

Piecework:
The Survival of
Katharina (Miller) Wolf
(1905-1996)

by Herta Wolf Pitman

December 24, 2018

Flüchtlingspaar an Kindes Grab, or Refugee Pair at Child's Grave

We were in flight when you came,
desperate for home,
only whispered your name.
Did you know?

We fled here and there,
from field to yard,
were allowed nowhere;
just, always onward.

Then your little grave tied us fast and became our home away in foreign land.

-from the book "Stoppelgang," poetry by Jakob Wolf, circa 1951, translated by Herta Wolf Pitman

A man I trusted quipped, "They brought it on themselves," ill-consideredly.
He stunned me breathless at the time, and his words still live among my painful memories.

-Herta Wolf Pitman

This is a survival story. We are survivors. In the chain of our pasts there were moments of chance that our ancestors survived; moments we survived. We are the descendants of survivors. I am the descendant of survivors of a recent dark time. Some survivors believe that their survival stories separate us. I believe our survival stories should connect us.

We fear that with the passage of time, the memory of the Holocaust will be lost. What of the memory of stories that were never known? What of the story lurking in scraps of my Oma's life?¹ I'm putting Oma at the center of this research to remember her life in context of, and comparison to, the history of her time; sewing it together with material I found in her Ohio home, and finding the threads that connect us all.

The acts of Hitler and those who followed him are held up as unique, unprecedented, and embraced by an unparalleled group of fanatic followers. For just one of many examples, in *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, Daniel Goldhagen claims that the Holocaust was the "most shocking event of the twentieth century," and that the Holocaust "marked the departure of the Germans from the community of 'civilized peoples.'"² However, I contend there is parallelism of tactics, and consequences; of imposition of the will of the powerful, and suffering for those they oppress; with no consequences for victors, who in victory control the narrative. There were parallels that preceded, coincided with, and followed the Holocaust historic moment. In fact, hypocrisy and self-interest lie behind the claims made both by men who carried out the crimes of the Holocaust, and by those who sought to bring those criminals to justice. While particular cruelties (for example: gas chambers, rape) occurred either only, or much more commonly, with

¹ Oma is a German nickname for grandmother. In this paper it is used to refer to the author's paternal grandmother, Katharina Wolf (nee Miller)

² Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (London: Abacus, 2008), 4.

one or the other of the perpetrating groups, in both groups there was underlying disdain for other groups of humans, and standards for acceptable behavior were determined by the victors, and not equal.

This paper investigates ethnic Germans in northern Yugoslavia in the mid to late-1940s, particularly Katharina (Miller) Wolf, my paternal grandmother, who I knew as, and will call in this paper, Oma. This paper will also focus on some people who shared roots in the multi-ethnic village of Fekitić, which is now in Serbia. Additionally, it focuses on the parallels between stories of the ethnic Germans of Fekitić and the methods of their Soviet and Yugoslav partisan conquerors, in comparison to those of victims and survivors of the Holocaust and the methods of the Nazis and their collaborators. This look into the life of one woman provides an avenue to explore the Soviet and Yugoslav partisan methods of conquest. Further, this research demonstrates that there was parallelism in Soviet war and post-war practices, with the goals and methods employed by the Nazi regime, and parallelism in outcomes for the ethnic German populations the Soviets and Yugoslav partisans targeted in Yugoslavia with the Jewish and other populations who were targets of Nazi aggression.

The victorious allied nations negotiated prosecution of the Nuremberg Trials with trepidation because of their knowledge of their own culpability in acts for which they could presumably also be held legally liable.³ Oma escaped from Fekitić, her home village, just before Soviet forces arrived. Those who did not escape were subjected to the kinds of cruelties that at the Nuremberg Trials, Soviet prosecutor General Roman Rudenko decried with outrage. He railed at being deprived of the “right to punish those who made enslavement and genocide their

³ Philippe Sands, *East West Street* (New York, NY: Vintage, 2017), 324.

aim,” while the same month the trials started my maternal grandmother was sent to a starvation camp.⁴

Oma

Oma was hard of hearing. I had to yell for her to understand me. Yelling our talks would often cause me to feel angry. I didn’t wonder what she might feel. She seemed so permanently who she was, unchanging. I never asked her questions about her past. My curiosity bloomed far too late.

When Oma died in 1996, she was 91, and four foot ten. Her house was left to my bachelor uncle, Adam. In 2010, when he died, the house was left to my brother and me. Oma’s things were still in that house when it came to us. Those things: letters, documents, artifacts, and photographs led me to her past.



At right: some of the things that I found in Oma’s home.



A Fekitić landscape



Miller family house

⁴ Sands, *East West Street*, 338.



Print of the “Schwabenzug” (Swabian migration) of the late 1700s

Feketić, and the Expulsion of Ethnic Germans

Oma, every close relative of mine, and I, are Danube Swabians, and we all have origins in a small village called Fekitić, which for most of the 20th century was in Yugoslavia, and since the breakup of Yugoslavia, is now in Serbia. Danube Swabians migrated east via the Danube, primarily in the 1700s, from southwestern areas of what is now Germany.⁵ In the middle of the 20th century, Yugoslavian Danube Swabians endured great upheaval in the Batschka region, where Fekitić is, as did ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche) throughout Eastern Europe.

