

Jochen Michael Lude

**Mein Leben
Ein Leben
Aller Leben**



J/L

Der Flaschengeist / The Genie

**My Life
One Life
All Lives**

ENGLISH

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Forward

»It was dark, the moon shone bright,
The green meadow was white with snow,
As a car slowly drove round the corner
at lightning speed.

People sat standing inside
engrossed in silence in conversation.

As a dead rabbit
was ice skating on a sandbar.

And the car drove
backwards up a hill at a trot.

Over there an old raven was winding
the clock of a tower.

There was deep silence all around
And with a terrible lot of noise
two camels were silently playing chess
in the branches of the grass.

And on a red bench

Which was painted blue

A blond curly haired boy

With raven-black hair was sitting.« etc.

Much of how we live and what we experience in life cannot be explained exactly, even if we attempt to do so in psychotherapy or in some other ways. But, nonetheless, life stories can be told and now I will tell you mine. I find this absurdity expressed excellently in the joke poem above, whose authorship is not clear. It is said that the poem was passed down orally and that's how I got to know it myself, as a teenager, whilst attending a holiday camp. It is also said that the tradition allows for new verses to be added as it is passed on through the years.

The absurd contradictions of our existence ‘hit the nail on the head’ in this poem and show us how life is governed by opposites. We all get caught up in life’s contradictions and have to find our own way through as best as we can. Did I manage it in my life? I leave this for you to judge when reading my story.

Every time I talked with friends about my childhood memories, especially those of the war and post-war years, they were fascinated by it and said that I should write about it. My answer always was that I wasn't a good enough writer. But our friend Martin T. thought that this should not be a problem. He offered to interview me and record what I say and then write it all down for me. I thought about it for a while, then sat down at my computer, and wrote down what came to my mind. I found that I got a taste for this and that I even enjoyed it. Thus, I started at the very beginning and proceeded chronologically through my life.

The more I wrote, the clearer it became that it would be good, in my view, to tell the younger generation about my experiences. Especially when I think of how much the political landscape has moved to the Right, not only in Germany but almost everywhere in the world. The right wing populists are advancing and they are not afraid of misrepresenting the truth. They use a language that is aimed at people's primitive instincts; the others, the strangers, other faiths or belief systems are to be blamed for everything that is wrong in the world. In effect they lie, preach hatred and spread fake news on social media. I am amazed and horrified that anti-Semitism is spreading again in Germany; right-wing extremists are regularly demonstrating with their hatred of democratic values and the rule of law; the right wing group known as the ‘Alternative for Germany’ (AfD) is the strongest opposition party in the

German Parliament (Bundestag), and is not only popular in the new federal states but in the old federal states as well. It is shameful that a synagogue in Halle was attacked with the aim of killing and injuring the Faithful. The fact that the perpetrator was supposed to be an individual makes it no less shameful. However, it is comforting that there are many people resisting holding the opposite views. To resist this today means it must be 'nipped in the bud' before these views spread more widely.

I am aware that my family history has left a deep mark, and yet, my subsequent environment, my encounters with a wide variety of people outside my family have also influenced me a lot and made me who I am today. Therefore I would like to share my life story. I often ask myself who I would be if I had grown up, for example, in the GDR (German Democratic Republic). Would I be a loyal follower? Perhaps even shoot a fugitive at the border as a police officer? Given a different upbringing and different circumstances it seems a distinct possibility. After all, what is good and what is evil? Both are within us and can be interpreted either way depending on the existing balance of power and what stories we are told and believe.

My war memories and pre-school years 1941-47



At 7am on Sunday 10th of August 1941, I caught my first sight of the world. My mother only just managed to get to the hospital in time for the birth. The Karlshorst Horse Racing Course was right next door and so the joke regarding the drama of my birth was that ‘the donkey had dropped me whilst galloping’. Had the first Soviet air strikes two days earlier on Berlin shocked my Mother, and therefore possibly started

the birth process? Who knows? In any case, I was the third child of my parents. My brother Peter was born on December 9th, 1937, and my sister Christel on May 10th, 1939. Prior to my brother’s and sister’s arrivals, my Mother had had two miscarriages. Therefore she was overjoyed to finally be able to take ‘her Peter’ in her arms.

