

I WAS NOT AFRAID
The Guided Reflections of Sibylle Laurischk
Conversations with Ronald Stockton

March, 2020

Offenburg, Germany



DEDICATION

To Cora Antes

She is her grandmother's granddaughter
Strong, intelligent, forceful, curious, unafraid
(Her grandmother's words)



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INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

Ronald R. Stockton

In 1980 I was in South Africa during my sabbatical. Sibylle Laurischk and her roommate were doing a law placement with the German-South African Chamber of Commerce. I met Sibylle on my first weekend in the country, in the national museum in Pretoria. I found her intelligent, thoughtful, and very pleasant. When I was not traveling around the country, the two women and I hung out, as we Americans might say. When I left, I invited them to come to Dearborn (in the Detroit area) to visit. Sibylle came, along with her American friend Linda. My wife and two sons really took to her.

Back in Germany she met her future husband and got married. She had two children (Vera and Kai) and was pregnant with Ellen when Jane and I returned the visit. We enjoyed that time and had great fun with the kids.

In time, her marriage broke up. One summer she decided to leave the kids with their father for two weeks to come visit us once again. We took her on a long trip around the Midwest, from Detroit to Chicago to Springfield (home of Abraham Lincoln) to St. Louis and then to Southern Illinois where Jane and I had grown up. She saw parts of America that few Germans ever see. (To say that she fell in love with Chicago would be an understatement).

As each of her children finished their university education, she brought them to visit us as a graduation present. First Kai (2009), then Vera (2014), and finally Ellen (2019). Each time, I arranged for them to visit my classes and have an opportunity to meet some of my students for lunch or some social occasion. I also arranged for Sibylle to meet my colleagues and sometimes to talk to my classes. Once Sibylle came as a part of her Bundestag duties to learn what she could about the local Arab population. I arranged for her to meet Arab leaders, and individuals.

Jane and I had British friends from the time we had lived in Kenya for two years in the 1960s. We kept in touch with those friends and visited them every few years. Whenever we made those UK visits, we also went to Germany to see Sibylle. Soon we started taking vacations together. We went to Poland, to Hungary, to Slovakia, to Vienna, to Switzerland. When the wall came down, we went to East Germany to explore the country and to visit Sibylle's relatives. (Some relatives had a piece of property caught up in those ownership disputes that exploded after reunification. As an attorney, she was looked to as the person who could resolve those issues). We also visited Dresden and Herrnhut, a place where some of my Moravian Brethren/Fratrum Unitum ancestors might have lived.

We all found these visits enriching and bonding. We all felt that these visits gave us rich insights about history and culture (and each other) that we could never have gained otherwise. As a political scientist (at the University of Michigan-Dearborn) I felt fortunate to have a friend active in local politics, and later in the Bundestag, who could share insights about German and European history and politics. She felt the same way about having a friend who knew the Middle East and Africa and could explain American politics. We were definitely intellectual colleagues.

In 2019 Sibylle had a serious health situation. She had left the Bundestag voluntarily at the end of her third term in 2013 but remained active in her profession of family law. In 2020 my university had its regular winter break. Jane suggested that I go to Germany to spend some time with Sibylle. It was a wonderful suggestion. Jane was in Arizona visiting our son and his family and could not join me but planned to make a similar visit in the spring. (The Coronavirus disrupted those plans). I went for five days from February 27 until March 5. We talked, went to restaurants, ate amazing German bread (we Americans have no such thing), visited Sibylle's childhood best friend Ellen Mundinger, walked around the neighborhood (and the Offenburg Cemetery, which I dearly love), went over to Strassburg for a few hours, took an hour-long walk up the hill to Ortenberg, where Sibylle had grown up, and watched election returns on television. (The Israelis had their third election in a year; the Americans had "Super Tuesday" in which Joe Biden emerged as a major challenger to Bernie Sanders for the Democratic nomination; and Thuringia had its second election for Minister-President (governor), following a catastrophic (and short-lived) decision of the local Free Democrats/Liberals to form a coalition with the CDU and the ultra-right AFD. For two people who eat and breathe politics, it was perfect timing. International travel was curtailed shortly after my return.

I have a personal passion for oral histories. I have organized projects involving students and colleagues, and organized a program on my campus so retiring faculty can deliver a farewell lecture to be preserved permanently in a virtual archive on the internet. I have also conducted three oral history projects. Over the years I have become comfortable with interviewing people. I saw this visit as an opportunity to make that happen. When I suggested the idea to Sibylle that first night, when I had just arrived, I was very cautious. Was I pushing her to do something that was really my project? I was pleased that she said she thought it sounded like an interesting idea. We prepared a list of topics to discuss and plunged in. These interviews were typically an hour or so. We did five of them in five days. Sometimes we covered different topics, which I broke into chapters. I edited the text and inserted some photos and commentary along the way but what is presented here is as in the original.

I have always told Sibylle that she is a significant person. She is modest about this, but I am right. I do not mean significant in terms of changing history but significant in terms of being a prescient

observer of the world in which she lives. Those qualities were there very early. She was constantly watching and analyzing and seeing things that others did not see. In reading the first interview, the reader will realize that this was a very perceptive little girl. She was alert to differences of class and ethnicity. She became suddenly aware of the heavy burden of history, which, as Marx said, weighs on us like a nightmare. She was aware of the contradiction of what might be called privilege (being from a prominent family, being an ethnic German, having educational opportunities not available to everyone) while at the same time being marginalized by being an outsider in terms of her family history and lack of a Baden heritage. She was free from being targeted for her differences, and yet was aware that she did not quite fit.

She is also of that generation of German youths who suddenly realized (in the 1960s and 1970s) that their parents were the people they were reading about in the history books. And she did not just sit on the sidelines and watch. She got engaged in local politics, served on her city council, and then figured out how to mobilize support to get nominated and elected to the Bundestag. She is somewhat cynical about her time in that important body but at the same time she had some things she wanted to achieve and set out to achieve them. She will tell you about that later. And should I note what I have told her more than once, that she is fearless in looking at her country's history?

The day after I returned to the U.S., I got a note from her with thanks, saying she was very pleased with the project. She said I was the only person who knew her well enough to have done such a thing. I was very pleased to receive that message.