Oma and her husband Adam (my Opa) and their sons (my Uncle Adam, and my father, Heinrich) lived in peril, and they struggled and suffered, but Oma and her immediate family survived. Many ethnic Germans in Eastern Europe, including Danube Swabians, among them more of my relatives, were subjected to similar peril, or even greater hardships, and many did not survive. This was because Stalin’s military forces, with at least the tacit approval of their British and US allies, and assisted by east European national forces, enforced expulsion of Volksdeutsche from territories they occupied at the end of the war.⁶ In the mid-to late 1940’s

⁵ Donauschwaben Villages Helping Hands “history,” accessed December 19, 2018, <http://www.dvvh.org/history/1700s/DS-history~tullius.htm>,

⁶R. M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 74-75.

expulsion (or forced removal, which later came to be termed “ethnic cleansing”) of ethnic Germans was widespread throughout Eastern Europe, and hardships were universal. An “Inter-Departmental Committee” convened by the Soviets, Britain and the United States to consider possible consequences of forced removal of Volksdeutsche, anticipated that expulsions would affect between six to ten million, and that the resources for such an endeavor were unavailable.⁷ Nevertheless, the plan went forward.

Expulsion Broadly

Expulsion, or forced removal, was not a Soviet, or even German, innovation. The notions of national rights, or racial purity that undergirded these post World War II expulsions of Volksdeutsche, also motivated events decades before, such as the “Trail of Tears” in the United States, and the Armenian Genocide in Europe. These relatively better known and horrific expulsions, are estimated to have led to the deaths of roughly one of every four of the over 20,000 Cherokee who endured the Trail of Tears, while closer to three of every four of the estimated 2,000,000 Armenians lost their lives in the Armenian Genocide.^{8 9} Even during World War II, the internment of Japanese-Americans in the United States must be supposed to have been built on a foundation of race-based national mistrust.

Captured Volksdeutsche in Parallel

In Fekitić, the Volksdeutsche who did not escape before the Soviet and Yugoslav partisan forces arrived faced extremely harsh reprisals. These were mostly the elderly, women and young children.¹⁰ At first, the conquerors harassed the Fekitić Volksdeutsche in their

⁷ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 74-77.

⁸ “Cherokee Nation” Brief History of the Trail of Tears, accessed December 20, 2018, <http://webtest2.cherokee.org/About-The-Nation/History/Trail-of-Tears/A-Brief-History-of-the-Trail-of-Tears>

⁹ New York Times Lensblog, “Survivors of the Armenian Genocide,” accessed December 20, 2018, <https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/04/21/survivors-of-the-armenian-genocide/>

¹⁰ Donauschwaben Villages Helping Hands “documentary,” accessed December 17, 2018, <http://www.dvvh.org/history/1900s/treatment-doc~Goettel~Schwebler.htm>.

homes.¹¹ The villagers were beaten, homes pillaged, women raped.¹² Elisabeth Blum, “Liesel” was fifteen when the Russians and Yugoslavian partisan forces arrived.¹³ Her mother was in her early forties, her sister “Katusch” was twenty, her younger brother nine. Later, the ethnic Germans of Fekitić were forced from their homes and moved to Sekić, a neighboring village, which had been turned into a concentration camp.^{14 15} Liesel and her sister were held captive together for almost 3 years, at first with their mother and brother in Sekić.¹⁶



[Map of expulsions in Europe 1944-1948, from DVVHH.org](http://www.dvvh.org)¹⁷

The expelled masses from Eastern Europe were mostly ethnic Germans, among them Danube Swabians. Ethnic Germans fled, or were pushed, or they were captured and enslaved.

¹¹ Henry Wolf interviews, recorded in June 2013

¹² Donauschwaben Villages Helping Hands “documentary,” accessed December 17, 2018, <http://www.dvvh.org/history/1900s/treatment-doc~Goettel~Schwebler.htm>.

¹³ “Liesel” is Elisabeth (Blum) Wolf, my mother.

¹⁴ Donauschwaben Villages Helping Hands “documentary,” accessed December 17, 2018, <http://www.dvvh.org/history/1900s/treatment-doc~Goettel~Schwebler.htm>.

¹⁵ Today, Sekić is known as Lovćenac.

¹⁶ Blum family archive, letter from Janoshalma

¹⁷ Donauschwaben Villages Helping Hands “history,” accessed December 22, 2018, <http://www.dvvh.org/history/atrocities/index.htm>

Some were raped, starved, tortured, or killed. Some were from Yugoslavia. Some were from Feketić. Some were my family. Among the dispossessed masses from Eastern Europe there were some strong men, and some of those had committed atrocities. Many of the dispossessed were elderly, or children. Most of the dispossessed were women. There were also in some cases Jewish people who until then had managed to avoid capture, hiding themselves as Germans.¹⁸ It didn't matter what their individual story was though. It was the perception of their Germaness and the desire for revenge that determined their fate. Nations of Eastern Europe, including Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia, cleansed themselves of the undesired population. The motives for, and methods used by the engineers of expulsion were sometimes strikingly similar to those used by Nazis. And, at least for the region of Yugoslavia where my family once lived, even the time period overlapped a bit. The conquest of Feketić in October 1944 was just a few months before the European war's battles ended in May 1945.

The day Oma fled was just a few months before Ruth Kruger, the author of the memoir *Still Alive* slipped away from a death camp fate.¹⁹ Anne Frank was taken captive a few months before my teenage mother was. The war ended in September 1945. It took six months more for my mother's mother to be starved to death. The Soviet and Yugoslav partisan forces who forced the fate of ethnic Germans of Feketić arrived in October 1944. Some of Stalin's Soviet, and Tito's Yugoslav partisan, forces were killing and enslaving the ethnic Germans of Feketić while Soviet prosecutor Rudenko vented his outrage that Germans who had "made enslavement and genocide their aim" might remain unpunished.²⁰

Camps and Other Consequences

¹⁸ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 137.

