

▶ Memories in my Luggage

From Communisms to Capitalism

Erlo Pietsch ▶ Presentation ▶ 10/27/2015

Welcome

Hi I am Erlo Pietsch I am born 1936 in Leipzig in the Freestate of Saxony in Germany. If I said I am an Australian you would still ask where I am from.

The fact that you are here today indicates that you don't want to wait until my funeral to hear my story.

I base my presentation on my personal memories and experiences. It covers my journey from war years in Sudetenland, growing up in communist East Germany, looking for freedom in capitalist West Germany and seeking security in Australia.

I verified dates from the internet. In the process I found some interesting historic tit-bits about Germany I am going to share. Childhood memories may be distorted. What appears to be a long way or a long time to a child is not as much to an adult and even less as we age.

Jumper demo

I was about four or five year's old. My problem was that the jumper often ended back to front when I put it on myself. Standing in the kitchen I resolved to figure out WHY? To this day I think of this whenever I put on a jumper.

Throughout my live I enjoyed tackling problems. Only if it is out of my hands to do something about it, do I get frustrated and angry.

I get bored if everything becomes routine. Sort of need a new project to work on.

On the other hand, I always avoid confrontation, I sooner negotiate and compromise.

My Sister and my wife was the exact opposite. For them routine and stability is all important. It is either black or white with no room for compromise.

That's why my sister still lives in Dresden and I ended up in Australia.

Sudetenland map. 1921: 3 123 000 Germans (23.4% of CSR) stranded after typically UK and USA draw of the borders drawn on the map. 500 000 remain.

My father was a master motor mechanic and moved to the Sudetenland in 1939 to buy a service station in Teplice. It did not last long because he was drafted in the war. He bought a house for mum and us children in Hamr / Livinov.

This was a coal mining area with a petrochemical plant with 32 600 employees nearby. This plant produced 50,000 ton of motor fuel from coal for the war effort. Naturally it was a frequent target for allied bombing raids in the last war year.

Our house received a hit too one night while we sat in the cellar.

We did not flee at the end of the war, but got expelled from Czechoslovakia four month later. This was the idea of the Allied Occupation Forces following the Potsdam Conference in July/August.

After two weeks trekking on foot we found refuge at my Great grandmothers flat on the outskirts of Dresden.

Consequently I had my education under a communist regime in the Soviet occupied zone of post war Germany.

I went legally on a visit to Cologne West Germany in April of 1956. The illegally bit was that I did not return. I had no compelling reason to leave my home, other than adventure and stayed in the West.

It turned out that I wasn't better off in the golden West. The difficulty finding accommodation after being married was the biggest problem. After four years I had enough and considered going back home.

Australia presented an alternative. To get away from the cold war and tension between East and West in Europe I figured Australia may be a good option. In 1960 I came with wife and child to Australia.

I had two aims:

1. My own roof over my head preferably in view of the hunger years with a bit more land.
2. My own business.

It may is a bit harder with a family, but I reached my goals perhaps because of it.

▶ Memories in my Luggage

Now you know it all and have your coffee and cake! Or stay for more details.

Video 2002 Hammer

1942, just before I started school, was the last time I saw my dad. From our house we could see the towers of the coalmines. Behind the mines was the Malteuern petrochemical plant with 32,600 employees, which produced at its peak 50,000 tons of fuel from coal per month. It was a target for frequent air raids from 1944 until the war ended in May 1945. I found it exciting to watch the air raids at nights from the bunker entrance. Searchlights crisscrossed the sky, flack shooting at the airplanes and the petrol plant blazing. A stray bomb hit our house in the night of the 16th January 1945 while we sheltered in our cellar. Mum couldn't get us kids out of bed quick enough to make it to a bomb shelter. I will never forget this night and what followed. We scrambled out of the rubble in the dark scared of other bombs. Then we received emergency accommodation in the attic of a house on the edge of the forest.

My mum worked at one stage in Litvinov about 20 minutes by tram while my sister and I were at school. If there was an air raid, I took my sister on the hand and went to the nearest bunker in the hill. Mum tried to make it by tram to meet us there, but when the full alarm sounded the tram stopped half way and she sheltered in another bunker. The nearest bomb shelter from home was actually to run across the paddock and go underground in the coal mine. The air raids were so frequent near the end of the war that I missed virtually most of 3rd grade school.

I remember a time when mum was in hospital and we children were on our own. Actually we were a lot on our own and I dragged my sister everywhere with me. I decided to bake a cake as I saw mum doing it on the coal stove and took it to mum in the hospital. I must have been 7 at the time. A worker from the coalmine did look after us at night. He operated the big winch which brought the miners up and down the mine shaft. I visited him many times at work und he explained the bell signals to me while he worked this big machine.

One day a rumour said that the Americans are in Kommodau about 30 km away. There was a rush to the nearest train station. (Johnsdorf) The train we took was packed. When we arrived there in the middle of the night all was quiet and mum didn't know where to turn. We took a train back in the morning. I saw no fighting when the Russians finally arrived in our village.

By this time I knew already newer to fight as a soldier. If forced, I resolved to play death at the first shot and let myself capture. But I would defend my community as a partisan. In effect what they call a terrorist to day. Lucky it did not come to this.

I don't know the exact day when I saw the first Russian. It could have been before the official end of the war. We did hear tanks rumbling for days all around. Some Germans fled, others stayed at home. It was a sunny day and we 3 families stood outside looking down on to the village. Then we saw a single Russian soldier coming up the hill. One family urged us all to go higher up of the cliff and jumping off. I knew that I wouldn't do such a stupid thing. By the time we got half way up the hill the Russian arrived and called to us to come back. Mum took her wristwatch off. I wanted her to give it to me, but she put it in the apron pocket. The Russian found it and took it. Then he asked the 18 year old daughter from the other family to get him a glass of water. He followed her into the house and raped her.