My mother was born on March 17th, 1912, an illegitimate child. Her biological father, Grandfather Levinson, was a Jew. He wanted to marry our Grandma but as he was a Jew, Grandma’s family was against this. She later married Grandpa Witte who adopted my mother. Thus, my mother was registered in the name of Witte. My father was born on April 26th, 1906, as the second of four children and grew up with three sisters. My mother was just 17

years old when they got engaged and three years later, in 1932, they got married.

We lived on the second floor of an apartment block containing six flats in Eichwalde near Berlin. By now the Nazi party was already in power. The neighbours were friendly people and it was a good community. However, this changed radically the moment it became known that my mother was Jewish. It didn't make any difference to the Nazis that she was only 'half-Jewish'. Once it was known, she was spat at by the house residents and insulted as a 'Jewish bitch'. My siblings Peter and Christel were no longer allowed to go to the local kindergarten. Consequently, it became unbearable for my parents to continue living there.

So we moved to a small house with a garden in Zeuthen near Berlin. Life was a little more carefree again.



However, my Father had already been drafted in 1942 by the Nazis to serve in the army, but then was required to get a divorce; otherwise he would have been deemed unworthy to continue in military service. He refused and was discharged immediately.

I was around three years old when I became aware that there was a war without really knowing what that meant. I noticed that the air raid warnings became more frequent and all of us had to go down to the basement more often. To cheer us up, our father always prepared a homemade candy in a pan with some fat and sugar for us children. I often longed for an air raid alarm in order to get a caramel candy again. One day a bomb destroyed the house next door. I must have felt very guilty about that event as it has become deeply rooted in my psyche. It led to the belief that whenever I wished for something for myself, it would end in disaster. As a result I decided it would be better never to wish for anything for myself again. I only recognised this connection much later in my personal psychotherapy.

I was always happy when my Father read us bedtime stories. I especially liked the ones from the book *A Thousand and One Nights: Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, Aladdin and the Magic Lamp, The Magic Carpet* and, especially, *The Genie in the Bottle*. I found these fairy tales exciting and suspenseful and I fantasised that one day I would find a bottle in which a spirit was locked inside, which I would free and who would fulfil all my wishes. Reminiscing about this inspired me to create the image of the Genie as an illustration for the cover of this book.

I also remember the day when we were sitting at the breakfast table and saw a group of men stopping on the pavement on the

opposite side of our street, right in front of our house. Mother knew immediately what this meant. She told my father to go upstairs and go to bed. Men were being picked up by the Secret State Police (Gestapo) to be transported to a labour camp. Since my father was lying in bed pretending to be ill they did not take him away. But a week later this did not work anymore. They arrested my father and he was taken to a labour camp in Zerbst (about 85 miles south-west of Berlin). Six months before the end of the war the camp was dissolved by the Red Army and the prisoners were released. My father returned to us, a physically and mentally broken man, six months after he had been taken away.

From autumn 1944 onwards about 10,000–20,000 so-called »half-Jews« and people who were married to Jews were recruited into special departments or arrested as part of the so-called ‘mixed-breed campaign’. On September 19th, 1944 they were taken to OT (Organisation Todt) work camps. OT was a paramilitary group in Nazi Germany named after its founder Fritz Todt. (1)

I have mixed memories of the Soviet occupation between 1944-1945. On one hand some soldiers were friendly and loved us children. They played with us and came over regularly. They also brought food from time to time. Each of us children had a soldier friend, mine was called Sascha. I loved it when he threw me high in the air and caught me in his strong arms again. We had fun and laughed a lot.

On the other hand we were afraid of the Russian soldiers, as they could be unpredictable and often drunk. One time I was standing at the window and watched a drunk Russian on a motorcycle with a sidecar crashing into our garden fence. He couldn't brake in time

and our fence was destroyed in the crash. He looked around and ran away quickly. Soldiers also often tried to steal wristwatches. It took a lot of skill on the part of my father to convince them that we no longer had any wristwatches. An elderly neighbour was not so smart and stubbornly refused to hand over his watch. For this he was shot and paid with his life.

On May 8th, 1945 I was woken by loud bangs. I looked up towards the sky and it looked to me as if the sky was on fire. I ran to my parents who were in the garden. They were laughing and joyful. This seemed bizarre and I felt that I did not understand the world anymore. I thought that they made fun of me for being so scared. I didn't know then that they were happy because they knew that the war had ended. They tried to explain that the 'fire in the sky' actually was a firework and an expression of joy. This did not succeed in helping me to calm down.

