

## Volker Pfaff — Washington

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On the eve of World War II, the vast majority of German Canadians had no roots in Germany; either they were native-born or came from outside Germany (such as the many ethnic German emigrants from Russia at the turn of the century) and were naturalized. Although the threat from Hitler was seen as more serious than that of the Kaiser had been, the Canadian government looked on its German-Canadian population benevolently. It reasoned that by condemning all Germans in 1918, public opinion had been so inflamed as to make a fair peace impossible. Thus, in the 1930s, the government was isolationist and appeasement-minded.

But, as the situation in Europe deteriorated, public pressure forced the government to adopt hasty and ill-informed security measures. As a result, many German Canadians found their legal rights and citizenship suspended, even though the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (the Mounties) could produce no evidence of domestic espionage or sabotage, except for three spies smuggled in from the outside during the war. Thus, one scholar concludes: "Once the war broke out, official moves against German-Canadians had much less to do with uncovering security threats than with concern about guaranteeing domestic calm [maintaining itself in power] among the majority of Canadians."

There were two waves of panic: September 1939 and the predictable Fifth Column scare of mid-1940. The legendary Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) arrested German Canadians

largely on grounds of membership in pro-Nazi organizations and neighbors' denunciations, but the Mounties had far less intelligence on German Canadians than the FBI had on German Americans (this is disputed by some historians). Most Canadian suspects were simple workers or farmers from the rural West. When a degree of calm had returned after initial fears of a fifth column proved illusory, the Canadian government admitted to itself, at least, that its grounds for internment were weak, and it began to arrange releases.

VOLKER PFAFF was born in Steyr, Austria, in 1918. His parents and five siblings suffered from starvation at war's end and in the early 1920s. His father could not find a job, and the parents were forced to scavenge for food in the nearby forests. By 1927, Volker's father and some friends managed to borrow enough money to go to Canada, where the elder Pfaff worked for wheat farmers in Saskatchewan for two years. In July 1929, he returned to Austria and arranged for the whole family to emigrate to Canada. The Pfaffs settled in Stony Plain, Alberta, just north of Edmonton. There, Volker's father began life anew as a carpenter.

*(I interviewed Mr. Pfaff at his home in June 1993. His is a remarkable story of betrayal [maybe], perseverance, irony, and just plain luck.)*

*Q: How much contact did your family have with other German immigrants during this time?*

The only contact with Germans or Austrians was through the Lutheran church. Later, there were German clubs. To my knowledge, my dad never joined any club.

At home, we spoke German. My father found it rather difficult to acquire English, but my mother was more adept, and she acquired it well.

After father got his job at the joiner shop, life in Edmonton was very comfortable. But following that first winter of 1929-1930, my father gave up his job. He didn't like city life. He wanted to be out in the country, being descended from country people in Austria. He wanted to go out west under a program instituted by the Canadian Pacific railway. They hoped to settle immigrants on these lands on a sharecrop basis. My dad thought this was a great thing, and he wanted to become part of that. He gave up his lucrative job in Edmonton, and we moved to Kamloops, British Columbia. The railroad-sponsored cooperative was already in existence, and they had built small houses for these immigrant families to move into. During that year, my dad went over to Vernon, British Columbia, where he found a ten-acre farm for sale. It was shockingly cheap, so he made a small down payment and we moved from Kamloops to Vernon. He built two large barns all by himself, and we rented a large pasture.

*Q: Was there ever any attempt made to become Canadian citizens?*

That's one thing my dad never did. It's hard to explain why he never applied. He knew that Canada provided a future for

our family since Austria was a closed chapter. However, he thought that after Hitler came into Austria that perhaps things would change, and I think he was considering going back to the old country. Now, when Tony Wolfe came along (more on him later), he nurtured this feeling. And then in July of '39, Wolfe managed to convince my dad to return to Austria. So at the end of August my dad finally gave in and said, "Ok, we're going to go back now," and he sold the farm.

*Q: Did the family discuss this?*

No. We boys were teenagers and weren't even home most of the time. My younger brother, at the persuasion of my father, had gone back to Germany in 1938. In March that year, my oldest sister, her husband, and their son also went back to Germany at the persuasion of his parents, who had written him, recommending that he return since he was a schoolteacher by trade. He would have free government housing and a teaching job immediately if he returned. My older brother and I refused. We didn't want to go back there, not at that time. My younger brother was inducted into the Hitler Youth immediately on return [and later the German army]. My brother-in-law was subsequently drafted into the German army and served in France.