EDITOR'S NOTE

This text you are reading is almost exactly as transcribed by Suzanna Emilio. I broke some interviews into separate chapters and inserted sub-titles to make the narrative flow but the text is as in the original spoken version. The editing changes were few, most to smooth out the frequent pauses and repetitions that people make when they speak. In conversation, we edit these away in the act of listening, but in print they look jumbled. These interviews were not jumbled. They were very fluent.

I did not make any efforts to modify the text to be more compatible with American English. Idiomatic phrases have not been replaced with the idioms of the American speaker. At a few points I did make a note of an alternate word in American English for purposes of clarification. For example, when Sibylle said a female had no perspective, I noted that she meant “no prospects.”

I also inserted a few footnotes with elaborations on some points. For example, the average reader would not know the name Allan Boesak or why he was so important. And the average non-German would not understand the reference to a Citizen's Initiative.

And even though almost all of the readers of this memoir will be Germans, many of my clarifications were inserted for the benefit of American readers. Somehow it made sense to do this.

In the course of editing this manuscript, I had several occasions to return to the oral interviews to check for a word or passage to insure the accuracy of the text. Listening to those interviews made me realize how impoverished a transcribed text can be. My late colleague Sid Bolkosky, who interviewed 300 holocaust survivors, said we should always listen for the “silences that speak.” That was certainly true here. So often there was a pause, a shift in tone, an emphasis, an emotion that would empower and deepen the words. Anyone reading this will realize that the words standing alone are rich with meaning, but the words connected to the person speaking them reveal a richness beyond the words themselves. When Sibylle said my name she was often correcting me. The voice reveals that shift, but not the text. I am sorry the reader cannot hear the voice.

I need to explain the title. It has two parts. When I first proposed this project I called it an oral history. Sibylle immediately used the term “guided reflections.” I like that phrase and made it into the sub-title. The title itself comes from something she said. In a previous interview project I had pulled out something the person had said that I thought somehow captured the essence of that person and made it into the title. When Sibylle said, “I was not afraid,” I thought that sounded perfect.

I would be remiss if I did not note that Jane Stockton spent days editing and formatting the text.

I

GROWING UP IN OFFENBURG

Introduction: Those who read this first interview will realize that this was a very perceptive little girl. She was alert to differences of class and ethnicity. She became suddenly aware of the heavy burden of history, which, as Marx said, weighs on us like a nightmare. She was aware of the contradiction of what might be called privilege (being from a prominent family, being an ethnic German, having educational opportunities not available to everyone) while at the same time being marginalized by being an outsider in terms of her family history and lack of a Baden heritage. She was spared being targeted for her differences, and yet was aware that she did not quite fit.

RS: When were you born and where were you born?

SL: I was born on the 12th of December 1954 in Offenburg.

RS: Offenburg, right here.

SL: Right here, yes. Downtown.
(See photo, 2020).

RS: What was your family doing in Offenburg?

SL: They just had moved to Offenburg, my parents just had married, year before, and my father had started a job as a prosecutor here in Offenburg. My mother was a housewife.

RS: How long was your father a prosecutor? He became a judge.

SL: I think about seven, eight years, maybe nine. I'm not quite sure but in the early 1960s he switched to the local court as a judge.



RS: You have a sister.

SL: Yeah, Jutta¹ (See photo of the two as young girls)

RS: Tell me what it was like growing up in Offenburg.

SL: Nothing special. It was – it's not a big place. At that time it was a smaller town than it is nowadays, so it was very over-seeable [easy to overlook]. It was not so usual for kids to go to kindergarten, so I went to kindergarten very early. Not far away from where my parents lived and there I met kids with whom I grew up. I met them again and again in this place, so it was over-seeable, the place. And it was a very strict, very regulated situation.



RS: What kind of school was this?

SL: This was not a school, it was a kindergarten. So I was three years old then and I loved to go there because I had the feeling there's more to see, there's more happening than staying at home.

RS: You were excited with education.

SL: Yeah. I remember when I first came there they have these little doll houses and I loved to play with this and make the dolls work and to direct them. And this was a Catholic kindergarten. Offenburg was very much a Catholic place. And that was something that was strange.

RS: Because you're not on the Catholic side.

SL: Obviously we were not, we did not belong to that side. And not belonging to the Catholic side made us strange.

¹ Jutta is four years younger. She lives in Munich and has a son, Tobias. She is a very skilled dental technician who makes dentures in a laboratory on the ground floor of her house. Sibylle had meant to add additional comments about her family members but I returned to the U.S. before we got to it. The photo shows Sibylle with Jutta. Jutta is holding her *Schultüte*, a traditional cone of treats given to children to mark the occasion of their first day of school. Sibylle thought that Jutta was a more conventional daughter who fitted into the family in an easier way. She never quite fit in the same way, being quite different in so many aspects. (I told her something I had put in my own memoir, that there are two kinds of people, those who are a natural outgrowth of their family, and those who were dropped from a spaceship. I told her I always felt I was dropped from a spaceship. She thought that was an apt analogy for her own experience).

RS: Protestants in Germany they're either Lutherans or Evangelicals. Which are you? [Note: I meant to say Calvinist].

SL: We're not aware of this distinction.

RS: You're not?

SL: No. I came here, Southwest is mainly, – here, the area close to France – mainly on, historic tradition is very Catholic. People who were Protestants were not self-evident here.² And my parents were Lutherans definitely, but we never found out about this. Because I very well remember when my son was baptized, one of the aunts, godmother, said, well, you are a Pietist branch here. And I said, oh, I don't know. I mean, I was 35 then. No idea about that. Later on I understood because I belonged to the Liberal party and they are also a party of the Protestants. Because the CDU was Zentrum, as we had it before was a Catholic branch.³ And if you were not a working class person then the way to escape... So definitely I was in this very Catholic kindergarten with a nun. And somehow we were something different, but being the daughter of a prosecutor they had mercy. And we had a kindergartner, she was a very free person, not a religious person, and she walked out with us and we were singing all day long. This was really fun.

RS: As you went on in school to higher levels, tell me about that.

SL: We had two schools downtown or more or less for the whole place. One was the girls school and the other one was the boys school, so girls and boys, we were separate. The girls school was the Anna Frank school – we had no idea about Anna Frank. And the other school was called after a local politician. Again, we had very Catholic teachers. We started praying and most in the class made a cross, so if I think about these circumstances, somehow I was strange. I felt, somehow I felt outside.

RS: You felt outside. You were aware that somehow that this was not your culture

SL: Yeah.

