

DB - 29
Fatherless Fatherland:
A Glimpse of the Future

Plockstrasse 8
Giessen, Germany
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Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Of the six young Germans I know quite well, only one grew up with a father at home during most of his life. The fathers of five others served in the armed forces during most of the Second World War. One of these died two years after the war, of battle wounds.

Current circumstances of Germany's division have withdrawn two of these young friends from the guardianship of their fathers at a premature stage.

Therefore it was hardly surprising to discover that none of these youngsters pays much attention to his father. This is not to say that they lack affection or filial respect for them. It is simply a matter of not heeding their fathers. When they do acknowledge the authority of a parent, it is usually the mother.

One is tempted to snicker and say, "sounds just like what they write about American fathers." But when you consider that these young persons belong to the nation branded forever as the Vaterland, branded by psychologists as the people cursed with a father complex, then the matter takes on a different cast.

One of my friends is actually fatherless. Five others are suppositively fatherless.

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Of course the de-fathering of Germany began before World War II, before any of the millions of fathers were sent to die for the fatherland. It began when Hitler came to power. Specifically, it began in 1936 when the first law concerning the Hitlerjugend was announced. It commenced:

"The future of the German Volk depends on the youth. The whole German youth must therefore be prepared for its future duties...

1. The whole German youth within the area of the Reich comprises the Hitler Youth.
2. The whole German youth is to be educated in the Hitler Youth, besides in the home and school, physically, mentally, and ethically in the spirit of National Socialism for the service of Volk and the Volk community.
3. The task of educating the whole German youth is transferred to the Reich Youth Führer of the NSDAP (Nazi Party)...."

About the same time, Adolf Hitler spoke of the German youth he expected to create by these measures: "...My teaching is hard. Weakness must be hammered out. In my Ordensburgen (training centers) a youth will grow up which the world will tremble at. I want a violent, dominating, dauntless, fierce youth."

Thus did Hitler replace father in countless German families; more tyrannical, more cruel, more authoritarian than any German father had ever been in legend or in fact.

But the Ersatz father revenged himself on his children for their failure to bring him victory. Thirteen years ago this month he committed suicide - leaving many German children deprived of real fathers and the substitute one.

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I think this goes a long way toward explaining why none of my six friends is "violent", "dominating", "dauntless", or "fierce". On the contrary, they are rather gentle folk. I think a Nazi might even call them "weak".

For example, one of Germany's most popular illustrated magazines, Quick, recently ran a serial biography of a former Hitler Youth. The story told of an idealistic and fanatic youngster whose dream was to fight for Hitler. He turned on his father and mother for not being enthusiastic Nazis. Finally, his chance came to serve. Germany's collapse was approaching fast and with it the terrible hour of disillusion for the young zealot. At war's end he knew he had been betrayed by his Führer.

While this story was still running, a 30-year-old reader wrote a protesting letter to the editor. He proudly told of his Hitler Youth service:

"...For me and many of my comrades just this period was a great and valuable experience, which of course had nothing to do with the sated satisfaction of the German Wirtschaftswunder (economic miracle). What we learned in these youthful years was self-discipline, joy in serving, and hardness... Perhaps my efficiency would not be so great now if I had grown up like the present generation with gangster pictures, jukeboxes, cigarettes, and chewing gum..."

In other words, today's young persons are "weaklings". There were three letters in a similar vein from other former Hitler Youth members.

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No doubt my six friends were scarred by the war. No doubt their lack of fathers had made them different from earlier generations of German youngsters. No doubt it has made them "weak" in certain ways. But it has made them strong in still other ways, strong and viable in the democratic society of the German Federal Republic. To see this, you have to know them better.

The youngest of the six is Heidrun Stecher, who just turned 17 last December. Her short, robust figure recalls the fact that Celtic tribes once roamed her native Upper Hesse. But her brown hair and eyes and her wide mouth indicate a trace of French blood; Napoleon's soldiers spent a number of years in these parts too. Both her parents come from old Giessen merchant families.

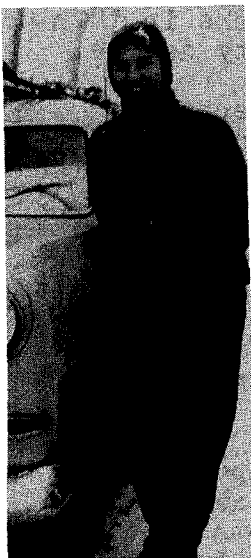
Heidrun lives with her mother and younger sister in a comfortable apartment on the Grünbergerstrasse. Her father, who liked to paint, died of war injuries in 1947. Heidrun inherited Herr Stecher's pleasure in sketching. When she first began to visit me last autumn, she would bring reams of drawings: minutely detailed pen-and-ink sketches of flowers, charcoal portraits of dewy-eyed girls and boys, and fashion designs. They are the work of a copyist rather than an original talent.