After he left mum went with us down into village where many German families huddled together in one house. I don't think it was only Russians and Czechs who rummaged and looted. All the forced workers from the oil plant were free too. But it did not take long before order was restored under Czech rule. We Germans had to wear armbands like the Jews under Hitler, but were free to move about and got the same rations as the Czech. When we got back to the ransacked house on the hill, there was blood on the stairs right up to the attic door opposite our rooms. Mum took us children away so we didn't see the five bodies behind the other door. It turned out to be the same family which urged us to jump off the cliff. They killed their children and carried them up the stairs before suiciding themselves. I understand it was the top Nazi in the village. Not necessarily a cruel one. Perhaps he figured it a better way than the military. One of my uncles was in a similar position.

Life became normal and I expected to join the Czech school in September. But one day in August, I was sitting in the paddock tinkering with a broken radio when I heard my mum calling and looking for me. She and one other German woman with 2 small children got notice to leave the country within 3 hours. Mum packed a handcart with belongings. She was 5 months pregnant; I was 8 years and my sister 7 years old. The women requested an escort which was granted for the 20 km walk to the German border. A Czech guard escorted us up the hill to the summit of the Ore Mountains.

We walked a minimum of 20 kilometres a day for two weeks. Begging and scavenging for food along the way. I have only a hazy memory of barns and broken down buildings we slept in. Needless to say that we relied on the good will of the population we passed.

We tried first to get to Thüringen away from the Russians, but the western allies surrendered it to the Soviets for a slice of Berlin at this time. We double backed to head for mum's home city Dresden.

SHOW Occupation map and pix – may be Potsdam video too.

Let me digress from my memories for a moment. At the Potsdam conference 17th July to 2nd August 1945 the American, British and Soviet leaders decided the fate of the German people. They also redrew the German and Polish borders and ordered the expulsion of the remaining 12.4 million Germans from the lost territories and countries who held refugees from the east. Some ended up in Russian labour camps as reparation. Even countries which were happy to keep the Germans, like Hungaria, were compelled to do so. Because Germany held already several Million refugees, this process continued 5 years until 1950. It is estimated that 2 to 2.5 million died while fleeing from the advancing Russians. - So if you think that the current migration from Afghanistan, the Middle East and elsewhere is terrible, think again. But it is a feast for a one sided media. They never mention the real cause.

Now back to my personal memories: An uncle of my mum in Dippoldiswalde put us up perhaps a few days, I don't know exactly. From there we and many others with handcarts got a ride on a flatbed wagon on a narrow gauge railway for 15 kilometres. I still remember the sparks and suds from the locomotive showering us.

We arrived in Freital a town in the Weisseritz valley south west of Dresden. Our destination was a north western suburb some 8 to 10 kilometre away. Mum put us children on the tram to find our way to her Grandmothers place, because we could not take the handcart on the tram. I was confident to find the way with my little sister. The alternative was walking with mum. I knew from previous visits that I have to change in the city into number 3 trams in direction Wilder Mann (Wild Man) - to the end stop. Mum walked pulling the handcart and arrived hours later.

Pictures Wilder Mann – maybe Video of Steam train

Accommodation was scarce in Dresden because the inner city was completely destroyed. Great grandma lived on the ground floor in a 3 story villa with 6 flats. It was a three room flat without bad. The toilet was on the landing half a flight up to the next set of flats. There was already another family was living with her. There wasn't enough room and I had to go at night to other relatives to sleep.

We children had the nearby sandy heath and forest to play. There were wrecked tanks, other vehicles and even an aero plane lying around to clamber about. We found boxes of, I think percussion cabs, we called 26er. It was great fun to put on the tramway tracks to detonate when the tram run over them.

My brother was born in November 1945 not exactly a good time.

The first five years are the hunger years after the war. Often there were no supplies for our meagre rations and we had to do with awful tasting substitutes. City folks had virtually no means to grow things. We even had trouble to find food for the few rabbits we kept on the balcony. With no man in the house, gathering fuel during winter was difficult too. Even great grandma's furniture ornaments and her billons of inflation money from 1924 suffered. The forest ground was swept bare of pine needles and trees stripped of bark. Some used sling shots to bring down dead limbs from the pine trees. We all huddled in the smallest room with extended stove pipes below the ceiling to extract the maximum heat. We children begged for bread wherever Russian soldiers congregated, but they wanted something in exchange like onions or fresh fruit which we didn't have. We and many others foraged in the forest for berries, herbs and mushrooms. After harvest, we and hundreds of others went in the country side to look for missed potatoes or grains.

This memory remains with me to this day and influenced my actions throughout life.

When not in school or scavenging for food, I tried to earn money by offering my services in shops, a dentist and other people who were better off and paid for doing the crap work like shovelling snow. I gave it all to mum. A recurring nightmare was about suffocating under heaps of potatoes. **So much for child labour!**

There was no such thing as war widow's pension in the East. Mum took on work whatever she could find to make ends meet.

I never heard her complaining. This was just life.

During school holidays mum send one of us at a time to our grandparents in Wehrsdorf for a spell. This is my father's ancestral home in an out of the way village near the Czech border about 80 kilometres away. My grandparents had some animals and did grow some food. Goats provided milk, butter and cheese as well as meat. But there were many mouths to feed too.

While at school we received a watery soup and dark bun at lunch. I think from the Red Cross. It certainly did help. Sometime it was the only meal. Once took up a collection of our buns as a birthday present to our favourite class teacher. He knew what scarifies it was for us, but we refused to take them back.