RS: or your religion.

² While Sibylle's experience was that relations were good, she did tell me once about an occasion when her mother encountered a bigot who called her a heretic. Her mother was shocked.

³ Germany traditionally had a Catholic Party, inspired by Pope Leo XIII's encyclical Rerum Novarum of 1891. During Weimar it was called Zentrum (Center Party) and after World War II it evolved again into the Christian Democratic Union. It has always been strong in Catholic areas such as Baden.

SL: Yeah, there are differences.

RS: Were you treated...

SL: There were differences. That's what I understood.

RS: Yeah, ok. But you were treated the same, it sounds as if you were.

SL: Yeah, but as Protestants we were accepted, but not loved. And that's more or less the situation of my parents as well. I mean, we came out of the, what we call this, our people at that time made a difference. Somebody's from the place or they are refugees. And refugees not from.... somewhere in Africa or so. This was clear inside Germany, the refugees from the war. Nobody else was there. No so-called guest workers or something. And these refugees spoke better German than people do here.

RS: Why was that? Were they better educated?

SL: Germany is divided into all kinds of areas with special dialects. Of the dialect you know where somebody comes from. And in the eastern countries, especially nowadays when you think of those areas which are Polish now, they had no dialects as long as they were educated people. My mother said, people there had their own, in that areas they had their own language, which was a variety of German, but not a dialect. So all those people had a higher kind of language, educated sounding language, and here it was different. For example, our first head of state after the war, Mr. Heuss – you just saw the medal – he spoke strong Swabian accent.⁴

RS: Swabian is from which province?

SL: Stuttgart. It's a Pietist area. Nowadays we say it's the area of the Pietcong. And in comparison, my parents had no accent. It was what we call High German. And the people around Hanover, for example, in the western countries also speak High German. And when I was in the Bundestadt somebody came to me, some of the colleagues and said, Mrs. Laurisch, you're one of the very few examples showing that even southerners can speak High German.

RS: I guess that's a compliment.

⁴ Sibylle once told me that she would switch to dialect when dealing with a less-educated client who was not fluent in standard German. She did this to connect with them and to make them feel comfortable. She also told of the time her father, as a prosecutor, used a dialect term for table. The judge stopped him in mid-sentence: "We speak German in this court."

SL: It was meant to be, but out of this you can still see the discrimination. For example, Schauble. [A very prominent political figure from Baden]. He has a dialect. My granddaughter, since she is in kindergarten she's starting to speak Swabian.

RS: She's three.

SL: Yeah.

RS: And she's picking up what the local kids are saying.

SL: That's where I learned the local dialect, but I never learned it properly because you learn it at home or you just learn it as something extra. So language was an interesting thing for me right from the beginning. I saw there are differences. And then at school, while we were a girls class and we had these Catholic teachers but we also had a teacher who was a refugee as well. And they all were very strict that we would learn proper things. They really were interested to give us something to learn, to read in a fluent style and everybody had to. So I wouldn't say there was a discrimination, but they knew who was willing to perform and possibly who was not willing. I would rather say who was not able to perform. And we had an interesting way of discrimination. Once in six weeks or so, what we call the lice women turned up and each girl had to go in front of the whole class and she checked if you have lice.

Discovering Marginalization

RS: My goodness. And did children have lice?

SL: Sure.

RS: Some did.

SL: Yeah.

RS: And this was done in front of the class.

SL: Yeah.

RS: So you knew which kids.

SL: Yeah.

RS: And those were the poor kids.⁵

SL: Yeah, and you knew where they lived. And one of these girls – for some reason I found these differences, I found this interesting – What’s wrong with them? How come they have lice and we do not? We, the others. And I saw they had a different language, not only the dialect, but also quite a number of people living in that area used to come visit. It’s still the low situation area, the slum area. If you want to call it that way. There are also a minority of gypsies were living up to, they are still living there, coming in from Macedonia. I have had clients out of that group. And they have a special language. So this was interesting for me again and again, how different the languages are. And I remember one of these girls saying, if you’re not going – to another girl – if you’re not going to function you’ll get a badge. And I remember the first time I went to France as an MOP [Member of Parliament], we were asked if we want to have a sign, and they said, in French they said, you need a badge.

RS: What does that mean?

SL: A badge means you get, you’re hit, something is put on you.

RS: A badge. With a word on it, an identification.

SL: So it was the same name. I was so surprised to hear this in Paris, a word I knew from my early childhood. A very special circumstance.

RS: So let me understand. In your school, getting a badge was a bad thing.

SL: No, it was this girl from that slum area said to another girl, if you’re not functioning, do not do what I want you to do, I’ll smash you, so I give you badge. [Smacking sound] I put something on you. And then this word turned up again. These were very special memories and things I remember that made me aware how people express themselves.

RS: As a little girl, you’re also seeing categories and discrimination within society, aren’t you?

SL: The lice woman was such an example, yeah.

RS: Other kids just experienced this, but you were thinking about it.

⁵ My initial reaction to this was surprise but after my return to the U.S. my wife said that her school also had regular lice inspections. She also remembered that it was the poor kids who were always discovered to be infected. After she discussed this, I remembered that my school also had such inspections, also with the poorest kids being the ones who were infected.

SL: We did not talk about this. It was just a matter of fact that she just turned up.

RS: Yeah, and checked children and some had lice and some didn't. And you could tell that the ones with lice had a different standard of German.

SL: You see, looking on this from nowadays you can see that the discrimination the Nazis had made was those are the ones who are dirty, who are full of diseases, lice.

RS: Those were the same ideas, weren't they?

SL: Nobody would admit this, but it was obvious.

RS: Yes.

SL: And this stopped somewhere. But I very well remember. We were about seven, I don't think we were eight, I think it was second class. We had one of these kids from the gypsies' field, they usually were working in fairs and they were walking or wandering around in the area, and there was one of these girls and she was very helpless, very uneducated because she was changing school more or less every six weeks or so, very strange situation. Now she was not, because she did not understand much and she was strange, looked strange, the way she was dressed was strange and the other day the father turned up and stood in our classroom and the teacher could not help anything, and he said, if you do not stop mobbing my daughter, my big sons will come here and you'll learn a lesson.

RS: Mobbing means mistreating.

SL: Yeah, to... I thought it's an English expression.

RS: It probably is, tell me about it.