¹⁹ Ruth Kluger *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*. (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2012), 129.

²⁰ Sands, *East West Street*, 338.

Lager is the German word for camp (though lager also means beer), and can be applied to all kinds of camps: summer, refugee, POW, concentration, etc. The camps surviving Fekitićers spoke to me of, were places where they were held against their will. Sekić, a whole village surrounded by barbed wire, could best be described as a concentration camp. Food and supplies were scarce and of poor quality, or non-existent. Prisoners were forced to work, and ill-treated. Some prisoners, including my father's paternal grandfather, died in the camp at Sekić.²¹ Many families were separated when the able-bodied men and women over eighteen were sent to labor in Russia, and the unable were sent to camps like the one at Kruševlje.²²

Liesel

Liesel and her family were found to be too young, too old, or in Katusch's case, unfit because of a damaged foot, to be sent to be enslaved in Russia. Liesel's mother and brother were sent to Kruševlje, where their mother died of starvation.²³ My father Heinrich's paternal grandmother, and his aunt and her three youngest children also died there.²⁴ Kruševlje was one of several camps that Danube Swabians called "Vernichtungslager."²⁵ Vernichtungslager were camps for those unable to perform work; those who were too old, or sick, or weak, and mothers with young children.²⁶ I've heard this kind of camp referred to by survivors as starvation, liquidation, elimination, or simply, death camps.

Liesel's little brother, Nikolausz was with their mother in Kruševlje when she died. He survived, and alone at ten was relocated to an orphanage in Ribnica, Slovenia. Many ethnic

²¹ Henry Wolf interviews, 2013

²² Donauschwaben Villages Helping Hands, "deportation," http://www.dvvh.org/history/atrocities/chap_1_tito_1944-48.htm#Deportation-Russia. Accessed 12-19-2018.

²³ Blum/Gegner Family collection, Letter from Janoshalma

²⁴ Henry Wolf interviews, 2013

²⁵ Donauschwaben Villages Helping Hands "Gakowa-Kruschevlje," http://www.dvvh.org/history/atrocities/chap_2_tito_1944-48.htm#Gakowa-Kruschevlje, accessed 12-19-2018

²⁶ Henry Wolf interviews, 2013

Germans lost their children, and many of the children lost their families. Stories of what became of just a few children who suffered in this way, and are known as “Wolfkinder,” are told in a particularly gripping [Lens Culture, photo journal](#).²⁷ Nikolausz, and also Heinrich, were at risk of never finding their way back to their families.

In parallel to the better known horrors of the Holocaust, ethnic Germans in Eastern Europe, including my Volksdeutsche relatives from Feketić, though some survived, were nonetheless crushed by the ideas acted on and set in motion with Hitler’s rise to power; at virtually the same time, and in roughly parallel ways. For those suffering, it is nearly impossible to think beyond the immediate agony. The worst thing that happens in an individual’s life: severe illness, the death of a loved one, abandonment; could be counted as nothing in comparison to someone else’s worst moment. But the agony of 100 or 1000 or 10,000, or 100,000 or 1 million people does not reduce any other individual’s suffering. Single, terrible moments expand to blot out any thought for anyone else, for anything else.

Liesel and her older sister remained imprisoned first in Sekiće, and later in Sombor, at forced labor, and enduring terrible hardships, for nearly three years. Liesel told me that she was so undernourished that her periods stopped, which is a common occurrence for women in concentration camps.²⁸ Liesel and Katusch were still in Sombor until 1947, where they were able to manage to become reunited with their brother. That fall then escaped from the camp, first to Hungary, and eventually to Germany and Austria.²⁹ In 1952, they emigrated to Cleveland, Ohio.

Testimony by Feketić villagers who, like Liesel and Katusch, did not escape before October 18, 1944 confirm details provided by my family members. “[Documentary](#)” written by

²⁷ Lens Culture, “Wolfkinder,” accessed December 19, 2019, <https://www.lensculture.com/articles/claudia-heinermann-wolfskinder?fbclid=IwAR3TVRIKQcw017S3wSra9aNhYL677DAbhV9ldaJ3z2n1jarXqYQd0PFBeG0>

²⁸ Kruger, Ruth, *Still Alive*, 119.

²⁹ Blum/Bruckner/Gegner Family collection, Letter from Janoshalma

Jakob Goettel in 1952; and Justina Hoffman's story captured in the book *A Terrible Revenge*; tell us that at first, men were brutally beaten, and "Women and girls had to hide themselves away every night in order to avoid being raped by Russian soldiers," though not all succeeded.^{30 31} By escaping, Oma avoided these travails. Her escape took her to Berlin though, where hardships also lurked. The book "A Woman in Berlin" is a diary that details eight weeks (April 20, 1945 – June 22, 1945) just before, and at the beginning of, Russian conquest in the city of Berlin.³² The *Woman in Berlin* tells of her struggle to find food, constant air raids, hunger, rumors and lack of reliable information, deaths, food rationing, and the spread of disease.³³ *A Woman in Berlin* confirms (as do numerous other sources) that the phenomenon of rape by the victorious Russians was widespread.³⁴



Left to right: Katharina Wolf, with her husband and baby, both named Adam; with both sons, Heinrich and Adam; two photos with her husband and both sons; a treadle sewing machine. Photos, left to right: taken circa 1929, 1932, 1937., 1940, and from internet.³⁵

Oma

Oma would have been subject to the same fate as so many others from the region, had she not fled in October 1944.