It was a half hour or so walk to different substitute schools for my sister and me, because ours school was occupied by Russians. We walked barefoot from mid-May until the first snow. Our teachers were either very young or very old. But we received a very good general knowledge in school. Politic wasn't a main subject in those early years, but our teacher talked about capitalism and money spinning arms manufacture. It proofed right to this day.

The Hunger Years continued

From grade 4 to grade 8 we had Russian for a main subject. I regret not paying enough attention and just scaped though the final exam.

In 1950, near the end of year 8 introductions to work places and factories began. We were tested to determine which job or further education is best suited for each individual. Of course most of us aimed for an apprenticeship in the food industry but we could not all be bakers or butchers. After a further test at the railway workshop I started a maintenance fitter apprenticeship. Amongst us 500 apprentices were 80 girls. Before starting at 7 am we had 15 minutes sport in all weather. Praxis was 4 days in the workshop and theory 2 days at the trade school on the same premises. The Old Prussian quality standards of working and discipline applied.

The best thing about working at the railway was that I received higher rations. It was acknowledged heavy work requiring more calories. We also had a warm midday meal at nominal cost in the canteen independent of rationing. Things started to look better. I gave my remaining pay after paying for tram fares and canteen to mum.

At my confirmation in 1950 one gift was still a 2 kilo loaf of bread instead of cake. Life in the East started to improve from 1950 onward. Rationing eased gradually, but supplies of all sorts of goods were sporadic and remained tight until the collapse 1989. The first things taken off rationing were bread, potatoes and sugar. I nicked off to the West in 1956 just when everything looked good.

I think I should re-cap here how the split of Germany came about. I remember what we learned in school, but to be sure of the facts I researched the exact dates and found some astonishing facts.

Some Photos

From Communisms to Capitalism **5. 1948 - The split of Germany**

Marshal Plan Graphics

The recovery of war devastated Europe was sluggish which benefited the expansion of communism throughout Europe. Capitalist America didn't like this development and came up with a plan, the **Marshal plan** on the 3rd April 1948. The communist Soviet Union rejected the US aid. It was the start of the now forgotten Cold War.

On Friday the 18th of June 1948 the West German people were informed by the media that their money will be no longer legal currency on Monday in the western zones of Germany. A new currency, the Deutschmark, was already printed during the previous months in Washington and shipped over. The exchange rate was 1:10. Virtually overnight goods appeared in shops. Coins remained at 1/10 their value at the start. To stop the flow of the old currency from the west to the Soviet occupied East Germany, we had to follow suit by issuing a new currency on the 23rd June 1948. This was done by putting stickers on old banknotes until new ones could be printed. However in the absence of American aid the shops remained empty.

It was a real mess in Berlin. The conflict over which currency should operate in the four zones of Berlin between the Soviet Union and the western allies led to the Berlin blockade on the 24th of June 1948 by the Soviets. The blockade lasted 11 months. Aren't the Russian a bad lot? How could they dare to stop American supply lines? **This all happened within one week.**

Under the leadership of the US the German Bundes Republic was formed on 23rd of May 1949 and Bonn declared as its provisional capital. A provisional German Democratic Republic was established on 7th October 1949 under Soviet domination with Berlin as capital.

Both states remained under the control of the occupying forces until after the communist system fell apart in 1989. It astonishes me that Germany wasn't thoroughly independent until the Moscow treaty on the 3rd October 1990!

Image this! Forty five years after the end of the war!

Only this enabled the unification of the two German states 25 years ago. I understand it's still no peace treaty.

I find it strange that the Russians were compelled to remove their troops, but Amerika not. I suppose Germany offered a deal too good to pass. The last Soviet soldiers left in 1994. Of course the US tried to fill the vacuum with missile launchers, but this was contested by Russia as contravening the treaty.

From Communisms to Capitalism **6. Life in East Germany the DDR**

It is history now and irrelevant. I just mention here that the Communist party held no majority in parliament initially. Only after the formation of the two German States in 1949 and the merger of Communist Party and the Social Democrats in the East was it possible to manipulate elections. This paved the way to a communist police state in East Germany.

For the ordinary worker the system doesn't matter. You earn just enough to get by either way. As for freedom of speech, what does it matter? Nothing changes either way. If you have no money it doesn't matter if the shops are full or empty.

East Germany was severely handicapped: Apart from the war damage, the Russians dismantled most factories, even ripped out rail tracks as reparation and shipped it to Russia. Germany's heavy industry was in the West and we tried to build a steel industry from scratch out of own resources. Furthermore we didn't have the benefit West Germany had with its massive capital inflow from America.

The communist state controlled and planned everything, However you can plan as much as you like. If you don't have the resources and enthusiasm of individuals it does not work. The ordinary worker found means and ways to work the system often by cheating and take advantage of the benefits. Not everything was bad – bugger freedom!

The agrarian reform expropriated all land belonging to owners of more than 100 hectares of land and Junker estates were converted into collective people's farms. More than 30,000 square kilometres were distributed among peasant farmers, agricultural labourers, and refugees. All production was controlled by the state.

This sounds great, but without chiefs the Indians are idle. To compensate for the labour shortage at harvest time young people are recruited from the city. I was one of them.

Later on small farmers, who slogged on their land, were quite happy to hand over control. The state paid rent for their land and forest. As employees they worked only an 8 hour day and had paid holidays. They grew fruit, vegetables in the garden and kept some animals on the side for personal consumption and the black market. I suppose you can figure out where some of the feed for their animals came from.

Life improved from 1950 onwards. By the time I left in 1956 no one starved. But every one yearned for imported goods, coffee, cocoa and tropical fruit.

Life in East Germany the DDR continued

Not everything was bad for the individual.

There was no unemployment. The state provided for child care from an early age so every adult man and woman could work. In fact it was in the constitution – the right to work.

Prices for basic needs and rents were kept artificial low. Supplies are another matter.