*(In a memoir for "posterity" that Pfaff wrote in 1993, he says that his older brother had no intention of returning to Germany, and that he, Volker, preferred to defer any decision for the time being. He never found his younger brother after the war.)*

In 1938, Tony Wolfe, who spoke fluent German, had presented himself as a true friend of Germany and of Hitler. My dad was always sympathetic with what Hitler

was doing in Germany and Austria, especially after the *Anschluss*.

*Q: He just showed up on the farm?*

He just showed up without anyone knowing anything about him. He was taken in as a real good friend of the family. All the while, this man was nothing less than an undercover agent of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

*(In his memoir, which is far more detailed than this interview, Pfaff never mentions Wolfe.)*

My dad was just a simple farmer; he had no capacity in the art of dissimulation. Wolfe lived by himself in a rented place, and he was quite a regular visitor. Of course, therefore, he knew all about our family, specifically my dad's sympathetic attitude toward Germany and Hitler. So he was able to gather quite a file on the whole family. This lasted until shortly before the outbreak of war.

In June 1939 this man manipulated my dad in such a way as to cause him to be fearful of what Canada might do to the family in light of dad's sympathetic attitude toward Germany and Hitler. Supposedly, we would be in danger of our lives here in Canada, and he talked my dad into leaving because somebody was after him, which was untrue. But my dad fell for it. Later we realized that this was nothing but entrapment. What the policy or politics or philosophy behind this was on the part of the Canadian government, I'm still trying to figure out today. At no time was our family ever any threat to Canada. None whatever. We would never have done anything against Canada. In fact, we recognized continually, ever since coming from Austria, that Canada was our salvation. But my father sold the farm for a pit-

tance. We packed our bags and took off in this guy's car. He accompanied us practically all the way to Whiterock, British Columbia.

The idea was to cross over to the United States from there. We had settled down in a cabin in Whiterock, and Wolfe knew where we were. The day after we settled in, he left us to go to Vancouver. That evening around seven o'clock, while the seven of us were in the cabin, there was a knock at the door. We opened it, and there stood a Royal Canadian Mounted policeman, his revolver drawn. He ordered us all to raise our hands, saying, "You're all under arrest, don't try to escape. This cabin is surrounded by armed mounted policeman." They had two or three cars there, and they ordered us into the vehicles with our belongings and drove us to a detention building in Vancouver.

*(In his memoir, Pfaff writes that his older brother was not interned, he thinks, because he had never shown any sympathy toward Hitler's Germany. Presumably, those in the family who were interned had.)*

During this trip, the women were separated from the men. We found out later that they had released my mother and sister and her child and allowed them to go back to Vernon. But the men, including my father and brother-in-law, were kept in detention for about four days. During these four days they questioned us hour after hour. Always alone. Always the same questions, as though we had been some super-secretive Nazi spies. And obviously, since none of us had anything to hide, we told the truth, that being also because of our religious faith.

But they kept on grilling us with the same questions, over and over. About Germany, about Hitler, about the Ger-

mans in Canada, and whether we had any plans to sabotage or to blow up bridges, and so forth. When we were arrested they found nothing incriminating. Not a thing. After four days they finally transported us by rail, under guard by armed mounted policemen, to Seebe, Alberta. There we got off the train and were placed in an army truck and taken about fifteen to twenty miles over unpaved country roads, to camp Kananaskis, approximately sixty miles southwest of Calgary.

When we arrived at Kananaskis, the camp was ready for occupancy. There were already other civilian internees there; the total number within the first year ranged around 900-1,000. It varied, some were released, and some new ones came in.

*Q: Had there been any official notification that you would be interned?*

I never saw any document charging us with malfeasance or being a threat to Canada, or that we had committed any kind of adverse act against Canada. Nothing of that sort. No hearing either.

In Camp Kananaskis the food was very adequate. We also had a camp canteen where one could buy cigarettes, candy, writing pads, pencils, pens, and so forth; the prisoners operated it. We didn't actually have any cash per se; the money we did have was coupon-type money. Cash was not allowed in the camp.