She also keeps large scrapbooks on various subjects - animals, home architecture and decoration, and several film stars. She keeps a diary, which doesn't have any great secrets, according to her. She also has a book of autographs from her school classmates. Each one wrote a verse or a message or drew a picture for it.

Heidrun is a bit of a dreamer. One day she wants to become a journalist, the next a fashion designer. She's still thinking about a career of that type even though she started work as a secretary in her uncle's wholesale liquor business this week.

A few months ago, she asked me to help her learn news writing. I told her to bring me a story about something she didn't like. Heidrun arrived a few days later with a piece about some of her nouveau riche relatives. It was a real blast, ending: "I can't imagine that these people are happy, seeing fulfillment in showing off...I can only say they are poor creatures - dazzlers in turbid light."

Her vocabulary is tinted with teen-age expressions of enthusiasm. She says toll (roughly "terrific") schrecklich ("terrible") and fürchterlich ("awful") two or three times a paragraph.



Heidrun loves to travel. With her mother and sister she has been to Italy and France as well as much of Germany. Right now she would like most to see Asia.

She gets along very well with her family (not counting some distant relatives). Her mother is a gay and witty person who seems to have a lot of understanding for young people. Her little sister is a frail and extraordinarily intelligent girl. She and Heidrun play together a lot. They ski together in winter and swim together in summer.

Although Heidrun has grown up in Germany's age of gangster films, jukeboxes and chewing gum, it doesn't seem to have influenced her. She prefers to go to Giessen's Stadttheater. She doesn't chew gum. She rarely wears lipstick. Although she likes popular music and dancing, she has seldom been out on a date as yet. That will come later in this small and somewhat constrained community.

Heidrun's burgher upbringing appears to have protected her from growing up too fast. While she was still in school last year she told me: "Boys are silly." She isn't much interested in them yet; her social life centers around her girl friends.

One day I took Heidrun to a French documentary film about the German concentration camps, called "Night and Fog". (It was gruesome. If I had known this beforehand I would not have taken her.) Heidrun was speechless for a time after the showing. When she finally spoke, she said: "We were told about that in school, but nobody believed it." She couldn't eat until the next day.

Heidrun isn't interested in politics, but she did listen to most of the Bundestag foreign policy debate in March. She was disgusted with the violent outbreaks of partisan feelings, but she found some of the speeches stimulating. She told me she didn't think the Bundeswehr should be armed with atomic weapons.

I think Heidrun is a good citizen. She is a happy person, sensitive, alert, and critical of her elders without disliking them. She is not afraid to speak her own opinion. If I were to compare her to American girls of her age I would surely find they had much in common. However Heidrun is probably more self-composed than her American counterparts, a bit more tranquil; perhaps she is also less disposed to compete with boys and less worried about growing up.

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Robert "Bobby" Harnisch is a great husky galoot. He has a broad forehead, thinly-set blue eyes, a big hawk nose, and a shock of light brown hair which he keeps carefully combed back. A year ago he graduated from the Liebig School with an Abitur (equivalent of a junior college diploma). He had to work hard to get it.

Robert would have liked to go on to the university like most of his classmates. But his truck-driver father was in no position to pay his fees. So, at 20, he entered the Federal Customs service. For the past 12 months he has been taking part in a training program. With his education he is assured of reaching the middle ranks in this profession. To go higher he would have to have a university degree.

His home is in Wieseck, an ancient village that was recently annexed by Giessen. Robert grew up there with an older brother, mostly under the care of their mother and grandmother. Father Harnisch was away during most of the six years of war plus a couple of years in America and British P.O.W. camps.

I remember Bobby when he was still in school; an extrovert, a bit awkward, but a good athlete, and a mild example of Hessian Sturheit (stubbornness). When he visited me last week he seemed changed. He had become pensive, more serious, one could almost say introverted. What was it?

"It's the Customs service," he said. "A lot of my superiors are pretty unbearable. They're finicky about obedience, spit and polish. When I report I have to click heels, bow, and say: 'Customs Candidate Harnisch reporting. What does the Herr Oberinspektor wish?' A lot of them are old Nazis."

With his earnings, Robert bought a light motorbike last summer. He's looking forward to the day when he can afford a car. Like most German lads, he knows just about all there is to know about automobiles. Yet being motorized has not kept him from enjoying exercise. I've been on several long hikes with him and he was all for making them longer.

