the Positioning of German National Identity' in *Psicologia Politica*, 32 (2006), 131-153,(p. 150).

[140] Peter Rigny, 'Frontline' (interview with Jens Pieper, ed. of *Nobody Asked Us*, collated by students at Humboldt University) <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/germans/germans/shoulddo.html [viewed 31 May, 2005]

trivialisation, distortion of knowledge, voyeurism and a familiarity, which in turn leads to contempt.[141]

However, others consider that outward expressions of contrition in Germany, via national commemoration, can be seen as state-sponsored creative acts that are designed to promote the country's reconciliation with its past. Germans visiting these memorials are given an opportunity to engage with these creations. Such encounters may afford them an opportunity for contemplation, and a chance to reconsider their national story. These cultural institutions have been funded and built by the nation state, and consequently portray a state-approved national story. Graeme Davison considers this in his following discussion:

> A country with the courage to face its past, and the *imagination* to look beyond its own borders … the national museum can become a place, not just for celebrating the Nation's triumphs, or even its collective sins, but also for confessing the ways in which the nation is itself constituted and reproduced through its collective memories (my italics).[142]

Davison cites Germany as an example of a country that is actively engaging with the past—dealing openly with its Nazi legacy and portraying it in such a way as to encourage citizens to feel a sense of shame and mourning about their national story.[143] Rosamund Dalziell's conviction about individual testimony[144] can apply equally to the national story:

> The … telling of shameful stories may constitute a form of testimony to suffering and injustice that transcends the experience of the individual

[141] Nancy Wood, *Vectors of Memory: Legacies of trauma in post war Europe* (Berg, Oxford, 1999), p. 92
[142] Graeme Davison, 'What Should a National Museum do? Learning from the World' in *Memory, Monuments and Museums: the Past in the Present,* ed. by Marilyn Lake (Melbourne University Press, 2006), p. 108.
[143] Davison, p. 108.
[144] Dalziell, p. 11.

> narrator. Such confrontation with shame may open up festering wounds within society, thereby overcoming denial and facilitating healing, tolerance and reconciliation … this painful emotion is difficult, individually and socially. However, if such a confrontation does occur, it can lead to a deeper self-knowledge and a greater recognition of shared humanity.[145]

The state-sponsored museum or memorial site can constitute 'a form of testimony to suffering and injustice'[146], which reflects the government's desire to communicate the national story. Within modern Germany these cultural sites of mourning are designed to reinforce the country's shame and contrition about the Holocaust.

Consequently, Germany's memorials can be thought of as sites that not only may initiate healing and reconciliation, but also act as a warning against the evils of a dictatorship. And in many cases, because of their artistic conception – as exemplified by Daniel Liebskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin, or The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe – these constructions can be places that enable personal confrontation and possible reconciliation with the individual's past. Because these modern architectural creations allow for individual interpretation of their meanings, Young considers that the possibility of personal reflection is more likely. He believes in the importance of abstract art that allows for distinctive readings:

> The pillars … remain undetermined and open to many readings: they are alternately stones, pillars, blank tablets, walls and segments. This said, in their abstract forms, they will nevertheless accommodate the references projected onto them by the visitors.[147]

The likelihood of personal understandings, as suggested by Young, makes it possible that visitors to these memorials will creatively incorporate this confrontation with the

[145] Dalziell, p. 274.
[146] Dalziell, p. 274.
[147] Young, p. 212.

Holocaust into their personal narrative and move forward, incrementally, towards reconciliation with their country's past.

Through re-creating the past and encouraging people to interact with it, museums like the Deutsche Historisches can give post-war Germans the opportunity to connect with historical objects on display that belonged to their parents' and grandparents' generation. It is possible that they can imbue them with personal meaning that relates to their individual narratives. The curator of the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin believes that creativity is the way forward for post-war generations who were not involved in the original atrocities:

> You cannot mourn psychologically for something you didn't do … I believe in dealing with the past symbolically and artistically.[148]

Part of a museum's role is to convey cultural meaning and to disseminate ideas about the nation's past as well as its future; it is therefore possible that these institutions could, particularly in Germany, act as catalysts for national healing by dealing with the past symbolically and artistically.