Our daytime activity during the first three years was forced labor: forestry and roadwork. In the evening I pursued my educational goals. Other activities in the camp during weekends were sports: soccer and baseball. In the winter we played hockey. We made our own rink. Evening lockup was at nine o'clock,

with lights out at ten. In winter, we rose at seven, in summer at six. There were approximately eighteen to twenty-four prisoners in each cabin. The windows inside could be opened only partially, so that no one could squeeze through. Doors were locked from the outside, and in the morning, the army personnel unlocked them and all prisoners were called out for *Appell*. We had to line up in rows, and each internee had a number. Mine happened to be forty-two, one of the early-timers. So as the sergeant major called out each number, you had to say, "Here."

During that first two years in Kananaskis some people tried to escape. I helped to dig a tunnel underneath the barbed wire enclosure. We began under one of the cabins closest to the wire. Digging out the earth and bringing it out in little cans, we distributed it inside the enclosure but behind the cabins where we had started a garden. And this earth would simply be deposited as part of the garden earth. That way it escaped detection for quite some time.

Just before completion they discovered that tunnel. I don't specifically recall how it was discovered; maybe some of the earth that was tunneled out looked different. The camp personnel made an extensive search of every cabin, under the cabins, and also the mess hall, and the kitchen. I think it was under the mess hall that the tunnel began, close to the barbed wire. Each one who participated had to spend two weeks in solitary confinement with only bread and water. No one would betray another. You just confessed. The whole camp would have been punished if the individuals who had done it didn't come forward.

We spent two years at Camp Kananaskis; I think it was July of '41 that they transferred us from there to eastern

Canada, to a camp by the name of Ripples. It's in the area of Fredericton, New Brunswick. This trip took about four days and three nights. I recall quite vividly that when the train was stopped at a town, the people outside would shout obscenities at us. We took it with a grain of salt; we just kept silent.

The fences at Camp Ripples were not quite finished yet; we had to do it ourselves. Life continued not too different from Camp Kananaskis. We still did forced labor, but that ceased shortly after we arrived because of the Geneva Convention. Under the convention, to which Canada, Great Britain, and Germany were signatories, prisoners of war could not be forced to work; we could go out to work on a voluntary basis. Actually I volunteered to work because otherwise you're sitting there with all that time on your hands, not knowing what you want to do with it. That way time passed quicker. It kept you in better health, physically and mentally. We were paid twenty cents a day for labor. In the evenings I continued the studies that I had started in Camp Kananaskis, until November of '44.

It was in November of '44 that Great Britain, Australia, and Canada entered into an exchange agreement with Germany. German prisoners of war in Canada, Great Britain, and Australia were designated for a prisoner of war exchange with British, Australian and Canadian prisoners of war in Germany. As a result the Canadians transported us to the Isle of Man in Great Britain.

We were approximately two hundred internees. This was on a voluntary basis; I didn't have to go. I wanted a change from internment. Internment can get to you. You're under confinement as a young man, and you're deprived of freedom. This can take its toll in your inner

spiritual life. I guess the best word to use is depressing. On the other hand I wanted to get back to Germany to find out what had happened to my sister and brother. So I decided I'd volunteer for this exchange program.

*(In his memoir Pfaff writes that those who were selected for the exchange had refused to deny their allegiance to Germany.)*

In November of '44 the Canadian military transferred us by train to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where we boarded a small Red Cross ship, about 5,000 tons. We departed Halifax sometime in the latter part of November. The first five days we ran into a hurricane. That was about the most horrible experience I ever had. You couldn't eat anything; nothing stayed in the stomach. That was a terrible feeling; you felt like you wanted to die. Unless you've been seasick yourself, it's quite difficult to imagine it. Finally, after five days, the storm subsided, and we continued on our journey.

We docked in London, and from there we were transferred to a military train, which took us to Liverpool. From Liverpool, we were again placed on a small boat and taken to the Isle of Man. There was a prisoner of war camp there, but these weren't huts, these were eight-nine-story brick buildings. Before it got dark, all the windows had to be blacked out because of the possibility of bombing.