All prices were fixed throughout and printed on the manufacturer's label.

We paid nothing for health and dental services. Even health resorts to prevent or treat illnesses were paid for by the state or factory.

You could feel safe walking the dimly lit streets at night even in the cities.

All education was free. For instance my brother went to university and became a professor at no cost to our mother. He continued to progress to education ministerial level in Berlin. His handicap for further progress was my presence in the west. - He had great difficulty finding a new job after the wall fell.

During school holidays children were encouraged to visit free day camps in pleasant surroundings. Employers provided holiday premises for children of employees.

As times improved most people went on holiday at least once a year to factory owned or leased places with all meals provided. The locations were restricted to East Germany initially. Later you could travel to other communist countries.

People did help themselves and tried to improve the surrounds around the housing estates by organising working bees. Vandalism was virtually unknown and there was no mess laying around. It astonished my daughter during a visit that a truck stopped after dropping something while turning a corner and the driver went in a house to get a broom to clean up the mess.

You could not go on strike because theoretically you are part owner of the state controlled firm you worked for. How can you strike against yourself?

As we all know this system failed because all individual initiative was stifled.

From Communisms to Capitalism **7. The FDJ and my Jobs in the DDR**

Most young people were members of the FDJ, a socialist youth movement in Germany whose political and ideological goal was to influence every aspect of life of the young people in the GDR and the indoctrination with socialist behaviour. In Hitler's time it was an underground anti-fascist movement to oppose the Nazi Party's rule. This organisation was banned 1951 in the West after the split of Germany.

It gave you many benefits and I largely ignored the political aspect. Access to motor cycles and sailing boats gave me skills I could not otherwise afford to learn. It provided many leisure-time activities including dances in the youth club. I didn't mind carrying a flag or banner at rallies against America and the Korean War. Most times we got a bun and sausage to eat before the march. I must admit that I rarely marched to the end and just nicked off at a congested stop, leaving the flag behind. But youth conventions and large sporting functions over several days in various cities were generally fun. All paid for by the state owned employer.

I was 16 years of age when I finished my apprenticeship half a year early and started work in the railway workshop repairing goods wagons. We received full adult wages although, I think now that I wasn't physically ready for this sledge hammer and oxy torch work.

One day 2 friends and I got caught up in a wild demonstration in East Berlin. It was the 17th June 1953. Only after we crossed to West Berlin did we find out what it was all about. Headlines pronounced "uprising in East Berlin". It became a national holiday in the West. ***You are looking at a hero here although I didn't know.*** The following day protest meetings were held at our work place and elsewhere. After the police and the Soviet Army suppressed the uprising all three of us got the sack as 'not suitable for railway duty' because it was assumed that our visit to Berlin had something to do with it.

A job with the city parks and gardens tied me over until I returned three month later to the railway. It was the building division this time. This work was versatile in the workshop and on construction sites. Mostly I was the only machinist on site. This included plumber's jobs and operating or repairing all sorts of machinery used in construction. ***If I didn't have a clue, I figured it out or bluffed my way through.*** I wasn't strong enough to start the diesel compressor on a bridge construction site and had to swallow my ego by asking one of the big blokes to bring it to live.

Pictures FDJ and photos

The FDJ and my Jobs in the DDR continued

Then after 11 months I got myself a job in a pharmaceutical factory as maintenance fitter closer to home. *Tradesman wage was 1.41 Mark per hour –I still got the contract.* I was 17 going on to 18 years of age. There was no FDJ group in this factory and the money budgeted for this went begging at year end.

I figured it is time someone does something about it. Consequently I put a billboard up wrote articles to please the union and party officials, also invited other young workers to a meeting. I convinced about a dozen girls and boys that 3000 Mark are better used by us, than let go back in consolidated revenue. It was November and time was short. We approached a bus tour operator who organised a weekend trip in the Oberlausitz including a theatre outing in Zittau. *The play was “Maria Stuart”.*

Although we contributed 6.00 Mark each to the fare, the bill caused a bit of a stir with the party functionaries in the factory. I sorted it out by what I called “smear honey around their snout”. In other words tell them what they want to hear. On my FDJ bill board I praised the party in my report over the opportunities given to us and the morale bust to all concerned. I continued to refresh the bill board by writing interesting newsletters and reports intermingled with political slogans to please the party. Once I got ticked off because I forgot to mention Stalins birthday, but shortly afterwards his crimes where disclosed and it didn't matter anymore. (He died in March 1953).

After this we took smaller bites of the funds. We made day trips, went in the theatre and started a cabaret group. It involved many rehearsals to perform. We were in the process of forming a band just when I left for West Germany.

The factory owned a holiday home in the Ore Mountains. In the summer it was used as a holiday camp for children of employees. Guess who volunteered to supervise a group of boys? My pay continued and I like the forest.

There were 4 groups of children who changed after two weeks for a second lot. Younger and older in separate dormitories. The Girls slept in the main house and the boys in another building. I was in charge of the older boys. Some had cameras and on a rainy day I decided to introduce them to developing film and make contact prints of their photos. I knew nothing about it, but bought an instruction book, the equipment, paper and chemicals; set up a darkroom in the attic and off we went. The excitement was great when the first pictures appeared on the paper under the red safelight.

I got hooked on photography from this day on.

The FDJ and my Jobs in the DDR continued

When the call came to help at the harvest in the countryside, I volunteered too - naturally on full pay. On arrival we found it too cold to sleep in the tents consequently we moved into the barn to sleep on straw - all together boys and girls. There I met Gerhart, a FDJ functionary, who led the action. We went on long evening walks looking at the stars discussing the universe and all sorts of things which were on our mind. Our friendship continued back in Dresden and we went out a lot together. He asked me few times to speak on various topics at meetings, but I declined. I think he had connections to Erik Honecker who led the youth organisation at the time. My conviction to communism wasn't strong enough.
Did I miss an opportunity there?