³⁰ Donauschwaben Villages Helping Hands, "Documentary," accessed December 17, 2018, www.dvvh.org/feketitsch/documentary.htm

³¹ Alfred de Zayas, *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 101.

³² Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000.)

³³ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin*, 3, 10-11, 15, 17, 22, 177, 252.

³⁴ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin*, 147.

³⁵ Photo from https://antiques.lovetoknow.com/domestic_treadle_sewing_machine, accessed December 12, 2018

Oma was born on June 4, 1905, the oldest daughter of eight children. She completed the six years of schooling available to her in the German village school, then she became a maid. Payday was only once a year. When she was about 18, and her father arrived to claim her yearly wages, her employer said, “No. She earned this money. It goes to her.” Oma bought a treadle sewing machine, and took sewing lessons. Adam Wolf (Opa) carried the machine on his shoulder to the lessons for her. They got married. Opa did farm work, and Oma took in sewing to stretch their budget. She made their home with no running water, a wood stove, a dirt floor, and at first, no electricity. They made or grew practically everything they needed themselves. They had two sons who survived infancy; Adam, born in early 1929, and Heinrich in December 1930.³⁶

Oma’s three oldest brothers left Fekitić in the mid-20s to seek better opportunities. One went to Ohio. The oldest went to Brazil and (because Oma gave him the money he needed to go) her 15-year-old brother Adam went with him. Adam died soon after he got to Brazil. In 1928, Oma’s parents emigrated to Ohio, leaving their four youngest children with Oma and Opa for a year, until they could send for them. Then Oma was the only person from her birth family left in Fekitić.³⁷

The Depression hit Fekitić hard. Oma and Opa struggled along, and in the summers of 1938 and 1939, as the German economy under Hitler was rebounding, they took advantage of the guest worker program in Germany. They put electricity and a floor in the house where they lived, and bought a radio. Heinrich was offered a place at a boarding school in Budapest, and a stipend to pay for it.³⁸

³⁶ Henry Wolf interviews, 2013

³⁷ Henry Wolf interviews, 2013

³⁸ Henry Wolf interviews, 2013

1944: Nazi forces were losing ground, and the draft had been expanded to include ethnic German men aged as young as 16, and up to 50. Opa was drafted at 42. On advice, the younger Adam evaded the draft by volunteering for the paratroopers. Paratroopers were required to be 18.³⁹

October 2

- 13-year-old Heinrich leaves for school in Budapest.
- The Allies sense victory ahead and are weighing plans for how they'll prosecute war criminals when the war comes to an end.
- The approaching enemy, who for the ethnic Germans in Fekitić are Soviet and Yugoslav military forces, is just over 20 miles away, east of the Tisza river.
- Oma and Adam are still in Fekitić.

“Vertreibung” Routes taken by my grandparents, father, and mother:

Dark Green = my Oma & Uncle

Adam Jr.; Light Green = my

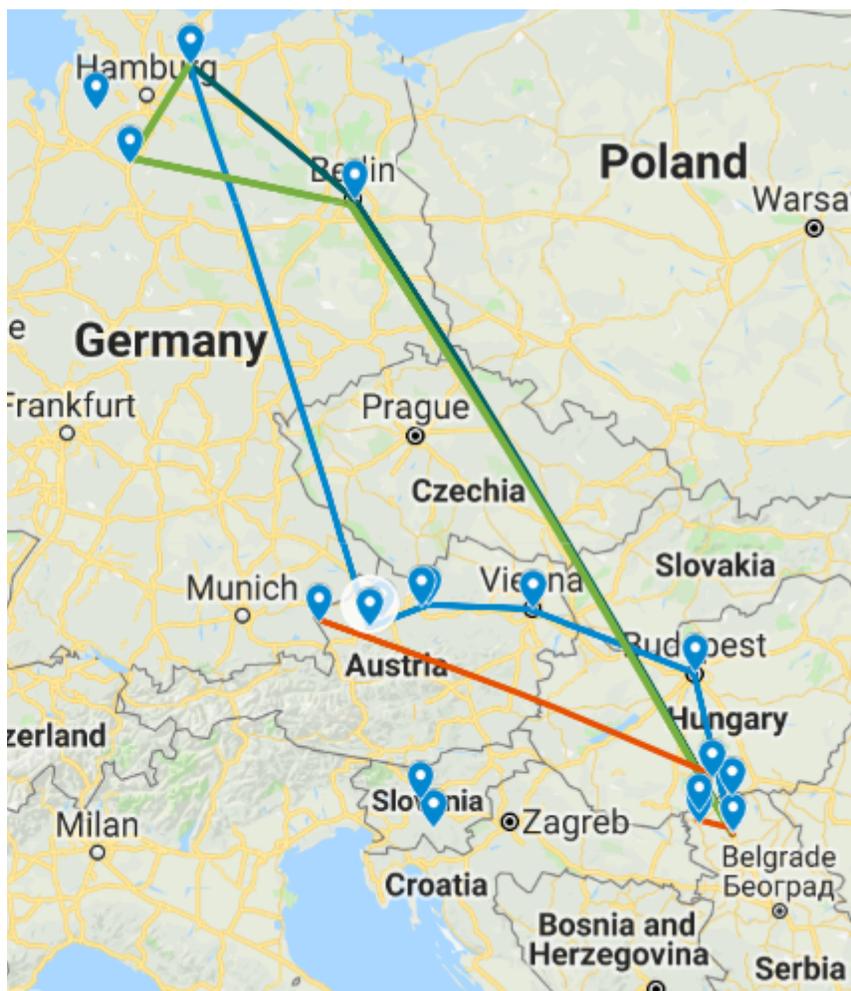
Opa/Adam Sr.;