Life on the Isle of Man was considerably more stringent than back in Canada. The rations there were approximately one-fourth of what we had received in Canada, so we suffered pangs of hunger. We spent the winter as best as we could. There were no educational facilities, so time was spent doing virtually nothing, just walking around during

the day. At night you just lay in your bed and mused.

*Q: Did you have reading material?*

Newspapers were not allowed at any time, either in Canada or in Great Britain. We did have books, so I read some books two or three times just to have something to do. We didn't have any store as in Canada to buy little items. So time became quite a hard thing. You just had to make the best of it. That was all there was to it.

My father had been released from Camp Ripples after three and a half years of internment. They allowed him to go back to British Columbia to join my mother. Father had sold the farm and mother had been living with my youngest sister and her husband in Kamloops; he was never interned.

My other brother-in-law was released after four years of internment from Camp Ripples, and he went back to his wife and child. I probably would have been released too had I decided not to go back to Austria. After my father and brother-in-law had both been released they decided to settle down in Summerland, British Columbia, which is a fruit growing area, and they went to work for fruit farmers there.

Finally came May 8th and the end of the war. The announcement came over a loud speaker that the war had come to an end, and that we prisoners were going to be released shortly. I still had the choice of going back to Canada or continuing on to Germany or Austria, but I'd decided to continue on to Austria in search of my sister and her family and my brother.

Those who had decided to go back were then transported on a former German war vessel captured by the British.

It was approximately the same time that the Russians had torpedoed two other ships. As I recall there were two ships transporting refugees fleeing west to escape the Red Army. Approximately 10,000 of them drowned. We were fortunate; we were transported from Liverpool via Copenhagen and Stockholm to pick up other prisoners and transport them back to Germany. We docked at Kiel in northern Germany. That's where the British released us, and in groups of six transported us to various locations near the Danish border where I took up my civilian life.

After settling in at a country school-room with twenty-nine other refugees, some mothers approached me and asked me whether I would be willing to teach their children English; they would pay me for it. I agreed. I asked the local Burgoemeister if I could use the furniture that had been placed in the attic of that school building. He gave me permission to do so. I started with a class of eleven students. I set up a curriculum, starting with the ABCs.

In the following couple of weeks word had gotten around in the area that somebody was teaching English at that school. So local farmers came to the school and asked me whether I would be willing to teach their children English at their homes, for which they would pay me. I said, "Ok, I'll do this under the proviso that you pay me in food. I don't need money; I can't do anything with money." They agreed. I had about half a dozen different farm children who I visited at their homes and instructed them in English. I brought the food back to the camp and shared it with the other people who were there. And so everybody's life was a little easier, since every bit of food played a big role at that point. These refugees were people who had fled from

the oncoming Russians. Their husbands were either missing in action or killed, so they were widows with their children.

My intention from the beginning had been to continue on to Austria. However, this was the British zone of occupation and no one could leave without the permission of the occupying forces. I wrote two letters to the British military authorities in Kiel. But each time they rejected my request to go to Austria. After the second rejection I decided there was only one reason why I came back here, and that was to search for my sister and brother. I was going to pursue that course.

So, after the wheat harvest was over, I went out on the wheat fields with a little gunnysack and gathered about forty pounds of wheat stubs. I put them on a canvas and removed all the chafe. After cleaning them, I had twenty-five or thirty pounds of clear wheat kernels. I took that to a flourmill and exchanged it for flour. Then I took the flour to the bakery, and they exchanged it for one loaf of bread. Super! A good, solid German loaf of bread.

Then I took some of my personal belongings and clothing and exchanged them for eggs, canned fish, and butter. I got two kilos of butter from a local creamery whose owners had two daughters, to whom I gave personal English lessons. I packed up my things; I had one suitcase and one large gunnysack. I took my food and wrapped it in a blanket and put it in the gunnysack. I took a local train to Flensburg, and from there on to Hamburg.

Arriving at Hamburg, I could see all the bombed-out buildings, nothing but skeleton after skeleton. The whole town was destroyed. It was a weird, eerie sight to see all these buildings and the shadows. That evening I spent camped at the

local railroad station, which was half destroyed. Sleeping at the station, though, was a very anxious time. I was afraid for my provisions because the temptation was great on the part of the people who had become completely destitute at that point.