The war ended with the surrender of Hitler's regime and we had to vacate the house in Zeuthen. We stayed temporarily with Grandma Witte. My Grandpa Witte committed suicide in Lake Teufelssee. We didn't know why, possibly because he was scared of what would have happened to him after the war by way of reprisals.

Here is a brief overview of the immediate post-war political situation from a general source:

From July 17th to August 2nd, 1945, the Heads of States of the victorious powers, Josef Stalin (USSR), Harry S Truman (USA) and Winston Churchill (UK) met at Cecilienhof Palace near Potsdam for the 'Potsdam Conference'. France was not represented, but later approved the protocol with some reservations.

The four victorious powers assumed sovereignty over the German Reich and divided the area among themselves either into occupation zones or outsourced zones. These 4 zones comprised the entire territory within the 1937 boundary of Germany. The military commanders-in-chief took over in co-operation with civilians. 12,000 Americans, 25,000 British, 11,000 French and 60,000 Soviets were now making decisions about what should happen to Germany in the future.

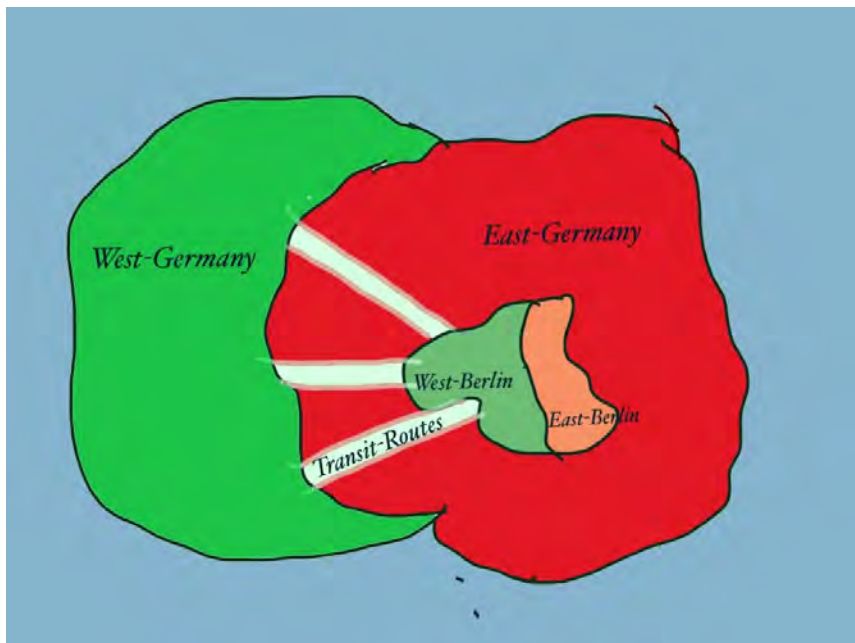
These were the individual zones of occupation:

1. The Eastern Zone within the jurisdiction of the Soviet Union.
2. The Northwestern Zone comprised of Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia and Hamburg, was under British control. Bremen was under American administration.
3. The Southwestern Zone included Bavaria, Hesse, North Württemberg and North Baden. These areas were initially under US military sovereignty. In the summer of 1945, these areas became the federal states of Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland and parts of Württemberg and Baden and were handed over to the French.

A Control Council of the four Allies was established in Berlin and was given power to make any important decisions for Germany. There were conflicts already brewing which later became evident within the four powers. The four commanders-in-chief were meant to make unanimous decisions but this was rarely the case. Berlin was ultimately divided into four sectors and was subject to a common Allied administration.

The four commanders-in-chief were General Eisenhower for the Americans with headquarters in Frankfurt am Main; Field Marshal Montgomery in Bad Oeynhausen for the British; General Latre de Tassigny in Baden-Baden for the French and finally Marshal Zhukov, who headed the Soviet military administration in Berlin-Karlshorst. (2)

At this point West-Berlin was called an 'Island in the Red Sea', i.e. West Berlin was in the middle of the Soviet Zone of Occupation (SBZ). For a long time we only ever called the SBZ the 'East Zone'.



In 1946 my family moved to Hüttenrode in the Harz Mountains, about 150 miles west of Berlin.