SL: If you call people names and just, not really smash people but you behave in a very unfriendly way.

RS: Yes. Today we would call it bullying.

SL: Ok, yeah. And then he said, I've been a German soldier for six years and you're not going to do anything against my daughter. And then we all had to go to the head of the school, most of the class and he said, this has to be stopped and you don't do anything. And of course I told about this at home and my father knew this father. So my parents said, yeah, that's ok, you behave properly with this girl. Because on the other side the gypsies were sent to the camps. So this man said something essential about his life. And this was very impressive for me in this basic school time. And in that school, being a student, a pupil, I was a little girl then, of the Anna Frank school, we learned about in

fourth grade, we were about nine or ten before we switched to the high school, we learned about what Anna Frank was or who she had been and about her fate and the Nazis and the camps. That's what we learned at school then.

Encountering Germany History

RS: That was your first introduction to that period of history, wasn't it?

SL: Yeah. I had not heard anything about it at home.

RS: And what did a little girl in the fourth grade think about those things?

SL: I was shocked. It was unbelievable for me. And in addition, it was in a classroom which had been used as a Chemistry room before, so they had, this was no longer in function, but the applications were still there for gas. So this was just unbearable for me, this was really frightening for me.

RS: This was not some abstract thing, you could see...

SL: There was a gas application in this room, not in function, but out of that former functional room where they had to need gas for experiments in a chemistry room. Very strange. It was really frightening for me. Maybe it also was something, it was so frightening because I felt there's something wrong in this country. I couldn't have said this at that time, but I felt there was something wrong and I had no idea what was wrong. Many things were wrong. We were not Catholic, we spoke the educated language, giving the idea to all the people around of some kind of an elite, which we were not, because it's just a.... Well, we, my family, we did not speak this dialect here. So things were wrong.

RS: So as you went on in school to higher levels, tell me about those years.

SL: This was a big question for my parents because they were, they wanted me to be an educated girl. Although I was only a girl, which was clear – I was only a girl – but as they had nothing else...

RS: They had no choice.

SL: They had no choice. They had the idea, ok, they must make something out of her. Then we had to, my parents had to decide on which high school I would go.⁶ At that time, we had a nice form of discrimination, because you asked about discrimination, which we have still and I wonder if it's only

⁶ The German school system is complex. After four years, there are choices. One track leads to a three-year apprenticeship or trade school. Another track leads to gymnasium, the Abitur and university. This was what Sibylle meant by high school.

discrimination or maybe there's even something other behind. But up to fourth grade all kids go into one class no matter what their possibilities and their intelligence is. They learn writing, they learn reading and counting. But with fourth grade you have to decide.⁷ And for my parents it was just clear, I go to high school. And you had to pass an exam to show that you're able to go to high school. This is no longer true, but at that time you had to pass an exam. So I made this and this was not a question. But quite a number could not go to high school there or even did not try it. They had the possibility to go what we call folkschule at that time. – There you have volk again --. Nowadays it's called main school. And in between is kind of a middle level – not high school but not the lower, main school. Again, we had a girls high school, a boys high school, and we had a Catholic girls high school and we had the, it was called Humanistic high school starting with Latin and Greece, the classic languages. And that was the only high school where the boys and girls could go. There were 20 boys and maybe one girl. So classic education was something for the boys and all those good family names, the well-known family names, boys went into that school. My father was, well, give her a classic education, why not. The Catholic girls high school was out of sight for me. This would have been possible but it was out of sight. Nobody even thought about this. So there was just the girls high school left over. Basically giving education on new languages, French and English, and Natural Sciences. And this was not so traditional, so my father said – this is really something, he tended to the classical thing – and I said, no I don't want to go to that kind of boys school, I want to go to that girls' school. At that school all the girls were fashionable and fancy. That was something my parents were not so convinced of. But in the end they said, ok, at least you can learn Latin as a second language there. And to be able to make a medical study, you need Latin. So they decided to send me there and I was happy to go there. And this was a good decision because it was not such a big school, classes were not so big. And I felt happy there. This was a good situation. And I think one of the main experiences I made there was to learn something that my parents just couldn't compete and this was to learn English. Because my father had learned much more French. He had learned English, but French was the main language at that time, in addition to Latin as a foreign language.⁸ My mother had learned English, but under the Nazis. This was not the main language. So both felt uneasy with this. This was not their field. I felt not so easy with English as well because I saw my parents are not so comfortable with this foreign language. But when I first came to, I had the possibility to go to England, this

⁷ Americans call this streaming. As in Germany, it is controversial.

⁸ I knew Sibylle's father. I found him a very agreeable person, easy and comfortable with people. I did not speak German but he spoke enough English to engage in simple conversations with me. From what I have heard he was very well liked and respected. He and Sibylle had a good relationship. They often discussed history and politics including complex and difficult topics.

opened a new world for me. So with English I really had an opportunity to develop. And I still think this was a basic input I had at that school. We also had good teachers in German, which I always liked as a subject. And we had a very good History teacher who was a Marxist. So he said, I'm a Marxist, who cares, you'll learn that everything has two attitudes. Where's the contradiction?

RS: Yes, the dialectic.

SL: Yeah. I did not understand that at that time. And my family was very anti-communist. But nevertheless, I had the feeling it's interesting what he says, which it was. Those girls in my class nowadays they say, you were the only one who was interested in his lessons. This was so boring. And we never understood what he wanted and so on. But I really, I felt there is something that he has to give us. And for example, we worked on three French constitutions. They changed the constitution again and again. I did not really understand what was the outcome of what he was telling us. But I saw there are specialties. This man is telling us – my father has no idea. Because my father was a walking history book. He knew very much about German history, definitely, but from a totally different point of view. So I always felt that school is a field where you learn things where you do not learn at home. So this...

RS: This was exciting to you.

SL: Yeah, this was good. But at the same time it was a time that I just wanted to make my high school degree and just leave this place. I wanted to leave my family, I wanted to leave the place, I wanted to leave the Offenburg society. I went to Heidelberg and not to Freiburg for studies, because in Freiburg you met all those people from Offenburg again because it's only 60 kilometers away and Heidelberg is 120 kilometers away and it's much more far away from here. So I went to Heidelberg.

RS: You never told me this before

SL: Definitely.

RS: about how you wanted to leave.

SL: Desperately.

RS: Some people are that way.