The next morning a train was scheduled to leave Hamburg, direction Frankfurt-am-Main. I bought tickets for the trip, which incidentally I never needed because no railroad man came around to check. The only place I found was in the passenger car, which had aisle compartments. The cars had no glass in them; bombers had strafed all. You were exposed to the cold draft as the train moved, and it was pretty cold out there. We traveled south to the demarcation of the British and U.S. zones, arriving about two o'clock in the morning. The policy was that when the train was leaving the British zone and entering the U.S. zone, the U.S. military would check everybody on the train. So, when the train stopped and the U.S. military ordered everyone out, you could file back into the passenger car on presentation of proper identification. But I had nothing, only my prisoner of war card, stating my name and my prisoner number, forty-two. I had no birth certificate, no passport, or anything like that.

Then came my turn. A master sergeant stood at the entrance of the car. I showed him my prisoner of war card. He looked at it and said, "Nichts," and motioned me back. Then I began talking to him in his own language. I explained the situation in detail, told the exact truth about the whole thing. He listened very attentively, and finally said, "Ok, buddy, get in." Just like that: "Ok, buddy, get in." So that was it. I had made it.

The train continued its course to Frankfurt, where everyone got off. I

thought to myself, let everybody else go first, then I'll gather my things and get off. Finally, everybody had left and I found my suitcase, but the gunnysack with the food had disappeared. The most precious thing I possessed had disappeared. And I had had only one meal from my piece of bread, with a little butter and one egg. The rest of it, my provisions for about ten days, was gone.

I sat down in the station with my things and started brooding. As I was brooding, a couple of women with some children who were sitting not too far from me said, "we'll give you some bread." Then a young man came up to me and asked me if I wanted to buy a ration card that had one loaf of bread left on it. I asked him how much he wanted for it.

"Fifteen marks," which was the black market rate, so I gave him the marks. What's money compared to bread? I redeemed the ration card at a local bakery.

I found out that a freight train was due to leave, going south, direction Nuremberg. So I got myself over to this other station and boarded an empty freight car. Half way to Nuremberg that train reached the end of its line. So I climbed on a coal train and continued. On the coal train, I met a man with a bottle of wine, and since I had a loaf of bread, we became friends

When I got off the train at Nuremberg, I noticed a company of American soldiers having their K-ration breakfast. I went over and introduced myself to one of them and told them my situation. Right away, they gave me a couple of K-rations. After that, I boarded a passenger train from Nuremberg to Regensburg, then to Passau, which was only about three or four miles from the Austrian border. I stayed overnight in a Gasthaus opposite the railroad station. There I ex-

changed a shirt for some more food with a waiter. How he got the food, I don't know. From there I had to walk about three or four miles to the border crossing.

I hired a porter to carry my luggage. There was also a group of about forty or fifty people heading in that direction, who wanted to get into Austria. Like me, half that group didn't have proper identification. U.S. military police guarded the crossing along with Austrian custom officials. The Americans allowed me to enter Austria, as I explained to them I was born in Austria, but the customs officials refused to let me in because I had no identification. I turned back again toward Passau with about half of that group that didn't have proper identification.

In Passau it started raining, so we found another Gasthaus. I debated what to do. I inquired which was the best direction to get into Austria, not at the border crossing, but illegally. They told me that behind the Gasthaus was a steep rise. "Go up there and then head back toward the border," they advised, "then continue through a woods." One young lady about nineteen years old decided to accompany me.

We arrived on top of that slope and stood there for a while, resting. We saw two men coming from a different direction towards us. From a distance it looked like they were uniformed border guards, but as they came closer we noticed they had on tattered German uniforms. They came up to us and introduced themselves, as did we. It turned out they were former German soldiers returning to Austria. So we joined company, and fortunately they helped carry the baggage. Of course, I paid them for it.



It started to rain more heavily, but we weren't going to let that stop our progress. We continued over fields and woods for about three hours, until after dark. We stopped not far from a farmhouse where we could see lights. Two of us decided to go to the farmhouse and inquire where we were. We knocked on the door. A lady answered, and we asked, "Is this Austria?"

"Yes, you're in Austria now."

We explained our situation, and they were very kind and invited us in.