Robert has a girl friend who lives in Bonn. He met her last summer when she was visiting a grandmother here: "Uta was sitting next to me in the theatre, a pert little girl. I guess I like small girls. So I wrote her a note and asked if I could see her again. She said yes." Uta is four years younger than Robert; "just right", he says. He has another girl friend here in Hesse, neither of them serious prospects, he adds.

Like many Germans I know, Robert is a possessive friend. If I have no time to see him he is really offended. When he invites me out for a beer, he insists that we make a long night of it - until the bars close. When he came the other day I apologized for not answering a postal card he had written several months before. He consulted a notebook and replied: "Several months? No. It was exactly ten weeks and three days ago that I wrote you."

Robert has a villager's mistrust for politics. "They'll do what they want in Bonn whether we like it or not," he says. Still he reluctantly supports the policies of the Social Democrats.

Although he is "stubborn", Robert can and does change his opinion. When he makes up his mind, he does it by himself, not because someone told him to. "I change my mind frequently," he admitted, a little surprised at himself. This is something his father is scarcely capable of doing. However, Robert and his father are not much alike.

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Otto Krauss is a classmate of Robert Harnisch from the Liebig School. Out of a class of 17, Otto was the only one to volunteer for service in the newly-formed Federal Army. One would have expected it least of him, a medium-sized fellow with a round head, rosy cheeks, a soft voice, and a quiet manner. Otto comes from a gentle and happy family of seven.

His father, a prosperous businessman, was home during most of the war. A few years ago he moved his family into a large and comfortable house on Luther Berg (hill). Of all the Germans I know, only the Krauss family has had a long and continuous home life. Yet even Otto seems remote from his father's authority, closer to that of his mother.

Otto's decision to join the Bundeswehr was his own. Like his classmates, he was due for a 1-year hitch as a conscript anyway. Unlike them, he decided to volunteer for 18 months. He didn't have any dreams of military glory, he just wanted to see what the army was like. At one point he considered the possibility of making a career in the Bundeswehr. But during the year, he made up his mind to continue studies as a civilian. Otto says he has never regretted his time in the army.

He finished his basic training at Hannoversch-Münden before Christmas. In January he was moved to an officers school in Hannover. Since Easter he has been an ensign in Munich. Last week he wrote: "My service will be finished on September 30 and then I can retire as Leutnant der Reserve, and finally begin long desired and postponed studies. The quarter year at officers school was a good time for me." Otto expects to study mining engineering at a technical college.

At Christmas, I asked Otto if he bothered to read newspapers in the caserne. He said no. So I gave him a quarter-year subscription to the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. This is what he wrote about it: "Sometimes I thought about what you said, that one has to get used to a newspaper like a new shirt. When I reflect on it, I believe the paper interested me more than it bored me. You just have to look for the things that interest you. Besides, it's also necessary to keep informed about the political development of one's own country. Of course my own interest is not exactly politics, rather I prefer the feuilleton."

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Brunhilde Jung came to me last spring for English lessons., an ebullient 17-year-old with long brown hair and a permanent grin. She had just finished Mittelschule, was working as a secretary, and wanted to try for a job as hostess on international trains. For this she needed better English than she had learned in school.

Every day for two months, Brunhilde would come at 6 p.m. for her lesson. There was more laughter than learning in our "classes". They went something like this:

Teacher--"Do you like to travel?"

Pupil--"Yes."

Teacher--"Come on now, Brunhilde, you've got to give me a full sentence. Now, where do you want to travel to?"

Pupil--"Madagascar."

Teacher--"With the train?"

Pupil--"No, you Dummkopf."

Teacher--"Why do you want to go to Madagascar?"

Pupil--"I have never been there...You know, you smoke too much."

Then Brunhilde came down with a lung disease. The doctor ordered her to quit her job. Moreover, she had to give up the plan to work as a hostess. She spent the next six months convalescing at home and in a sanatorium. Meanwhile, her parents had relinquished the lease they had on a local tavern and moved to a town near Stuttgart. Father Jung took a new job as headwaiter in a big hotel. It was the fifth move the family had made in the past 10 years.

Brunhilde's family is a loving one. She has two sisters - one still in grammar school and the other working in Giessen. They get along famously. All three are pretty and all three are saucy.

Several months ago Brunhilde wrote: "How was your 'business trip' to the Cologne Karneval? I hope to get a thorough report, which contains at least 20 per cent truth."