Blue = my father/Heinrich; Red =

my mother/Liesel

Link to active map

https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1RNsZrhq-co1CoB_hBV64x7zoFQZL-WZQ&ll=46.82177813355131%2C15.983942723217979&z=8



³⁹ Henry Wolf interviews, 2013

October 18

- Soviet and Yugoslav military arrive in Fekitić.⁴⁰ But Oma and Adam had managed to flee. How?

Piecing together some facts and my own imagination of Oma on that day, I invent the answer:⁴¹

The news of the world swirls in the air; every report the crier calls, every story on the radio, every tale my neighbors carry to me is terrible. Dada and Heinrich far from home; my whole life out of control; and me not knowing what to do, but it's time to harvest. Powerless for so much else, I can do this. The sun follows me along the rows, and the work holds off my sadness and fear. There is a comfort and timelessness in repeating the rituals of my life, and of the lives of my family before me. I can be strong for them and for my hopes.

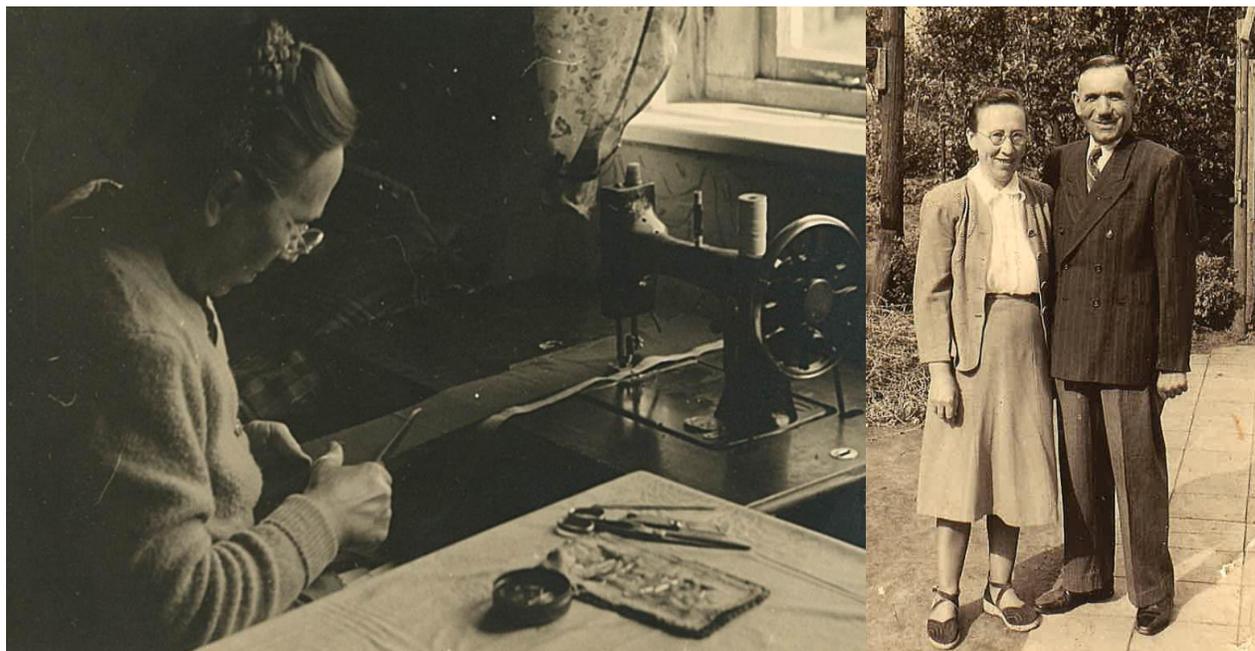
Then Peter Rarig finds me in the field, and insists we go, now. How can I leave though? Home, all I have ever had, and the home my husband and Heinrich will come back to? Peter overpowers my arguments. He has room for us in his wagon. Tomorrow we will go.

Their wagon joined a refugee caravan, through Hungary, to Germany. During the flight they were strafed. A bullet pierced Adam's coat, under his arm, but didn't touch him. Peter Rarig's nephew came, and trucked them to his home in Berlin, arriving around November 1. A bomb shelter wall collapsed, just after Adam had moved from his seat, killing the person who'd been sitting next to him. Oma worked as a seamstress in the nephew's tailoring shop that winter. The nephew's place was bombed out in early spring 1945. Oma and Adam found their way to the place Opa was, joining his unit; moving west to avoid capture by Russian forces, and north to

⁴⁰ Donauschwaben Villages Helping Hands, "Documentary," accessed December 17, 2018 www.dvhh.org/feketiitsch/documentary.htm

⁴¹ Henry Wolf interviews, 2013

avoid a German charge of treason. Oma and Adam tagged along, and they ultimately came to Lübeck, where they sheltered in a barn. At the barn, Opa and other soldiers surrendered to British soldiers. Opa became a prisoner of war, and was held for over a year, first in Fallingbostel, and later in Belgium. My maternal grandfather, Nick Blum, who was drafted into the German army when he was 45, died in Sandbostel, a British prisoner of war camp not far from Opa's POW camp.⁴²



Katharina Wolf sewing in the single upstairs room in Lübeck; and with Opa after June 1946 -After his time as a POW he was extremely thin for the rest of his (and chose to wear the repellant mustache style at least until 1951, but not when I knew him.)