SL: I just needed to get out of here. When I started in Heidelberg I didn't call my parents for four weeks. My mother nearly went mad. I was so happy to be out of this very strict and somehow old fashioned way. My father was 45 when I was born, so this was an old father then. So yeah. And Heidelberg was university with a very hard core left wing students movement and this was the time

when the students, not especially my generation but some years before they really had opposed their parents and especially the fathers out of the contradiction of saying, you might have built up this country, but what did you do before? The history doesn't stop at 1945.

RS: That was your generation, wasn't it, or slightly older.

SL: Slightly older than me, but also my generation, yeah. So this was a heavy struggle between the generations at that time, really heavy.

RS: What do you think about that? I don't even know what to ask you about that. I mean, you experienced it, you saw it.

SL: It was the time when I got in contact with the women's movement. Just the other day I told my eldest daughter that we had bookshops there where men were not allowed to enter. And we had books I would not read nowadays, but at that time it was just to get out of a very old fashioned family structure and family picture. You see my mother has been a housewife all her life long, but she had started to study medicine and out of the situation of the war she had to stop it and then became a refugee and after the war she had no financial possibilities to keep on studying. Her parents were in the eastern part of Germany, so they could not help her. And she just learned to type for a living, she started as a secretary. She said she would have liked to be a surgeon. And in our attic there has always been a little box with a surgeon's knives she had kept somehow. So this was a real – I could see the tragedy of my mother. So it was for me not so much the political contradiction of this very conservative generation of fathers, very authoritarian style of thinking. It's about five years ago that I realized that all these fathers – all – had been soldiers. For a long time I thought only my father, which is ridiculous, but I really, I understood that this was the basis out of which this generation of families, fathers were acting. And for me it was more.



SL: My parents had not a good relationship. My parents were 15 years apart and I could see that my mother had been a talented person and definitely would have been a good doctor and she never

realized this dream. This dream was put into a little box in the attic.⁹ So this was something I did not want to experience as well. And so I think I came into the women's movement and of course this was a discussion of family structure, of society's structure than being a student. And being a law student, at that time not so many did do law. Just the other day my cousin asked me, as my father's been a judge I must have been interested to be in such a position or in such a profession. And I said, no. Reason that was interesting for me was to go into a man's field. That's something I did not speak out, but I felt it would be interesting not to become a teacher with 90% of girls becoming teachers. But do something else. Not go to Freiberg. Do something else. Yeah. So I was just happy to have left Offenburg and to go to a place which was lively, young place. And in the beginning I thought I'm in a wrong game because I did not understand anything what I was studying. I just struggled through.

RS: You studied law from the beginning, right?

SL: Mm hm. [Yes]

RS: You entered a law program.

SL: Mm hm. Here you have the high school degree and then you start right away.¹⁰ You do not need any preparation before. So I started right away, but it was very strange for me, it was hard. Many things I did not understand.

RS: Most everyone was a guy, right? You were one of the few women probably in that program.

SL: We were about 20, 25% women. Nowadays it's half-half. And much more of the civil servants or the judges or so are women because they are very busy and they work hard, they have the better exams. That's what my son says. I can imagine. At that time it was not so much a field to make a career, that's what it is nowadays. Yeah.

Intellectual Influences

RS: As you look back, were there any books or films during your youth that really changed the way you think?

⁹ This is an exceptionally powerful passage. As I was thinking of possible titles for the various interviews, I thought about naming one Dreams in a Box.

¹⁰ She knew the American procedure. A student gets an undergraduate degree or Bachelor's degree and then enters a law school for three years of study. Apart from summer jobs, there is nothing like the required placements that took her to South Africa (discussed later).

SL: I read day and night. I read through all libraries I could get. It's difficult to answer this. I could not tell you right away some specific title or film.

RS: What kinds of books did you read?

SL: Novels, biographies, many biographies, I found this always very interesting to see how people managed their lives. And yeah, I read all the German literature, of course. But as I mentioned, this history teacher taught us about the American situation and I was, at that time I was about 14, 15, I had read *Gone with the Wind* within three days.

RS: Oh, that's a long book.

SL: Day and night.¹¹ It was like this. And then for a reason I remember, I read Gwen Bristow, *Deep South*.

RS: I don't know that book. I'll check it out later.

SL: And then we had the lessons about the States and the slave situation. And I'd have to say no this was different, no this is not as, I think there's something else to be said or so. And then this teacher said, I'd like to know what you're reading right now. (Laughter) I still



just... No, I couldn't say that there is a special book that changed my life that was enlightenment or something. I couldn't say. Maybe there was, but this was not a life-long impression then so that I kept it. I still read books and think this is just necessary to read it, but I do not keep it as an on-going experience. And films. At that time we all watched the Bergman films and the young German

¹¹ Sibylle's house was filled with books. Her living room had a large bookcase. The photo shows perhaps two-thirds of it. She was always reading, a book or her beloved daily *Zeit*.

filmmakers, like Fassbender, Wem Wenders – he played Homer¹²– that was fascinating, that was really impressive. And Schlöndorff. I've seen the . . .

RS: The Tin Drum.

SL: The Tin Drum, just recently. I've seen this again and I think, this is just a remarkable film out of a remarkable writer, Gunter Grass, who got the Nobel Prize for this. But again, Gunter Grass is an example, again and again you have the contradiction. He had been such a light of the SPD, backing Willy Brandt and his movement, but never admitted until he was a very old man that he had been in the SS for a short period and as a very young man. But of course this was not an easy point, so he had kept this out of his life, but somebody found out. And this is something that's really essential in this country again and again, somebody found out. Just the other day I spoke with somebody of my generation and he said, oh I've read Böll again, Böll is also somebody who got a Nobel Prize in literature and he's been very critical with the Nazi situation and he's really been, nobody found out anything about him because he was clear, but he also had been a soldier. Just recently I read about this person. We've really, that was something we were involved with. *Views of a Clown [Ansichten Eines Clowns]* or so that were interesting books showing into society with a different point of view, absolutely different to what we saw at home.¹³

An American Question and a German Answer

RS: Let me ask you an American question. When you were a young girl we were in the Vietnam war. What was your perspective on that war?