We were able to change our soaking wet clothes, and they provided us hot food. It was great! That night we slept in the hay barn, all four of us, covering ourselves with hay. The next morning we got up around five o'clock and walked almost three hours to a railroad station. We got there shortly before the train was due to leave for Linz. We boarded and paid for our tickets, arriving in Linz three or four hours later. There we parted company, and to this day I still regret that I never wrote down the names and addresses of those other people. But under the circumstances all you had on your mind was heading to your destination. But it was a common experience, and it would have been nice to get together again later on

From Linz, I took an improvised truck to Steyr, my hometown. The truck halted at the railroad station, and opposite the station was the Lutheran church where I had gone as a child. I knocked on the parson's door and was greeted by Mrs. Fleischmann, the pastor's wife. He was critically ill, and I never got to see him; he died just days later. But she answered the door and I introduced myself. Now, at that point I had been traveling from northern Germany all the way down to Austria, a trip of about six days and six nights, and I had no opportunity to shave

or change my clothing, so I looked and smelled like a real bum. You can imagine. So, when Mrs. Fleischmann opened the door, she stepped back and, I believe, had a little shock. I introduced myself but she couldn't believe who I was. She remembered the name, but she just couldn't believe it was possible. She said that the Pfaff family had emigrated to Canada in 1929. "You can't be here."

"There are two pictures hanging in the Sunday school rooms. My two brothers and me are in those pictures."

"Come on in. If you can identify yourself in those pictures, I'll believe you are who you say you are." We went in.

"Well," I pointed, "that's my brother George, my brother Joe, and that's me." That convinced her. One of the parishioners had brought in a rabbit the day before, a fat field rabbit, and she ordered her cook to prepare a meal. It was around two o'clock when the meal was finished, and of course she asked me question after question, all about life in Canada and prison during the war. I talked, and talked, and talked until three o'clock in the afternoon. I became so weary of talking, so sleepy I could hardly keep my eyes open. So I asked to be excused. She gave me a bedroom, and I lay down at three o'clock in the afternoon and slept until six P.M. the next day! That was a beauty sleep I'll never forget.

That evening I continued telling the story. I asked about my cousin, got his address and the directions to get there, and took off right away. Of course, they were amazed to see me. So we stayed up until the wee hours of the morning—talk, talk, talk. They told me about my sister, that she was somewhere in upper Austria, but they didn't have her address. They said some relatives out on a farm

might know where she was. So the following day I walked about four hours out in the country and got to these relatives and they said, "yes," they knew where she was in a refugee camp near a town called Reid-im-Traunkreis. Now, there are two towns whose prefix is Reid. One is Reid-im-Traunkreis. I went there and searched through that refugee camp, which housed about five thousand people, for about three weeks but couldn't locate her. I went back to the relatives. They had discovered two days earlier, they said, that they'd given me the wrong town; she was in Reid-im-Inkreis, not in Reid-im-Traunkreis. I took off again the following day for Reid-im-Inkreis.

At four the next morning, I got up and went to the municipality where they issued ration cards; they opened at eight o'clock, so I was the first one to get in. I asked about my sister, and sure enough, she was registered there and they had her address. She lived with a farm family not twenty minutes walking distance. So I took off right away.

I got to this farm, knocked on the door, and asked, "Does Mrs. Kahlert live here with four children?"

"Yes, she has the room upstairs." I walked up the stairs. The door to the room was partially open, and she stood at the other end of the room. I pushed the door open. She looked and saw me standing there and got all white in the face; she thought she was seeing a ghost. The last time I'd seen her was in March of 1938, before she and her husband returned to Germany. It was now September 1945. She was aware that I had been interned, but she had no idea that I'd come back to Austria. As far as she knew, I was in Canada, but there I stood! Well, it took a little while to get over that. The Americans had captured her

husband in France, but she didn't know whether he was dead or alive.

#### Postwar....

I returned to Steyr and settled down as a translator for the U.S. military, which had occupied the Steyr factories. In the Gasthaus where I'd rented a room there was no running cold or hot water, so I used to go down to the kitchen and get myself a basin of hot shaving water. There was a young girl working in the kitchen, and I became attracted to her. I guess the attraction was mutual, because she started bearing hot water to my room. We became better acquainted that way and began dating. She's now my wife.