I was now 18 and of age in the GDR. The harassment to join the Volksarmee, which was still voluntary, increased steadily following the re-armament of West Germany. One time I was called to the stage at a workers meeting in the canteen to justify my reluctance to join the military. This upset me so much that I became physical sick for several days.

In my desire to get ahead I continued with further education by completing a certificate for welding pressure vessels your equivalent to boilermaker. Then I started a course to prepare myself for the university until I messed my live up and that's how it came about:

I went for two days to the Industry Expo in West Berlin in October 1955. Our money was only a quarter worth but the entry to the expo was 1:1. This opened my eyes how far behind our technology was in the East and made my think. I desperately wanted to do something about it and discussed avenues to improve the situation back in Dresden. The 'Falcons' a West German youth organisation did have a stand there. I put my name in a raffle for a holiday.

Weeks or even months later I received a letter from the Falcons stating that I won a trip to Cologne at Easter 1956. To help me to get a travel permit to the West they sent a fake wedding invitation as well as a return railway ticket. I was not suspected of fleeing the DDR and received a travel permit to West Germany.

So I travelled legally into another world and abandoned all I knew! No dramatic jumping walls or barbed wire!

Photos Industry expo

Later I found out that my desertion caused quite a stir and a criminal investigation in the factory.

Our hosts 'The Falcons' were genuinely interested in us East Germans and made us welcome. We stayed in a youth hostel in Cologne. Apart from sightseeing, we compared our respective lives, discussed politics and agreed that the reunification of Germany should be highest priority, opposing the re-armament of separate states.

I stayed behind and did not know what to do next. My little money disappeared at the rate 4:1 and the cost of food was the other way round. I was hungry and went to the train station mission for a soup. Because at 19, I wasn't 'of age' in the West; they called the department for youth. The youth counsellor advised me to re-consider my step and go back home. I nearly did, after all, the rail ticket was in my pocket and the welcome not too hot. But the curiosity, which killed the cat, to find out what happens if I stay won. Consequently I received a train ticket to the **Notaufnahme Lager Gießen**, a sort of detention camp. (Wednesday 4th of April 1956). **Picture Notaufnahme**

There I was housed in the youth camp Krofdorf. The Americans interrogated me several times. We also got detailed to work commandos to keep the place clean. Eventually I got a permit to stay initially in Baden-Württemberg. After ten days, I and other youths were escorted to an out of the way temporary camp near Bad Andergast in the Black Forest. It was a bit derelict, but who is complaining? The camp leader introduced us to classical music in our spare time. He was very passionate about it.

If you think a German can just live anywhere in Germany without registering you are mistaking. Registration, police clearance and the employment office kept us busy.

There were tears on the letter from my mother with the photocopies of my birth certificate and trades papers. This was a complicated process in those days involving real negatives. Then the Americans requested another interview and told me to come to USHF (American Historic Research Institute) in Stuttgart after I have a firm address. I never did go! Perhaps they thought I am a spy because I came legally. Or they found out how active I was and knew more than I told them.

By the end of April I got a job in a factory which manufactured small garden tractors. First thing what hit me: No adult wages as in the East! It hurts when you do piece work and get 25% less than the fellow next to you. Accommodation was a bed in a room shared with 2 others in a private house. The money lasted only from payday to payday just the same as back home. Mainly because basic essentials turned out to be dearer, leaving little for the dreamed off luxuries.

Capitalist West Germany continued

I managed to get my driver licences, but no Vehicle. Once I start something I don't give it up easily but was not happy with myself, lack of progress, lack of money and my life in general. Capitalism hasn't worked for me so far. I dreamed to see more of the world, but got nowhere. Mood swings and loneliness came on top of it. Got to try something else!

Oh- The impatience of youth!

After 5 months in West Germany I got a cheap ride with a truckie to Hamburg. To go to sea I had to get a passport, International Immunisation Certificate and the hardest thing of all, my mother's consent. The need for parental consent in the West ruffled me at age 19.

Just in the nick of time, after being fleeced in Hamburg and virtually penniless I got hired on a merchant ship as cleaner and creaser in the machine room. Nice cabin, good roommate just one year older, food and board – *life looked promising*.

Then misery: I was seasick all the way across the Atlantic and homesick too. The constant noise, heat and oil in the machine room didn't help. However it got better after the first landfall in the USA. Trouble with a bully of one chief and general remarks about being from the East from superiors made life miserable at times. My 20th birthday was on the way to Buenos Aires. I also celebrated my most memorable New Year's Eve in Argentine. By the time we got back to Germany after six months everything was fine.

We returned to dry-dock in Hamburg to fix a split weld in the hull which the deckhands temporarily patched up at sea. I had the option to take 2 weeks paid leave, but left altogether to go home for a month.

It was the last time that I could get a two-way visa for East Germany. It was denied at later in the year (1957). I just received a letter that I could return without reprisals permanently.

It would take 17 years before I could see my mother again.

After the break I got stuck in Hamburg because due to a recession, ships were idle and I couldn't get a job. I shared a room with a Turkish Muslim in the Catholic Sailors Home and ran out of money fast. We got along fine and I got an insight in Muslim customs too. *A bit of irony here – a Protestant and a Muslim going to Catholic mass to goggle at the girls.*

Photos Hamburg

Capitalist West Germany continued

Next call was the employment office. I don't know if the officer had a bad day or didn't like Saxons. First question was what I want in Hamburg. I could try elsewhere. When I insisted he reluctantly referred me to Siemens. At Siemens I was told my apprenticeship was too short and they don't want East Germans anyway. I walked out and went what I call 'door knocking' – got a job the same day. I never went to an employment office ever again. When I needed a job I found one myself. But I never bought any Siemens appliances in my live either.