Oma and Adam were permitted to live with a family in a house nearby, and eventually moved to the Hartleben home across the street. Oma began sewing to provide for herself and Adam, and he worked for a farmer.

In all this time, Oma didn't know what'd become of Heinrich, and he had had no news of his family.

⁴² Henry Wolf interviews, 2013

Heinrich

Heinrich arrived at school in Budapest on October 2, 1944. On October 15 his school closed, because the war was approaching. He was told to go home, but found that he could not. He was at the mercy of others. Just 13, and on his own, he managed to find ways to survive: until Christmas in a school in Vienna, and then until April at another school in Lambach, then in Perg working for farmers for food and a place to live. When Heinrich talks of the day he left home at thirteen he describes it as the day his childhood ended. The BBC website has a remarkable [online display based on found letters](#). It's about a boy whose Jewish mother left him in Vienna at age 14 in 1939.⁴³ Heinrich turned 14 in Vienna in 1944. Both boys did ultimately find their ways back to their mothers.⁴⁴

Heinrich contracted typhus, and received treatment when two women bartered for his care. Heinrich was at grave risk of death from the typhus. The spread of diseases (and deaths due to the diseases) because of the circumstances of so many people forced from their homes is a lesser known consequence of the Holocaust. Sometimes disease (like brutal cold, and starvation) was an unrecognized assistant in the Final Solution. Disease is treated as collateral -not intentional- damage, and since allegedly unintentional, less horrible than the other ways people were murdered. Finally, in February of 1946, Heinrich received a letter from his father's youngest brother, Jakob, who told him that people from his village were in a nearby refugee camp, in Volklabruck, Austria. Heinrich went there and found, and for a while stayed with, Peter Rarig, and had occasional visits from his uncle.

Peter Rarig intersects at crucial moments with this family story, and twice played a significant role in their lives. There are letters, documents, and photos by and of him in the

⁴³ BBC, "Boy Left Behind," accessed December 19, 2018, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/ids-left_behind_in_nazi_vienna

⁴⁴ Henry Wolf interviews, 2013

Wolf/Miller Family collection that I hoped would shed much light on him. But though interesting in their own right, they did not. What I do know about Peter Rarig comes from my father, and from a very brief conversation I had with his granddaughter, who donated his documents to me.⁴⁵

Peter Rarig was a United States citizen who got trapped in the turmoil at war's end. Both of his daughters were in the United States, and one was married to Oma's brother. In October 1944, Peter had been in Feketić, building a house for his other daughter and son-in-law, where they intended to live once it was ready. When Peter fled, he convinced Oma to come with him, and perhaps saved her life. With his protection Oma got to, and settled in Berlin for a while. But at some point in that tumultuous time their paths diverged again. Oma went to her husband, and Peter Rarig and his wife found their way to a refugee camp in Volklabruck, Austria. There Peter Rarig attempted to obtain documentation to be permitted to return to New York, and because he spoke English, assisted others in the camp to navigate life among the managers of their American refugee camp. Peter Rarig was the first family connection Heinrich had seen in a year and a half.

Word-of-mouth networking was a common way that broken families used to try to find other surviving family members after the war. In this case, Jakob sought to find his own wife Margarete and their two small children using the network, as she was seeking him.⁴⁶ When Jakob located his brother Georg in Bayern, he learned that his own wife and children had survived. Jakob and Georg also exchanged information about Oma and Heinrich. Georg wrote to Oma in Lübeck and to Heinrich in Baden, since by then Heinrich had moved once more to find work. Heinrich received Georg's letter in June 1946. The next day, he received a telegram from his mother. It said, "Come right away!" He was still only 15, and he had been cut off from his family

⁴⁵ Henry Wolf interviews, 2013, and June 2017 conversation with Violet Niedermeyer.

⁴⁶ Details provided from a conversation with Henry Wolf on December 23, 2018.

for nearly two years. He was able to manage to take a train, and arrived in Lübeck four or five days later. The joy of reuniting was compounded because Opa had also returned earlier that same week; but their joy was tempered because just before Heinrich returned, Adam had disappeared.⁴⁷ Adam had miscalculated how long Heinrich's journey would take, and had gone to the train station to try to meet Heinrich the day after Oma sent the telegram, and he stayed until after curfew. Adam was arrested for curfew violation, and an attempt to flee when challenged. It was some more days before they learned that Adam was in an institution that was called an "insane asylum."⁴⁸ They were permitted to retrieve him. The family was complete once more.⁴⁹

I wonder about this time for Oma, and knowing a few details, I again imagine her in those days:

I hear some other mother call, "Bouve!," and I'm calling my boys home again in Feketić.⁵⁰ Of course, here in Lübeck, no one says Bouve. I just misheard. But it cuts me anyway. My life with my family da hame has been shrinking, and is now completely shattered.⁵¹ Here it is only me and Adam. Dada is a POW now, and Heinrich, my golden child, I have no idea. I haven't known for so long.⁵² I know they could both be dead. But my friend who tells fortunes says they are alive, and I so I keep struggling, and hope. Every day, I sew. I sew for the little pay, and for the lunch they provide me that stretches our meager rations a little further, and because the work occupies my hands and fills my mind. I sew the rows and believe I'm sewing my life back together.