SL: It was a horror. It was a permanent horror we saw on TV. But at the same time it was against the Russians and the Left political field. That's what we believed in. I grew up with a clear point of view that the Americans are our friends and the Russians are our enemies. What can we do when the Russians come? This was a permanent question. Everybody knew this question. What do we do when the Russians come? So be happy the Americans are here. And I think for one time we did not doubt the Vietnam War or saw it was a permanent horror on TV. When you saw those pictures of the wounded soldiers, of this partisan situation [guerrilla warfare] – all these fathers were soldiers. They

¹² This is a reference to the film *Wings of Desire* or *The Sky Over Berlin*.

¹³ The question focused upon intellectual influences. Sibylle also had a full diet of popular books and popular films, seen with her friends. She mentioned Karl May's stories of the "blood brothers" Old Shatterhand and Winnetou and the *Old Shatterhand* movies starring Lex Barker (of Tarzan fame)—and, of course, the Sissi trilogy. She also mentioned Champion the Wonder Horse. We had discussed those in an earlier conversation.

knew what a partisan situation is. So they did not tell, but you could feel that they did not doubt what was going on. But we didn't know anybody who was involved in that war. We had the feeling we had had enough war, had made enough war, had started war for once and surely that was just enough, so keep out of all of this. This is still an unsolved question, politically unsolved question. We'd rather keep out of it, but how far can you keep out of it? It's an open question. We did not know people. No Americans who had been there or whose relatives had been there, so it was something far, far away¹⁴.

RS: It helps to know another person, doesn't it? I grew up, a little boy during World War II. My uncles and others had fought. They were all heroes, Japan, Europe, doesn't matter, they were all heroes. They won the war. They saved civilization. And I grew up with the predictable views of Germany and then I met you and that changed my thinking because now I know a person. I once had a girlfriend, I think I might have told you this. My first girlfriend, I was only 16, but it counted I guess. She was a DP, a displaced person. She had grown up in a camp in Luneberg and then immigrated

SL: To the States.

RS: To the States. I met her through my cousin in Chicago. We lived 300 miles apart, so there was not a lot of romance going on. But she told me a little bit about what that meant. But you're the person that made me think about things. So that's something I've always been grateful for, just in terms of our friendship and what it has meant to me.

Encountering the Past

SL: Yeah, so far I'm really thankful because I hardly ever met people with whom I could talk about this in a senseful way. You see, as I said I did not realize that all these fathers had been soldiers. Why did I not realize this because all, as we were kids we did not realize.

RS: No one spoke of it.

SL: We did not speak about this. We kept away from this. Many fathers did never, ever talked. My father talked, quite something. As you ask about certain books, I remember I met an Israeli girl in England in a language school. We were eight or ten nations in one class so there was no possibility to speak anything but English. And she was, for some reason she had come there and we kept in contact. And when I was about 21 or so, I was a student then, I visited her. And I was invited into the, from

¹⁴ I remember in South Africa when we first met that Sibylle asked me if I had been in Viet Nam. I had not, and the issue was dropped.

her parents I was invited to stay in a Kibbutz, where she had grown up. And this was a Kibbutz where Germans were not accepted except for special invitation, which I did not know before. And her parents both spoke fluent German and this was really something very, very special as an experience for me. Her mother had left Hamburg. She spoke such a High German. And I remember that she said, well we work with immigrants and then I learned Yiddish, so this was a strange language for somebody even living in Israel. They had a library in this Kibbutz with German books and I read the memoirs of Chaim Weizman in German. I read it day and night. So this was, this gave me an insight, some idea how this movement, this Zionistic movement but also the whole helpless situation out of which these people came there, how they had to struggle their way and to build up a state. They gave me quite some insights. So Chaim Weizman comes from an area around a place in Ukraine or even further east, I'm not quite sure, but it's Pinsk. I had no idea, I just took this as an uninformed young German student. I read this and I thought this is interesting, I never had heard the name of Chaim Weizman, so ok. I read that his family had lived around Pinsk. I came back and I said to my father, I've read the book of Chaim Weizman. I wonder if my father knew who this was. And I said, do you know a place called Pinsk? And my father said, "sure." I said, have there been so many Jews? And he said, "sure. They stood in line." That was end of the conversation. So again and again I saw contradictions.

RS: How did you react when your father said that? Had he been there?

SL: Yeah. There was a point when I understood that all these fathers not had only been soldiers, they had been part of the system, more or less. And that's something you can't solve.

RS: No.

SL: It's something you can't solve, I think. You just can try to find out your own position. But you can't get rid of your family, even if you cut the connections, you can't get rid of it. And there was a point when I think I understood this more in a political way. For example, I think it's really senseful that we have this Day of Commemoration 27th of January, which is the day the Soviet Army freed Auschwitz and to have this commemoration ceremony in the Bundestag then. This is...

RS: Do they do this every year?

SL: Yeah. We have no solution, but we have a commemoration and at the same time I think it's really a terrible situation that this tendency, this right wing tendency which we have in this country now.

RS: Yes.

SL: Which is more open now, but probably has never stopped.

RS: I've been very impressed with how Germany has acknowledged its past. I walked around Berlin and saw plaques that this family lived here and there were seven people and they're all dead. And I'm thinking, ok, this is really honest and good, but for some people that's hard to acknowledge. There's a lot of research on this, that it's easy for people to acknowledge that individuals in your group did terrible things, but it's very hard to acknowledge that your group collectively did bad things. So it's easy for Americans to acknowledge that there are bad white people who are racist. It's harder to acknowledge that racism is structural and built into the very nature of the system. That's really hard to do. So I'm not at all surprised that there are people who are resisting and pushing back.

SL: Yeah.

RS: I mean it's predictable that this would happen. It's happening in my country, it's happening in your country and it's happening elsewhere. People don't want to acknowledge that. They want to say God Bless America or whatever to deny those things.

SL: Yeah. You can watch it from any point of view. These questions are new somehow again and again. It's not solvable and I'm sure I very early understood that we are not just playing on the playground, there's more behind, saying this kindergarten of Catholic... And there's also a kind of a structure of divide – I wonder what's divide in English – of abuse, of being dishonest with people, not as a personal question but as a structural question. And this is difficult to solve, this is very difficult. The other day I would so much have liked to take you to that meeting the day before you came. It's about the abuse in the Catholic Church and one of the leading persons on this question here in Germany lives in Offenburg and he submitted this book [She points to the book on her table, Matthias Kutsch, *Damit es Auf Hört*] the day before you came. And this is a structural basic question. He was educated by the Jesuits and he left the Catholic Church meanwhile. It's a different experience compared to my life. But again it's a situation of being lost or being in a strange surrounding, being in an uneasy, not honest surrounding as a child. And this is a very discouraging situation.