When Christmas came I was alone and lonely. Mum sent a home baked stollen, the traditional Christmas cake in Dresden. The previous one went all the way to Argentina, but missed the ship. I received it later in Hamburg. My mum sent one 2 kilogram stollen every year until she died in 1991.

Photos Ahrensburg

I had no luck with the local girls until I met one from Saxony. We married in 1958 in the registry office in Ahrensburg, a small town north of Hamburg. By then I was 21 and didn't need parental permission. Then the trouble began with finding accommodation. Best thing was, I am no longer alone. A child was on the way too. This gave me real purpose to my live. Finally, I could build a nest the way I felt it should be. We both grew up with only one parent which makes you only half a person. You don't realise it but something is missing in your personality. I resolved that our children should have a real home and both parents! ***And stuck to it!***

We found two rooms way out of town on a farm, but did not register. Next I got a court summons and fine. I kept looking for a better place and found a flat which was vacant for some considerable time. The authorities became aware of it when I went to register; but denied us permission to move in. I didn't take it lying down and made trouble in the shire office until they called the police.

This may sound like whining but it really cheesed me off.

As tradesman I never had trouble finding work, maybe not at Siemens, but other places. Certainly no burden on the social service!

Personally I had enough of West Germany and figured the East wasn't so bad after all. Life was a struggle and we certainly did not live better. On the other hand, meekly returning and admitting defeat did not appeal to me either. I am not much of a person to backtrack ever. I may cut my losses and start afresh, but going back - no.

Political tensions increased steadily between East and West with the rearmament on both sites at the time. The arms race between the USA and Soviet Union could easily turn the Cold War into a hot one too. ***Perhaps Australia is the answer!***

Photos Todendorf

From Communisms to Capitalism

9. Journey to Australia

Australia is far away from Europe's trouble. (As it turned out it was behind the moon too). I enquired previously following an advertisement and knew I qualified. Just had to qualify the pregnant wife, but we had to wait until the child was 12 months old. **After all, Australia wanted the finished product.** Australia did not take just anyone.

You had to be:
Fully trained with 5 years work experience.
Be under 45 years of age and healthy.
Stay a minimum of two years.
Willing to learn English on arrival.

Finally in 1960 we got three week notice to get ready for boarding our ship in Bremen Lesum on the 23rd of April. Being from East Germany the West German government took up the tab for our share of the fare. I had to assure the clerk in the shire office that they didn't have to pay if they stamped my document.

We left Germany quite cheerfully looking forward to a new beginning. Not a soul waved us goodbye. No tears to shed! ***We didn't feel we lost anything in Germany.***

It wasn't exactly a luxury cruise but we looked forward to the future which was now in the hands of the immigration department.

The Flaminia was an old troop transporter converted for the immigration trade to Australia. It provided spartan accommodation for 1024 passengers, mostly in eight berth cabins. The baby cot was placed across in between berths in the women cabin. There was no privacy and only two small clothing lockers in each cabin. Most luggage remained in a store room which was twice weekly accessible. Valuables could be deposited for a fee with the bursar.

If you have a baby, you have nappies to wash. There were about 10 sinks available - no machines or dryers. It was the wife's late night occupation to iron the nappies dry if the weather wasn't suitable. I took our baby on deck whenever the weather was suitable. We could not go together to film shows or lessons about Australia because one of us had to mind the baby.

As a diversion we christened our daughter and married again ourselves. This made the Lutheran Pastor on board happy. The catholic captain couldn't understand this!

▶ Memories in my Luggage

Pictures Flaminia and journey

Journey to Australia continued

We could go 2 hours on land in Messina – Sicily and half a day in Port Said – Egypt. Somehow we were a novelty with our baby in certain areas. Many children followed us to look in the pram. We didn't mind, but men beat the children and chased the women away. Taking pictures with women nearby was a no-no. These were the only two ports on the whole voyage. We had to stay on board in Aden and Freemantle. The journey on the whole was boring.

We arrived at Station Pier Melbourne on 30th May 1960. After completing customs and immigration formalities, boarded the train to Albury-Wodonga and the transit camp Bonegilla. I was too busy with the pram and luggage to take any photos.

We received a room for the whole family in one of barracks in Bonegilla. Accommodation was basic and cold, but better than on the ship. Food was plentiful and there were many diversions. **In fact we were quite happy there.** Everything was new to us and interesting - the gum trees, the magpies and frost on green grass, which turned out to be hard onion grass on closer inspection.

15. Arrival and Bonegilla

After ten days some of us men got a train ticket to Geelong. The family stayed behind until I found a place to live. I also left the last 30 shilling with my wife. There was a waiting time of about two hours in Melbourne changing train to Geelong. I bought a pie for lunch. Not expecting meat in something baked, I found it so revolting that I never bought one again ever.

On arrival in Geelong we transferred to the Norlane hostel and were directed to International Harvester, a farm machinery factory, for an interview. **From this day on we were on our own and Commonwealth support stopped.** Unfortunately it was a Queens Birthday long week end and we could not start work until the following Tuesday. I received the first hostel bills for myself in Norlane and the family in Bonegilla before my first wages. I disputed payment for the days before actually starting work. After all, we had a contract that the Commonwealth was responsible for us until I started work.

The You Yangs looked so close that a few of us tried to walk there. On the way we came across a group of Australians with a keg of beer celebrating on a football oval. They invited us to drink with them. Our English wasn't good enough for a meaningful conversation, but it was our first introduction to the local brew. The You Yangs seemed very far all of a sudden.

Photos Arrival and Norlane

▶ Memories in my Luggage

The language problem did not affect work very much. Working to technical drawings is part of being a tradesman. It did not matter that the imperial measuring system was different to what I was used to. To get used to the appalling Australian work practices and attitudes was the hardest.