⁴⁷ According to Henry Wolf, Adam disappeared after the telegram was sent, possibly before Opa returned, and definitely before Heinrich did.

⁴⁸ from a conversation with Henry Wolf on December 23, 2018.

⁴⁹ Henry Wolf interviews, 2013

⁵⁰ "Bouve" would be "boys" in the Danube Swabian dialect.

⁵¹ "Da Hame" would be "back home" in the Danube Swabian dialect.

⁵² Oma called Opa "Dada."

At last now, all my wishes are coming true. Georg wrote with an address for Heinrich. I sent a telegram to him, "Komm sofort!" those two words containing all my longing and pain. And suddenly today, Dada is back. He found just me here. I cried like a child; joy, relief, and worry. He arrived weak and emaciated like a skeleton, and I'm desperate to feed him back to health, though we have so little. Adam will be so surprised to find Dada here, when it's Heinrich we've been expecting. He's off on one of his errands, and missed the reunion with Dada.

Parallelity

A young woman I know wrote about the Holocaust in Romania in a way that, with a few word changes, also works well to provide context for what occurred in Yugoslavia.⁵³ Change Romania to Yugoslavia, Antonescu to Tito, Jewish to ethnic-German, adjust the numbers who perished or were forcibly removed, and the story comes out much the same, but mirrored backwards. The parallels are striking. Here are her words, with the changes:

In a lesser known yet equally as brutal chapter of Holocaust and World War II history, the ~~Romanian~~ Yugoslavian Government under Dictator ~~Ion Antonescu~~ Marshal Josip Broz Tito was a willing partner of the ~~Nazi~~ Soviet Regime and directly responsible for implementation of the ~~Final Solution~~ Expulsions and Incarceration of ethnic Germans in ~~Romanian~~ Yugoslavian-controlled areas. Prior to the Holocaust, ~~Romania~~ Yugoslavia had a ~~Jewish~~ ethnic German population of ~~757,000~~. 450,000.⁵⁴ According to ~~the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania~~, *Genocide of the Ethnic Germans in Yugoslavia 1944-1948*, the total number of ~~Romanian and Ukrainian Jews~~ ethnic

⁵³ Orianna Galasso, a classmate in The Holocaust history class taught by Jessica Pearson at Macalester College in Fall 2018.

⁵⁴ Donauschwaben Villages Helping Hands, "Tito," accessed December 19, 2018, http://www.dvvh.org/history/atrocities/chap_1_tito_1944-48.htm#General-Introduction

Germans who perished in territories under ~~Romanian~~ Yugoslavian administration is between 280,000 and 380,000 85,400.”⁵⁵

The Nazi war set in motion ripples, causing hardship and inflicting atrocities on many Europeans, including Germans, who were not the Nazi’s intended victims. These consequences of World War II may be continuing to have effects worldwide today. The beliefs held and methods employed by Nazis during World War II were not, and are not, unique to Nazis. I fear that the real modern potential for outbreaks of new nationalist behavior is underplayed by a taboo on drawing parallels to the Holocaust. Lessons about human rights can be drawn from comparison, but are often diminished by arguments over whether the comparisons are apt. That happened in a recent Twitter storm between newly-elected House Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Lindsay Graham. Graham attempted to school Ocasio-Cortez about the Holocaust when she Tweeted that “asking to be considered a refugee & applying for status isn’t a crime,” then listed Germany, Rwanda, Syria, and Central America as examples.⁵⁶ Graham’s ahistorical response caused the Auschwitz Museum to enter the fray. Their tweet is inspiring, and feeds my desire to point to parallelity as a way between hyperbole and apathy, between polar extremities, between denial and despair. Here is what The Auschwitz Museum tweet said:

“When we look at Auschwitz we see the end of the process. It’s important to remember that the Holocaust actually did not start from gas chambers. This hatred gradually developed from words, stereotypes & prejudice through legal exclusion, dehumanization & escalating violence.”

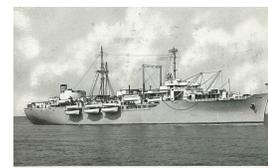
⁵⁵ Prokle, Herbert. *Genocide of the Ethnic Germans in Yugoslavia 1944 - 1948*. München: Verl. der Donauschwäbischen Kulturstiftung, 2006. 165.

⁵⁶ Second Nexus, accessed December 22, 2018, <https://secondnexus.com/news/auschwitz-memorial-tweets-lindsey-graham/>

That is The Auschwitz Museum tweeting strong support for drawing parallels.

Auslaufen nach Amerika

Oma and her family lived and worked in Lübeck until December 1951, when they emigrated to Oma's brother Chris in Ohio. The address they traveled to was painted on their trunk that today sits in my front porch. In the Wolf family collection, there is an itemized list of contents that were packed in that trunk. Among the very few things listed that came in the trunk was Oma's sewing box, which is in my home now. A postcard of the USS Harry Taylor; the refugee transport ship that carried the Wolf family to New York harbor was also among the items left in Oma's house.