A Terrifying Incident

SL: By the way, one of the main experiences in my life I haven't told you – in my children's [sic] life, I haven't told – and I think this is quite essential. I was about eight years old when I went to a club where we were doing exercises, how do you call it, gymnastics. And this was quite nice, I liked to go there and when I came there in the evening I found that I had forgotten something, I could not take part, so I went back. And it was November, so it was dark then, although it was not late, but it was dark. And I went all alone, eight years old, and at the traffic lights at the bridge -- where we

walked today along at the traffic light -- somebody was standing next to me and watching me, and he had bicycle with him. And I also watched this person, I watched the shoes, I very clearly saw the shoes. And then I walked on and when I was in a small road leading to my parents' house, this person stood in the middle of the pavement and said something to me. And I just turned, went back to the corner and kept on walking, thinking I go to the house the other way around. And where I was walking just the next road, was walking, I heard somebody was close with a bike, so it was this guy again. And I made what my parents always had said, if you feel you are in danger, you go into the next house and you just push all the bells, you ring all the bells, somebody will open. So I did this and there were people, even people that I knew and I was screaming, I said, there's something, something's going on. Then one of the sons of the family, a man of 25 or so said I'll accompany just around the corner and you'll be back home. And I thought that's ok. And he was accompanying me and then we just walked some steps and then this guy came out of a kind of a corner, sat on his bike and left. So he had waited there hoping I would come all alone. And I'm absolutely sure I survived a situation where you usually read, the child was vanished, only some coat or something was found. I'm absolutely sure. And then this guy accompanied me just around to my parents' house and there was my mother and my sister and I was just screaming, screaming, screaming. They got the police, they interviewed me, I described these shoes very precisely. They never found him. This was a very central experience in my child's [sic] life.

RS: I'm glad it turned out the way it did. As you started it I was very afraid you were going to tell me something that I...

SL: He did not reach me. I think it's been basic for my work as a lawyer because I understand people who have been in a desperate situation. And I very closely work with these people. So in the end this makes a difference. But I think it's a basic experience that I understand what's being in a helpless situation.

Awareness of Differences

RS: I've just seen several things about you, things I haven't understood before. You were marginalized in several way, you were a Protestant in a Catholic area, you were an East German in an area with a strong regional identity; your language was different from anyone else. You have so many ways in which you are in a sense the quintessential German in a German world, and yet somehow you were marginalized and you saw that. I think that made you very much what you are. I think that was really a sense that you are not privileged. As you said, it helps you understand people who are in difficult situations.

SL: Definitely.

RS: Yeah. This is not something you learn in school.

SL: No.

RS: Philosophical conservatives say you can't teach ethics. But through human contact we can develop standards of ethics and understanding that we couldn't get from a book.

SL: Yeah, yeah. [Long pause]. I mean, there are many, many experiences and things I could talk of, but out of this interview situation, this is what comes up to me, which is essential. I also, I very much saw the kind of ongoing feeling of being punished, of my parents having this split nation situation,

because it was also split family situation. They took it as a result of history, but at the same time it was a permanent wound.

For example my grandparents on my father's side (photo) had died before I was born, and also had my grandfather on mother's side. But I had this grandma in GDR [East Germany] and until I was 14 I have seen her maybe two or three times. Then she



moved here, so then we had more contact. But up to that time I have no grandparents idea out of this separation. Same with my mother. My mother's relatives who lived in GDR. This was an ongoing subject and we had this ongoing situation that we were sending parcels, gave all kinds of help. This was strange because here many people have no relatives in the east, had never ever been there. So again, this was different.

RS: You had a contact with a foreign country, as it was.

SL: Yeah.

RS: I deal a lot with immigrants in my students and so many of them say, you know, they left their grandparents behind, their families are back in Lebanon or Iraq or Poland or Albania or wherever they're from and you really were from an immigrant family, if you think about it. I mean, I see you within a context.

SL: That's true. For example, I remember in the German lesson, I remember the German at high school, the German teacher. I said, we spoke about fruits and we have a word for plums, in German it's pflaume. That's a very German pronunciation. Now here people say not only pflaume, they say flaume. That's a very southern expression, which we never used at home. My parents said not flaume, they said pflaume. Do you hear the difference?¹⁵ So for me, a flaume was a pflaume. So I said, well, there's several kinds of fruits, for example a flaume. And this German teacher insisted, it's not a flaume, it's a pflaume. You repeat this. And she started to teach me German, which is her profession. It's a slight different pronunciation, but when you know a language very properly you hear these slight differences. And out of this you know somebody's from the south or not. So it showed that I was not quite proper.

RS: You were an outsider.

SL: Yeah, but she insisted and she could not – well, is it flaume or pflaume, what's the difference? Yeah, she insisted. And you see, as I said, this is really essential. English opened the world for me. And in the beginning this was not so clear for me. When I was asked something from the teacher or when the teacher said who can tell this and that in English, I was under the table not to be seen. I went to the first camp with this international setting of students, I was 15 then. And my friend and me, we made our way with a suitcase through London, switching stations and I remember asking a taxi driver, where's Pancras station? And he said, just behind you, Love. I said, what did you say? And then we made our way to northern England via Leeds, it was all so strange. And then we turned up in Scarborough where this English course took place and we'd been there for four weeks. And this was like an explosion after this very international group and education with very good English teacher. He was really willing to teach us something. And after these four weeks I came back home and right away English was not a heavy thing for me anymore. It was something I could handle. Of course I still had to learn a lot. Of course you have to learn and learn,¹⁶ but I understood there is something that's reachable for me. This was not a strange thing from which I keep away. This is an instrument to go outside. This was so fantastic.

RS: It opened doors for you.

¹⁵ I nodded agreeably but could not really hear the difference. I hope I got these words right. I think it is important because it is a subtle way of separating people, which was her point.

¹⁶ And she did. Even in this short visit, she kept asking me to explain words and expressions.

SL: Absolutely, absolutely. I mean, the first job I got after my studies was in this American company and it was my ability to speak English or to be interested in English. More or less that was the reason why they took me. So it really opened my way. And I think that's got to do with this, a sensitiveness for language questions and the things behind and what does it mean and how do you speak and how do others speak and how do you pronounce in German. I still find this very encouraging. Like to this English course, this is interesting again and again how people speak out of their point of view, out of their education, out of their socialization. Communication, that's really something essential.