Other sites of memory, such as The Silent Heroes Museum in Berlin, show its citizens that not all Germans were perpetrators; some were rescued, resisting in small and mighty ways the National Socialist Party. Though this museum is small in comparison to Berlin's Jewish Museum it nevertheless has become a site of reconciliation; a place that can give hope to its viewers. Visitors are able to come away believing that not all Germans were perpetrators, that some had the courage to resist. The Silent Heroes Museum is part of the German Resistance Memorial Central Foundation, which commemorates the small groups of Germans, including Sophie Scholl and Colonel von Stauffenberg, who defied the Nazi regime. Many paid for

[148] Cited in Buruma, p. 237.

this act of courage with their lives. For Germans involved in these exhibitions their sense of national and personal shame can be partially assuaged by these museum experiences. As suggested by Davison these museums can:

> Offer suggestive models of how nations can think about the past, avoiding the simplification of either triumphalism or catastrophism, offering us a place for reflection before we are hastened to a judgement or pushed towards a preconceived conclusion.[149]

Until recently, places of remembrance within Germany have focused on their nation as a place of perpetrators and onlookers. No place existed to tell the stories of those who were the exception. Historically, most museums, as underlined by Davison, have mirrored the conservative concerns of their nation, rather than acting as sites of potential social change, but gradually this has altered. Moira Simpson suggests that recently the 'activities of new museums go beyond the role of museum and cultural centre and deal with issues of social, political and economic importance.'[150] In light of this new mission, it is possible that museums in Germany can assist people to heal from the problems associated with trans-generational shame.

These smaller places of remembering, such as the Silent Heroes Museum, can offer people an opportunity to hear individual stories, examples of oral histories that are quietly imbedded within the nation's narrative. By listening, visitors hear stories of resistance that go against the perceived identity of war-time Germans. However, this is a risky activity, because it is possible that viewers will minimise the willingness of most Germans to follow Hitler, and hence, downplay the fact that most Germans were perpetrators or bystanders. It is important to keep the ratio of rescuers and perpetrators in balance, and this is underlined by Dr Beate Kosmala, the

[149] Davison, p. 105.
[150] Moira Simpson, *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* (Routledge, London, 2001), p. 75.

curator of the Silent Heroes Museum.[151] She is concerned that while people are viewing stories of rescue they might forget that most Germans supported Nazism, but in a city that is synonymous with Holocaust memorials, this is difficult to imagine. It is possible that this museum can play a small part in offsetting the nation's shame by telling and receiving narratives of rescue.

Though the inherent risks of highlighting these individual stories of resistance are apparent, both on a personal and national level, they display a move towards national healing which has been a conscious act, stemming from a belief that the time for shame and grief is over, or out of place three generations after the initial crimes of war were committed. But when the crime is the Holocaust, a cloud of uncertainty hangs over the process of restitution. Feelings of bitterness and anger, the result of Jewish genocide, are not so easily repaired.

A third generation of Germans are still dealing with this legacy of sorrow. Standing alongside their feelings of shame are the inherited traumas of the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. It appears as though members of both groups are working towards healing their inheritance, a fallout from war that was silenced over sixty years ago. It is hoped that as individuals and nations engage creatively with their past, they will be able to find peace through the process of reconciling with their legacy of pain.

This gradual process of reconciliation may have allowed Germany to display a newly discovered and rather fragile patriotic pride. This was highlighted in the events that surrounded the 2006 World Cup:

> Hundreds of thousands of flags in black, red and gold are flying over town squares in Germany, where crowds of Germans are enthusiastically cheering, 'Deutschland! Deutschland!' In the

[151] Sarah Wildman, *Hanni's Story,* blog entry, 27/1/11, <http://www.slate.com/id/2282613> [viewed 25 July 2011].

> past, such a sight would be greeted by the rest of the world with anxiousness, even fear … images of patriotic Germans bring back dark memories of the Third Reich's dominance over Europe … But all of that has changed. The past four weeks of the just-concluded World Cup soccer tournament has changed Germany's self-perception … German patriotism has experienced a surprisingly … peaceful resurrection … People from all over gathered together in the public viewing areas to watch the matches, and no one felt ashamed about this massive display of the new-Germanness … [152]

Here, journalist Martin Wachtelborn discusses Germany's precarious patriotic pride as he observes the delicate balancing the country engages in when juggling the needs of the past and the present. He even suggests that outsiders are watching in case patriotism turns into nationalism. That is what everyone is afraid of.