Despite, or perhaps because of her limited education, Brunhilde is interested in a variety of things - theatre, music, literature, fashions, politics. Her comment on the foreign policy debate: "Our Government really didn't cover itself with glory. Adenauer's speech was beneath all dignity, he didn't even touch the important points." Brunhilde has strong opinions, but she is open-minded.

In March, at long last, the doctor allowed her to take a job again. "Unfortunately I still haven't gotten any nearer to Madagascar," she wrote. "Instead I got a job as ground hostess at Stuttgart Airport." She now has a room in a village near the airport.

A year ago, Brunhilde said she thought men were ridiculous. "I won't ever get married," she announced. Since then, she's changed her mind, a little. One of these years I expect to get a wedding announcement. But before that, I expect to get a letter from her postmarked Madagascar.

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Eberhard Wagner and Peter Zülch are from East Germany. Eberhard is 21, and Peter is 22. Neither has been home for over a year. The laws of the Deutsche Demokratische Republik won't permit them to go. Both are students at Giessen University.

From all I know of Eberhard, he is a problem child. From all I know of Peter, he is not.

Eberhard is moody, careless, desperately in need of affection, jealous, occasionally childish, and inclined to make difficulties for himself which he almost seems to enjoy. Peter is impetuous, self-reliant, extroverted, and good-humored; also occasionally childish. Eberhard is chunky, with long wavy hair. Peter is 6 feet 5 inches tall and has a crewcut. They are very close friends.



Peter's father is a surgeon, and it is medicine that the son is studying here. Eberhard's father is a veterinarian, and it is veterinary medicine that the son is studying here. Like their fathers before them, they joined a student fraternity as soon as they could; the Landsmannschaft Darmstadtia. Eight months ago, Eberhard got into a terrific argument with one of his fraternity brothers and

after many painful struggles with his conscience, he quit. But not before he had fought a proper set of rapier duels, which gave him some long head scars. Now he's glad he quit.

Peter, who loves the fraternity and nearly all it stands for, stayed with it. He's now second in charge. However, he remains loyal to Eberhard, an attitude which his fraternity brothers deplore. Actually, Peter is one of the few German students I know who has a personality strong enough to withstand the pressure to conform in the Corporationen. "I do what I want," he says, "and if they don't like it then to heck with them."

Both boys left the Soviet Zone out of fear for reprisals. Eberhard was stringing for a newspaper when he got a tip that he might be denounced for political "unreliability". Peter was active in an underground movement which smuggled refugees out of the Zone and raided Soviet Army supply depots. He told me some hair-raising stories about it recently.

Until last fall, Eberhard and Peter had sweethearts in their home towns. Coincidentally, each got a letter from the girl friend at the same time, saying the romance was off. Eberhard was very depressed. He came to my apartment and got drunk. Two weeks later he had a new girl friend here. Peter wasn't depressed. He already had a girl here.

Eberhard rebounded in a hurry. He and Renate got engaged in January. "We'll get married in four years after 'Renie' finishes her (medical) studies," he said. Last week, Eberhard came and said he was going to marry Renate in two weeks. "She inherited some money suddenly," he explained, haltingly, "and she wants to invest it in an apartment and furniture." Peter came by later with another explanation. "'Renie' is pregnant," he said.

It doesn't take an astrologer's cap to predict that Eberhard and Renate are going to have a tough time. But I think they'll make it. They know how to work hard - Eberhard held down two jobs during the semester vacation. He'll finish his studies, like Peter, on a scholarship. Whether Renate will be able to do the same is questionable.

Eberhard has some weak characteristics, but he has been able to surmount most of his troubles up until now. He's German enough to be able to buckle down when the going is rough. (Among other things, he recently summoned the will power to quit smoking, which is more than I can manage)

Peter, too, has some weak qualities. He is a bit hare-brained, a bit boyish, and given to rough-neck behavior sometimes - not long ago he knocked a bartender cold in a tavern brawl. But he is a decent sort, honest, and a steadfast friend.

Eberhard and Peter hope to see their parents one of these days, although neither appears to tender close feelings for them. To accomplish this they will have to drive into East Germany and find their families at a pre-arranged spot on the Autobahn. Peter calls this a Deutschlandtreffen - a "Germany Meeting". Such a meeting of divided families in divided Germany is not without danger.

It would be presumptuous to claim that these six young Germans are "typical" or "representative". Yet I have met scores of others who have similar backgrounds and similar problems. None of them is exceptionally talented or intelligent. Yet they are all strong individualists. Most are self-possessed. And most are very likable. They are free of fear, free of prejudice and free of conformism. Lack of parental authority has caused them difficulties, to be sure, but it seems to have made them free, freer at least than the generations of Germans before them.

David Binder
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