My Father had received a tip from an acquaintance that he could take over the lease of a small grocery store owned by a Mr Bockmann. This was meant to help our family move out of the cramped conditions of Grandma Witte's small terraced house and also out of financial hardship. However, as it turned out, this was not a good move. The shop was small and Hüttenrode, a small village, was in the Soviet Occupied Zone (SBZ). In the next street was a 'Konsumladen', a cooperative store. These stores were approved on December 18th 1945 in the SBZ by the Soviet Military Administration (SMAD). My father's small private shop couldn't compete with these cooperatives. Therefore, he tried several times to smuggle goods across the 'Green Border', which was neither se-

cured nor well-guarded. He was eventually caught in the act and was sentenced to six months in prison, which he served in Blankenburg. No food was given to the prisoners, so my mother brought him food every day. It was almost impossible for my mother to run the shop, look after three children and make the very long daily walk to the prison. Despite all of this we children had a 'carefree time' playing mainly outdoors in the nearby woods or on the square in front of the ruined church. Soon after my father was released from prison, my parents had to close the struggling shop as Mr. Bockmann sold the property. We then moved into the upper floor of the Bockmann's family home.

We hardly had anything to eat. Every day there was what became the 'famous' potato soup, a saucepan full of water with a little salt and a grated potato in it. I devoured at least 4 plates full a day. As a consequence of malnutrition I developed a handsome water belly.

Mr. Bockmann's death was my first encounter with death. Previously I had only heard about the death of Grandpa Witte and the neighbour who didn't want to give his watch to the Russians. His death meant that our days in Hüttenrode were numbered and we couldn't stay there any longer.

I had just started school in late summer 1948 and the joy of going to school in Hüttenrode was thus short-lived.

We moved back to Berlin and once again stayed with Grandma Witte in Schöneweide in her small terraced house. Grandma's little garden behind the house with apple, plum and cherry trees was a paradise on earth for us. The house was much too cramped

indoors. Downstairs there was the kitchen, a living room, a small toilet and a passage/washroom to the garden. Upstairs were three small bedrooms. It is still a riddle to me how the six of us managed to live together in such a small space.

The Berlin Blockade in 1948

The blockade of West-Berlin by the Soviet Union was not only a traumatic experience for me but also was the first crunch point in the Cold War between East and West. It was a crisis in the struggle for Berlin and was triggered in June 1948 with the introduction of the Westmark Currency (DM/Deutschmark) in the three Western Zones and West-Berlin. This was the first step towards the division of Germany into East and West.

In response Soviet troops blocked the access and transit routes to and from West-Berlin, an island in the Russian zone. The goal was to make West-Berlin unable to survive and thus force the Western Allies to give it up.

Thankfully the American General-In-Command Lucius Clay established an airlift to bring supplies into West-Berlin. He had correctly assessed the situation, believing that if he did this Stalin would not start a third world war just over Berlin.

It was not only the Western Allies who were involved in the organisation of the airlift; pilots from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa also took part and, in doing so, risked their lives. A sophisticated and well executed system made it possible for airplanes to land in Berlin every three minutes. Very rarely did an aeroplane crash.

The solidarity shown by other nations was excellent. This even went as far as grain destined for Great Britain from America was diverted to Berlin, which led to Great Britain itself having to ration bread. Not only were essential goods transported via the air-

lift but also passengers. British planes having dropped off their goods took children on the return flights from Berlin to West Germany in order for them to recuperate from the harsh conditions in Berlin.

In May 1949, thwarted by these many successful airlifts, the Soviet Blockade was lifted.

For my father and mother it must have been a godsend that Peter, Christel and myself were chosen to be airlifted out in this fashion. I still don't know how this came about. I only know that Grandpa Levinson, mother's biological father, must have been involved in some way. In a newspaper article my mother had read that her father had returned from America. He obviously had been able to leave Germany in time before being sent to a concentration camp. How he survived as a Jew and how he exerted his influence with the Western Allies three years after the end of the war remains a mystery to me.

I still have clear memories of the airlift. Peter and I had to get up early in the morning (my sister was sent to Westphalia via a different airlift). It was pitch black outside, and before I knew it, we were sitting both in a double-decker bus that took us to Gatow Military Airport. Like every other child we both had a note hanging around our necks with our names on it. We had no idea where the trip was taking us. Either I was too tired when I got up or I have simply forgotten. I don't remember our parents telling us what was going to happen to us. There was no time to waste and there was no real farewell.