* * *

This chapter has explored the ways in which repressed trauma can be managed, by suggesting that victims engage in creative projects such as autobiography. It has suggested that the creative act is able to externalise previously unspoken pain. Once the trauma is brought into the open it can be given a shape. It becomes a story, with a beginning, middle and end. Now the narrative of pain is separated from the author, and the unexpressed trauma loosens its hold over the victim.

It has also examined the possibility that similar techniques may be used to assist a country in coming to terms with its difficult past. This chapter acknowledges the ongoing debate about memorialisation within Germany, and recognises that some people believe that the time has come to move away from the shadow of the

[152] Martin Wachtelborn, 'World Cup Revives Patriotism in Germany' in *San Francisco Chronicle*, p. 9, July 12, 2006 <http://articles.sfgate.com/2006-07-12/opinion/17301755_1_germans-hamburg-andmun> [viewed May 2011].

Holocaust, whereas others consider that the Shoah should become a part of what it means to be German.

In spite of, or because of these debates and creative acts, some third-generation Germans are displaying a new-found and fragile sense of patriotism. They are gradually moving away from the shadow of the Shoah.

Conclusion

When I started this project I was only aware of a personal sense of shame, one which seemed to overwhelm me every time I connected with the Holocaust. At that stage, I did not realise that many second and third-generation Germans also felt guilty on their parents' behalf for the crimes committed during WWII. It was only when I began researching into the lives of other post-war Germans that I came to realise that I was one of many. The Shoah was considered to be one of humanity's most horrific crimes. The abhorrence with which this knowledge was received by the rest of the world set Germany and the Germans apart. Consequently, the shadow of the Shoah has cast a long pall and people today are still feeling humiliated by their association with a country that was the cause of so much devastation. A shame of this magnitude can instigate its own trauma, one which results in an unwillingness to say where you have come from, a constant need to apologise for one's identity, and a fear that within you lies the possibility of terrible evil. It is because of this trauma that my thesis has explored whether or not people's involvement in creative projects can liberate them from such a painful past. As I engaged in this project and learnt the extent of Germany's sorrow, I hoped that my personal confrontation with my unwieldy past would have far-reaching effects. Maybe it would have the capacity to influence others who have also been enveloped by a sense of disgrace, so that they could work towards healing their own legacy of second-generation dishonour.

My confrontation with my own deep humiliation, via my creative writing, has enabled me to explore my mother's story and imagine myself in her shoes. Would I have acted any differently if I had lived in Berlin during WWII? My creative project has facilitated a shift in my inherent perceptions of my mother, from condemnation to empathy. Of course, because of my mother's reluctance to speak about the past, I

am not sure how she managed her war. Nevertheless, my research has encouraged me to avoid 'tip toeing' around the dead as if they are sacred objects.[153] I have written, unashamedly, in my mother's voice in order to heal myself from the burden of a difficult past. Has this worked—am I healed? It is difficult to judge, as my undertaking is not a scientific experiment with predictable outcomes; how does one accurately measure any shifts in human attitude? I do know that I am proud now to say that my mother was German; I own a T shirt with the logo 'I love Berlin' emblazoned across the front, and I look forward to the day when I can spend a year living in Germany and enjoy her resurrected engagement with the avant-garde.

Of course, as I have indicated in my exegesis, there are still times when I cringe. When I watch Holocaust films or connect with Jewish people who still bear the scars of terrible trauma I am overwhelmed afresh, but I believe that this reaction is no longer linked to a feeling of shame; instead, I now feel a deep sense of empathy. There is an acknowledgement that we are all linked by a terrible past that continues to affect us.

My creative and exegetical project has gone through many phases. Initially, I just wanted to understand my mother's Germany. She had kept most of her past a secret, so I had to uncover her story by conducting interviews, watching films and reading widely on relevant topics. As I engaged with each new piece of information, I recorded my reaction in a thesis journal, which helped me to understand how I felt about such a difficult inheritance. While recording my journal I often directed questions to my mother—asking her whether she had seen a particular incident, or been aware of the annihilation of her Jewish neighbours.