Photos, above: the Wolf family's trunk; Itemized list of contents in the Wolf Family's trunk; Sewing Box that came in the trunk; Postcard of the Refugee transport Ship; USS Harry Taylor (carried the Wolf family to New York harbor, arrived January 4, 1952)

The caption on the postcard says, "MS. "General Harry Taylor" in Bremerhaven vor dem Auslaufen nach Amerika." Auslaufen can mean: leak, or leak out: run, or run out: drain; sail; discharge; be discontinued; empty; put out; or come to a stop. In the context of the postcard it must mean put out or sail, as in "put out to sea," or "sailed." But when I think about Oma's survival story, I think that at different moments each of the alternative definitions came into play.

In the end, Oma's Auslauf came to a stop. She and her family arrived in New York harbor on January 4, 1952. Oma's brother Chris picked them up in his new car. They visited relatives on Long Island, including Peter Rarig (who had managed the bureaucracy and returned

to the US in 1947), and his granddaughter Violet.⁵⁷ Chris housed the family in his Strongsville, Ohio home, and he helped them find jobs. The men worked in construction (until the sons were drafted) and Oma worked sewing, piecework at first, eventually becoming a member of, and later retiring from the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America. Oma and Opa bought a house, sold it, bought a different one. Oma worked and saved, and gardened and sewed (often the clothes I wore), and insisted on warming milk before she would let me drink it. Her house was mine for a short time. In it were the pieces I found and used to put together her life.

Pain inflicted, pain unacknowledged, pain. Plenty for all. Cry out.

-Herta Wolf Pitman

PEOPLE:

Katharina (Miller) Wolf –my paternal grandmother, “Oma” June 4, 1905-Jan 11, 1996, born in Fekitić, buried in Sunset Memorial Park Ohio Cemetery, North Olmsted, Ohio.

Adam Wolf, senior – my paternal grandfather, “Opa” August 15, 1902-April 25, 1973, born in Fekitić, buried in Sunset Memorial Park Ohio Cemetery, North Olmsted, Ohio.⁵⁸

Heinrich Wolf –my father, in the US known as Henry Wolf, and “Opa” to his grandsons. Born on December 11, 1930 in Fekitić.

Adam Wolf, junior – Oma and Opa’s oldest son, my Uncle Adam, remained a bachelor. Born in January, 1929 in Fekitić. Died in October 2010, Buried at Ohio Western Reserve National Cemetery, Rittman, Ohio

Elisabeth (Blum) Wolf: –my mother, known as Liesel in childhood, and Betty as an adult. Born on September 5, 1929 in Fekitić. Died on January 29, 2015. Buried at Lakewood Park Cemetery, Rocky River, Ohio.

Peter Rarig – the father of Katharina Wolf’s brother’s wife.

Jakob Wolf –youngest brother of Adam Wolf senior, Heinrich’s uncle.

⁵⁷ Wolf/Miller Family collection. Rarig letter dated January 27, 1947.

⁵⁸ Incorrect birth and death dates were listed in original paper, corrected 2/1/2019.

DEFINITIONS:

Batschka: Northern region of the former Yugoslavia where Feketić is located.

Feketić: The village in north Batschka of present day Serbia where both of my parents were born. Often called “Da Hame” by the author’s relatives, meaning “back home.” This spelling is the Serbian variation. The word is pronounced, and in German, is written “Feketitsch,” and is sometimes called Schwarzenberg. The village today has a predominantly Hungarian population, just as it did in the 1940s, and in Hungarian it is called Bácsfeketehegy. All of these names for the village mean Black Mountain. There is no mountain. In fact, the village was built on reclaimed swamplands.

Oma: German nickname for grandmother. In this paper it is used to refer to the author’s paternal grandmother, Katharina Wolf (nee Miller).

Opa: German nickname for grandfather. In this paper it is used to refer to the author’s paternal grandfather, Adam Wolf

Parallelity: Coined by the author to mean “the condition of being parallel,” and more specifically, used here to highlight the many similarities of methods used by agents of war; and the similarities of the experiences of victims and survivors, regardless of who the agents, victims, and survivors are.

Piecework: Work that is paid by the piece, and used here to describe the pay structure that Oma worked with at times, including sometimes work for food; and also the work of piecing together her life from documents and stories; as well as a hope that the sharing of stories like hers brings greater understanding, and is a small step in working towards peace.

Vertreibung: Expulsion

Volksdeutsche: ethnic Germans

Yugoslavia: In this paper, is used to refer to the former Yugoslavia, though now the location of Feketić is in northern Serbia.

LINKS:

Link to Map of “locations in Wolf/Miller/Blum/Gegner post-WWII movements,” created using Google myMaps. https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1RNsZrhq-co1CoB_hBV64x7zoFQZL-WZQ&ll=50.74540554692847,12.943543621875051&z=6

Link to Map of “Ethnic Cleansing in Europe: 1944-1948 on Donauschwaben Villages Helping Hands web site. <http://www.dvhh.org/history/atrocities/index.htm>

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Wolf/Miller Family collection

Documents and Photos from the Wolf.Miller Family collection



Oma's Emigration documents and ACWA union retirement card



Oma holding her first great-grandson



Oma

Gratitude

I am grateful to my predecessors for retaining so many of the items that have become sources in this work, and particularly to my father, Henry Wolf, who has been so willing to share his recollections, and to clarify and expand on questions that arise in my pursuit of our past. I am grateful to professors in the Macalester history and German departments for helping me to acquire skills and knowledge to investigate this past, and to Jess Pearson particularly for her encouragement on this project. I am grateful to my much younger classmates, who have always inspired me, especially my classmates in the Fall 2018 The Holocaust class.

I am grateful to Oma, but still not happy about the warm milk.