There was a depression in the first year and I took on all sorts of work available at International Harvester. I also applied at many jobs and ended up in the tool room at the Ford Motor Company which planned to expand. I worked there sixteen and a half years, but could not advance. Actually industrial expansion and technology started taking off in Australia too and we had the opportunity growing with it. I don't think it would have happened without us so called new Australians.

After two weeks I found accommodation just by talking to work mates. Then my wife could come with the baby from Bonegilla. We rented furnished rooms in a shared house at first. The first thing we bought was a kerosene heater for 18 Gunnies that is equal to \$37.80 on 2 year hire purchase. After the arrival of our luggage a few months later, we rented a house. Again by talking to work mates. Australians helped us out with furniture and an ice box.

I had a simple finance plan based on my basic wages. 25% for the house, 25% for housekeeping, 25% hire purchase and 25% for the rest. It was a bonus if there was overtime or a second job, like lawn mowing. In Germany a good slice of our wages went to social security. In Australia you had no security unless you took out private insurance. Well, I used this money and took my chances. When the second baby arrived it cost me two weeks wages. Not much different with the third one five years after.

Public transport was very poor especially if you worked shift work. Car sharing was common to get to work. I bought a bomb for 50 pound (\$100) after two years. Someone ran in our side on the way to the cinema and we turned on the side wrecking three doors. The police wasn't interested because we were not seriously injured. Neither of us had insurance. The fellow who was at fault said: "sorry I got 4 kids can't pay you". A Solicitor said I may get stuck most likely with more legal fees as the value of the car. - **Amazing what you can do with wire.**
A few months later a front wheel fell off down the hill on the end of Fyans street near the river. I still got 20 Pound from the wrecker.

Photos Gairloch Grove

Settling in Australia continued (first two properties)

By the third year I had saved 300 Pound. This was enough deposit for a commission home with a 40 year repayment schedule. Having the hunger years on my mind I looked for a bit more land and put an advertisement in the paper. All the replies came from the areas near Bannockburn about 18 to 25 kilometre out. None had town water or sewerage. I saw potential in an abandoned butcher shop in the main street of Bannockburn next to the general store and the pub with road frontages front and back. Although I had one third deposit the bank wouldn't finance it because of its age and condition. A solicitor was willing to finance it on a three year interest only loan. For a higher interest rate (8%) we agreed on an open repayment scheme. It felt good to have my own place paid off after two years!

I went back to the solicitor to borrow again on the same terms to make the place more liveable. Things like re-wiring and power points, a water pressure system, new bath room and kitchen. Apart from the electrical I did all work myself.

We also got our third child in 1966 just as decimal system was introduced in Australia.

Photos Bannockburn

In the back of my mind was the idea to become self-employed sometime. What was missing was capital and ideas. My wife did not like the shop idea. So I tried chucks in the staples as a sideline and build more sheds from second-hand material. Realising that I needed more land we sold the house and bought 8 acres in Wallington with a started house and town water. We got all our money back, effectively having lived rent free. Wallington is about the same distance out of Geelong in the other direction as Bannockburn, but the commuting to Fords is longer.

I worked at Fords, on the house, build up the farm to 4000 hens and tried utilising the manure for market gardening. It still wasn't enough to give my job away. Growing things here is difficult unless you specialise in a big way. My wife was a city girl and although she didn't give me a hart time, she was not happy. She did not drive and when neighbours children went to high school we had no transport for our youngest to the primary school. I changed to night shift at Fords just to be able to do this 6 kilometre drive twice a day. This was extra stress on me because the eggs had to be delivered in the morning.

Photos Wallington

Settling in Australia continued (Geelong and H&R Block)

I cut my losses, sold up and bought a modest 3 bedroom house in St Albans Park. I borrowed \$3000 more than needed to change the heating and hot water from briquettes to electric and allow for a trip home. This time the bank financed \$8000, but it didn't take long and the interest rates increased from 6.5% to above 10%, exceeding the rate the solicitor charged. Also the bank charged fees on top of it. **This was 1973 our 13th year here. It also was the end of hire purchase payments and second hand appliances.**

Now we had a complete house with proper bath and toilet. I missed the land, was lost with too much spare time and I looked for a second job again. I joined a movie club and bought a super 8 movie camera in preparation for my planned trip home.

16. Geelong – early years

In the following year I went on a holiday to Europe and made my first film. Germany did change, but my memory not. By this time, the east was a real police state, strapped for hard currency. Visitors from the West had to exchange 25 DM 1:1 for each day they stayed. I felt being home regardless. Seeing mum smiling and the rest of the family was a happy affair. We had a family party in Wehrsdorf under watchful eyes, but no one cared. **Somehow it wasn't the same any more or I have changed. I felt they had an easier life than we in Australia.** My Kodak film cassettes caused a bit of a hick up at the border control, but I talked my way out of it. **On arrival back in Australia my children welcomed me at the Geelong railway station and I knew where I belonged.**

Early 1975 H&R Block advertised a course for income tax preparer. Now this was the last thing I thought I could do, but did the course anyway. **I ended up working part time in the North Geelong office the next three years.** We had only adding machines at the beginning for the calculations. Calculators were still a couple of years off. **The job suited my mentality.** I could apply my common sense and the best thing was that I wasn't just a number like at Fords. **I felt appreciated** by the clients.

I also started part time study at the Gordon Institute in accounting. This was a five year 20 semester course and filled many hours studying at home.

In February 1978 I received a phone call at Fords. The offer was to take over the H&R Block management for the Western district and to come to Sydney in a couple of days.