However, this style of research had its limitations. Fortunately, I was given the opportunity to travel to Berlin and live there for a month. It was this experience

[153] Margery Fee, 'Who Can Write as Others?' in *Post-Colonial Studies Reader,* ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, & Helen Tiffin (Routledge, London, 2006), p. 170.

that gave birth to my auto/biography. As I immersed myself in my mother's world, I was more clearly able to imagine what life had been like for her in Germany, and thus put myself in her shoes. This process allowed me to reflect on my own burden of shame and view it as separate from my mother. And as I toured various Holocaust sites, I became aware that my personal sense of shame was reflected in the country's cultural perception of Nazi Germany. A cultural identity, that had been fed by movies, books and memorials all possibly contrived to enhance Germany's sense of shame. These reflections became the foundation for my exegesis, as I explored the long term effects of war from the view of the perpetrator, and began to understand how this shameful identity had been transmitted to the following generations.

In my research I wanted to understand why Germans felt ashamed about their past. How had this burden been transmitted to the following generations? I wanted to understand why this shame was such a painful experience; after all, it was just a feeling, without corporeal substance. My explorations led to a theoretical understanding of shame and an acknowledgment of its power. I explored how a culture of shame had developed in Germany, as its people responded to their troublesome past. By surveying post-war Germany's confrontation with the Holocaust, I was able to understand how national and cultural memory can influence a personal identity of shame, and how individual stories of humiliation can contribute to the creation of a culture of apology.

How are these stories created? I have argued that individual memory is created at the moment of its telling. And in a culture of humiliation, memories of Nazi Germany are framed within a national context of shame and regret. However, my research has led me to an appreciation of Germany's third generation, which is creating different stories, such which emanate from loyalty to grandparents and their distance from the events of WWII.

I have unashamedly used my mother's voice for my own healing, and my exegesis has examined this process. I have also explored the production of my hybrid text, which was manufactured as a way of understanding every aspect of my work. This project has argued that one of the ways to reconcile with a painful past is through the process of creativity, by examining various theorists who believe that healing can occur when we creatively write about our trauma. They have shown that the creative act separates the idea from the person. When we can see it on the page, it is no longer part of us. Is it possible that externalising trauma can also initiate healing on a national level? Consequently, my exegesis has discussed the function of Holocaust memorials – do they serve to heal or to punish? These constant reminders of the nation's shame are controversial in a country that is working through its painful inheritance. Of course, Germany has not been the only country responsible for crimes of genocide. Killing its own people has also been the prerogative of Australia, South Africa, Armenia, North America, Sri Lanka – the list goes on. Unfortunately, the Jewish Holocaust has not been the final word in mass extermination.

Therefore my thesis has, in part, explored how ordinary people can become involved in national programmes designed to exterminate those considered different, and when the dust of confrontation finally settles, and citizens are forced to reflect on their actions (as in the SA Truth & Reconciliation Tribunal), shame may be a way of understanding and marking these experiences. Obviously, in most cases this emotion is apt; however, if it is transmitted to the following generation then unnecessary anguish may occur.

I believe that my creative-led research project has wider significance than a personal undertaking for my own healing. Because I have found that creativity has assisted me in reconciling with my own second-hand shame, I believe additionally

that this process may be used by others who find themselves in a similar situation. My project also contributes to a theoretical understanding of shame and its long-term effects. With this possibility in mind, it seems indubitable that further research should be conducted into the use of creative projects for those suffering from transmitted shame, particularly amongst people who are burdened by the inherited memory of criminal acts. However, healing is not equated with forgetting, excusing or even forgiveness. I have discovered that healing, for me, has meant embracing my shame so that I can understand it, accepting that I am linked to the perpetrators of the Holocaust; and using my knowledge in a compassionate way, both for my family and for those who suffered at the hands of Nazi fanatics. I hope that engagement with this thesis will encourage others to deal with their inherited pain, and become involved with creative projects as a way of healing their unwanted burdens of memory.

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