Gatow Airport was on British Territory with the Royal Air Force (RAF) playing a vital role during the blockade. They supplied the population with 995 tons of provisions a day.

When we arrived at the airport, everything was hectic and chaotic. We were driven onto the tarmac like a flock of sheep and were rushed to run straight onto a waiting plane. However, we were immediately sent back because there were no seat belts on the plane. When we excitedly ran to the next plane, we were again turned away as there were neither seat belts nor seats. We had to run again and finally got onto a third plane. By the time we were on the right plane the sun had started to rise. We sat on metal benches that were attached lengthways. Since everything happened so quickly and chaotically, I had forgotten everything around me and didn't even know whether my brother was with me on the plane. I was extremely wound up and only concerned with what would happen next. When the plane took off, my stomach felt a little queasy. In order to look out of the window, I had to turn all the way to the left and only then did I realise that we were actually flying. I was fascinated to see streets, houses, trees and fields looking like a toy landscape.

We ended up in Lübeck and were housed somewhere in a school gym. I don't remember if and when we got anything to eat but recall that there were a lot of iron bunk beds in the gym where we would sleep for one night. I was allowed to be on the top bunk bed. Only when I was in bed did I feel abandoned and alone and started to cry quietly, very careful nobody would notice, especially not my brother. I had to be brave and understood that it was the best for all of us.

The next day we were driven by car from Lübeck to Bremen. By late afternoon we stopped in front of a house and I was asked to get out. Here would be my new home. I was told Peter was to be taken to another family further away. It was strange for me to leave Peter sitting in the car and not knowing where he was going to stay. It was only later that I learnt he was staying with a family which did not treat him well. After he was served a poor dinner, he was sent to bed early every evening. Only then did the family themselves have a proper meal. As a result the Youth Welfare Office took him to another family. But this didn't work out either. Two teenage sons kept teasing Peter, made him smoke and he was moved for a third time. This time he came to an elderly couple living in an apartment in Vegesack with a view of the river Weser. His new foster parents really spoilt him and he enjoyed his stay very much. I was allowed to visit him there once.

I had a very good time with my host parents. Herr Schröder went to work every morning and I stayed behind in the house with Frau Schröder. They had a small garden with a small chicken coop and chickens and a rooster running around freely. Before the father came home I was asked to crawl into the chicken coop to look for any fresh eggs. I always found this exciting and felt that we were doing it behind his back, like two thieving magpies. This was our secret and it seemed to me that we therefore had a special bond. One day Mother Schröder bent down to get out a bowl from the kitchen cupboard. I saw her big bottom in front of me and could not resist giving her a gentle push with my knee. I believe the devil must have ridden me at this moment. All she said was: »You little rascal!«



Although I was of school age I did not go to school during this time. I assume it must have been too complicated to organise this.

There was a large landfill site not far from the Schröder's house. Twice a week American trucks came along to unload their garbage. I always went there, along with other children, to look out for something useful among the rubbish. We enjoyed it even though the smell was terrible. Every now and then we actually found something to play with. Mother Schröder was not very pleased about my trips to this site. Not only did I and my clothes smell awful but she also felt it was too dangerous and was worried about me. However, she didn't know where else I could go to play. On Sundays Father Schröder took me to see his football team when they had a home game. I was thrilled when he enthusiasti-

cally roared »Goal! Goal! Goal!« and patted me on the shoulder with joy. Apart from these moments I only ever remember seeing him looking very serious.

I felt very comfortable in the Schröder household and had completely forgotten my parents, especially since I never heard from them, neither by letter nor postcard. Today, I believe that it was probably not possible to send normal mail from Berlin during the blockade. Therefore I was taken aback when I was told that the blockade had been lifted and that we would be allowed to go back to our parents in Berlin. In a very stubborn mood I stood up and said that I did not want to go back. It didn't help, I wasn't allowed to stay. I had no choice and had to put up with it for better or for worse and part from my well loved host family.

I don't remember how Peter and I were brought back to Berlin. My next memory is seeing my mother in my Grandma's kitchen. She seemed strange to me, and she had lost two upper front teeth. I started to cry bitterly, and only when she held me in her arms did I feel that she was my mother. My sister Christel didn't come back from Westphalia until August.