I took sick leave and went to me first management training. We agreed on the terms and I got hired on the spot. On my return I put my notice in at Fords and worked another fortnight. **I was 41 years old at the time.**

From Communisms to Capitalism

11. My own Boss!

Apart from intensive management training, I learned to apply interview techniques and instructor procedures. I ran the annual H&R Block training courses already in the second year because I felt I could do better than the teacher I had myself in the first year. Many of my TAFE teachers later on, lacked the skill to teach.

After another three years I took the H&R Block Franchise on for Geelong. Although giving up a regular pay check is never easy, I felt I could do better running the show myself without the shackles of the American system. Now the glove was on the other hand and I paid H&R Block 25% of the ongoing turnover. The procedures had changed over time and I bought my first computer in 1981. **I was my own Boss! It wasn't easy but I successfully increased the turn over steadily with the help of loyal employees.**

By now I completed the certificate of accounting. In view of my practical experience I received the tax agent licence straight away. When the National Institute of Accountants formed I was admitted as a full member and progressed there as far as was possible. All this involved continuing education, good management and new responsibilities. I entered a completely new circle of professional environment for which I wasn't brought up, but I succeeded.

17. H&R Block

1990 after the fall of the wall

Early 1990 a college made me an offer for the franchise. I was keen to go to Germany after the fall of the wall and sold the business.

To start something in East Germany did not agree with my professional ethics. Besides, scrupulous businesses from the West were already active. While I knew how western scams worked my friends in the East didn't believe me at the time.

On my return I started a new accounting practise. A new computer did help me to participate in the electronic lodgement trial with the taxation office. It was the beginning of the electronic revolution. The Tax Office increased the timeframe to lodge the income tax returns by Agents gradually. This enabled me to spread the work over a longer period, eliminating the need for employees. I had no intention to expand this business beyond what I could handle on my own.

Australia was in the doldrums too, with Interest rates of 16% and bank collapses. One of my business clients had his funds locked up in the Pyramid building society

▶ Memories in my Luggage

collapse. To help him, I worked on a scheme to bring new tourists to Australia at my own expenses and went back to Germany the following year. The plan failed.

Video East Germany 1990

From Communisms to Capitalism **12. The East of the united Germany**

By then Germany was united. It was the end of the secure and in some ways lazy life for the East Germans. Many lost their jobs and security. All of a sudden **‘Free Enterprise’ was a free for all**. Western commerce muscled in and destroyed the largely inefficient enterprises of the East. Con-men exploited the ignorance of the local people. Although a trust company was set up to pool all state controlled assets, a lot was diverted by corrupt ex-communist functionaries for their own benefit. Even I was approached there and in Australia. Local rural industries failed to find buyers for their produce or were blocked out by imported goods which looked more appealing.

Dresden is renowned for its historic paddle steamers playing the river. Now taken over and supplied by a consortium from the West. As many Dresdner do on a sunny day I took mum for an outing, she could no longer afford, along the river. How disappointing it was not to be able to buy a local beer on the ship. The so called traditional Saxon meal was lousy too. **Dresden was just no longer the same.**

As an accountant I wondered on previous visits how mum could manage with her pension and sent us parcels on birthdays as well. I went through her bills and envelope budgeting system and found she managed perfectly alright. Now in the united Germany she could not even afford the daily paper. Everything she dreamed off in the past was available but at prices she could not pay. She was affright to out into the city alone. When I took her in a café, I paid the bill and she said it was more than she could spend on food in a week. My brother found her in her flat unable to move three months later. She died two days later. It was a shock when I received a fax message in my office. She was the same age I am now. I still have her last letter that arrived later in a birthday parcel.

I had no desire to see Germany again for eleven years thereafter.

Video East Germany 1991

That was twenty five years ago and things normalised by now. New industries developed with the latest technologies. Modern infrastructure developed. Buildings are renovated and modernised. Reduced air pollution stopped the dying of the forest in the Ore Mountains. The new generation can't remember much how it was. It was always a beautiful land, but even prettier now that the villages and towns don't show decay and neglect anymore.

The new wave of immigrants from other countries will benefit from the German achievements without having contributed and perhaps destroy it all again.

18. Pictures 1991 – 2008

When I came to Australia my aim was to have my own home, raise my children in a staple family environment, become my own boss and be debt free on retirement with a little to spare. **I archived all this!**

It is possible I would have done it in Germany too, but who knows? The freedom in Australia to archive my goals was greater at the time.

When you come in life on a cross road you have to take one way – you will never know where you would have ended up the other way. So why worry?

My upbringing wasn't to be an entrepreneur and I never aimed too high.

My reluctance to take on debt certainly slowed things down.

I certainly missed opportunities and could have done better. But how much do we need? I am living comfortable now and have no worries.

If something did not work after giving my all, I just tried something else. I think this made my wife feel insecure. She resisted every move I made. Her idea was living in a city flat and me having a 9 to 5 job. Perhaps this is the Australian way? **It just wasn't my way.** I made an effort to spend time with my wife and children. Certainly the children were happy in spite of the discipline I insisted on. Material possessions are not so important. **We were a closely knit family.**

My working life was just short on 55 years, exactly half manual work and the other half professional work. Since then I lost my wife and my oldest daughter. The other Families live interstate. I found new friends in the German club and try to stay fit. **The sunset years are not bad at all, but I miss tackling challenges.**

19. The sunset years

Am I an Australian? What is an Australian anyway? The easy going, good enough, it will be right stereotype? Australia is country where many nationalities live in relative piece together. I think and write English, but my heart is still German and not compatible with the British way. I still prefer the food my mother cooked, eat unsalted butter and ryebread. I have not forgotten the bad years after the war.

My attitudes were formed by my upbringing and life experiences. Lately I question if some of my pragmatic ways were good or bad. In fact I don't think I fit in German society either. **At least in Australia no one bothers me.**