After finding my sister, we began corresponding with my parents in Canada, and it was in March or April of 1946 that we received news from them. Incidentally, the mail was very slow at that time; it would take two or three months for a letter to go one way. But I had made some good friends with the U.S. military people, and one of the soldiers was kind enough to forward my letters via the U.S. postal mail. It got through rather quickly.

My parents had received a letter in Canada from my brother-in-law, my sister's husband, who had been released in France and allowed to go back to Munich. As soon as he was back there, he wrote to Canada and told them his circumstances, and asked whether they had heard anything at all about his wife, my sister and her family. Since they knew where we were, and they knew where he was, they wrote him our address and us his. Shortly after that, by this five-part correspondence, we agreed to meet at the border of Germany and Austria at a

certain location. Several months later my sister and their children met him in Munich.

I continued my employment with the U.S. army and the Steyrworks, and married in Austria in 1946. However, we couldn't find any housing in Steyr. My wife had a foster mother in St. Valentin in the Russian zone of occupation; she said we could move in with her. In St. Valentin, I went to work as a laborer. In the evenings I got permission to use the school facilities to teach English. Several months later I decided to take a trip to Linz by train and apply for work with the U.S. military in upper Austria. I was hired immediately due to my knowledge of English and had a good job as liaison between the U.S. military and Austrian employees. I traveled back and forth by train between Linz and St. Valentin.

Then, word reached us through my wife's doctor—who had been her doctor when she was a child in St. Valentin—that the local Communist leader had found out that the Russians suspected that I was working for the U.S. military as a spy

This, of course, became a very ticklish situation, and right away, I decided: "We can't stay here. The Russians are going to pick me up and send me to Siberia," which was common at that time in the Russian zones in Germany and Austria. We decided we had to try to get into the American zone. This was in February of '48.

We engaged a local trucker to arrive at our home at six o'clock on a Sunday morning. We loaded all of our belongings onto his truck and headed for the demarcation line, which was a river crossing. When we arrived there were four Russian soldiers sitting on a railing off to one side of the bridge, and each one of them had a sawed-off machine

gun slung over his shoulder. I had obtained a .38 revolver from one of the U.S. soldiers for protection in the event the Russians would attempt to deport me. Before leaving, however, I decided I'd better not use that gun, so I'd buried it in the woods. Instead, I decided to purchase a quart of whiskey, because Russian soldiers were wild after whiskey and could easily be bribed.

My wife and boy were sitting in the front with the driver, and I was in the back of the truck. When we stopped, one of the soldiers got off the railing and came over to the truck. My wife showed him our identity card. He looked at it, gave it back to her, and then came to the back of the truck and said in broken German to help him up. I reached down and grabbed his hand and pulled him into the back of the truck. He poked through all the furniture, looked at the belongings and suitcases, and asked me whether I had a gun. I said, "nope." Then he tried to get me into a discussion about Hitler. But I thought to myself, you'd better shut up and not get into any conversation about Hitler or World War II. I clamed up.

He finally gave up the attempt and got back down off the truck and walked forward to the barrier, motioning us through. What a relief that was. Oh! At that point we were so tense, completely motionless, cold, but after we got through we started shaking. Then things let loose. We were free. On the other side the U.S. military policemen had a delousing apparatus, and they pumped DDT into us, front and back. We arrived in Linz and settled down.

I went to work for the U.S. military at camp McCooley from that time until our emigration to the United States in August 1955. During our time in Austria we had three more children. We applied

for immigration to the United States in 1948; it took a waiting period of seven years to finally get our visas. You had to be patient. Once in New York we traveled by train to Seattle. Before we left Austria I had to declare at the U.S. consulate in Salzburg what my destination would be. We chose Seattle because I still had relatives in British Columbia. Also, I'd hoped the opportunities for employment would be good in Seattle, being a large town.

I had tried ever since 1948 to return to Canada, and had written letters to the Canadian immigration authorities. I went even as high as the prime minister, but each of my letters was answered negatively without explanation. They simply stated: "You're immigration to Canada cannot be permitted." All I can assume is that it was because of my internment. I finally gave up and filed for emigration to the United States. Been here ever since.