Not a Boy

RS: What else should we talk about before we end this session?

SL: I think, I mentioned this, but as you ask me about my childhood and my early experiences, I think something that's also given a big impact on my life, on my thoughts, was the fact that I was not a boy. My parents were absolutely sure, there's no other possibility than this will be a boy. So they only had a boy's name, they had no girl's name.

RS: Oh my, that much.

SL: Yeah. Because this name is so seldom and they were refugees kind of people, so they wanted to keep the family and the family name. And what do you bring with you when you have nothing? So this was very essential for them. And for three days they had no girl's name. And then father read about Sibylla Augusta, who had been a bohemian princess.

RS: So you were named after her.

SL: Yeah. He read about her and then he went into the hospital and said, I have a name.

RS: That's a nice name. I'm glad they chose that one.

SL: Yeah, I like the name, by the way, I really like it. But at the same time it tells you something. So with three or four years I knew that if I would have a boy without being married, he would have the same name. So I thought about a solution to this problem. And I wonder if my parents were very happy about my ideas at that time. But it shows you how deep this problem was. And at the same time I work in my profession life, so in this very early time I had some – I don't know the English word, we call it [unclear] – I was very much involved in such questions, thinking about family structure, being married or not, having a name or not. That's my everyday's work.

RS: And your three children were given your family name.

SL: I kept my family name, yeah. My husband accepted this. And then I was studying law in Heidelberg. The family law in Germany was severely [significantly] changed and one of the changes was that the women's birth name could be the family name in a marriage. And the professor who was teaching about this said in Spanish law this is not a problem at all, so this should be possible. Then I thought, I'll try this. I did not know my husband at that time. So when I met him, he was married and then got divorced, so I said, I'm not going to be number two.

RS: And he was ok with that.

SL: Yeah.

RS: That's good. My son took his wife's family name as his middle name when they got married. He changed his name. He kept his own names...

SL: Which...

RS: This is Ted. So he kept his names, but her name was Miller and his middle name was Matthew, so he stayed Edward M. – Ted is the nickname for Edward. He stayed Edward M., but the name was changed legally.

SL: If you look into the files...

RS: It's very unusual in the US for this to happen.

SL: But it's possible.

RS: It's possible, yes, because you can change your name at marriage. I've had students from the Middle East where they don't always have particular surnames the way we do. Quite often they're like collective names or something. So people have changed their names when they became citizens. You can change your name or when you get married. And they've tried to make that more compatible with American custom.

SL: Yeah, it makes a difference, definitely.

RS: I always thought this was very interesting, how you handled this. And you had a law which made that easier to do.

SL: It's a basic question of my identity and I kept to this question and to this subject. Yeah. And I know that a name is an essential question.

RS: Yes, it is.

SL: I had no name for three days.

RS: You got a name. That's good.

SL: By the way, this Sibylla Augusta was the, whom we called Turken Louis, the big so and so margrave of Badenia [Baden]. And he fought against the Turks [in the 1600s].

RS: He's the hero of that war isn't he?

SL: There are others, but he's well known still as one of the central figures against the Turkish. Therefore he has this name, Turkenlouis, and in council they still have a collection of all kinds of war and material and stuff which he brought from these wars. And well, his wife was very Catholic. But my father didn't care.

RS: He liked the name and you needed a name.

No Fear

Note: After I returned, Sibylle and I had a conversation about the interviews. In fact we had several. We discussed all the things that we should have included had my students not been anticipating my return. She told me a story that she said she wished she had included. I took notes but I was not recording the conversation so this is my paraphrase.

SL: I have been thinking about my role within my family. I think it was hard for everyone to deal with me -- my sister, my parents. I don't think I am afraid of anything. Of course, I am afraid of normal things such as Coronavirus but I am not psychologically afraid. All of Germany is afraid. But I am not afraid. I look out of my window every morning and I see down the street that corner that I showed you where that man tried to take me when I was eight. It was just three years ago that I realized that looking at that corner does not make me feel fear. I view that incident not as a trauma



but as a victory. I was only eight but I escaped from that man. It was *my* victory.

SL: There is a story that I did not report during the interviews. I was two and a half. (See photo). We were living in that flat. My mother wanted to go into the basement to do something and she wanted me to stay in the flat. But I did not want to stay in the flat. I wanted to go with her. She left me there and went down into the basement to do her work. There was a hammer in the house. It was up high. I got a chair and climbed onto the chair and up onto the cabinet where the hammer was. This was very difficult for a small child,

climbing on a chair and a cabinet. I got the hammer and went over and smashed the door. It was a glass door and I smashed it. When my mother came back, she saw the door. The glass was everywhere.

RS: What did your mother say?

SL: She did not say anything. When my father came home, he did not say anything. There was no anger or punishment. When the man came to repair the door, I hid under the table. But there was nothing dramatic.

RS: You were defiant.

SL: I did not want to be left alone and I fought against that by breaking the door. I think it must have been hard for my parents to accept this quality in me. I remember when I was in the Bundestag. Mrs. von der Leyen, she is the head of the EU now, was organizing a women's group to press for a quota system for women in state-run companies. Von der Leyen was in the cabinet. She was the Minister of Social Affairs, the ministry with the biggest budget. Much bigger than the defense budget. Merkel was not in favor of this effort. My own party was strongly opposed to it. I was the only one supporting it. The day of the meeting, I was stopped by a powerful person in the Liberals. He said, "Mrs. Laurischk. Wouldn't you rather go shopping today?" I said to him, "Are you paying for everything I buy?" He did not answer. Then I said, "We are having a meeting to adopt a quota system to guarantee male representation in government corporations." He did not speak. I was not afraid of this powerful man. And he did not know it, but someday men may need a quota system. It is just a matter of time.

SL: I think this lack of fear made me seem somehow threatening. It made it hard for me to fit within my family. My sister had a much easier time. She was more like what my parents expected.

Note: I did not say it but I thought that if she had been the boy they were expecting, they might have been very proud of those traits.

Sibylle's sister Jutta



Sibylle's lifelong childhood friend Ellen Munding



Sibylle's parents are buried in Ortenberg, just a few kilometers up the hill from Offenburg. Her maternal grandmother is buried with them.



II

THE WAR AND ITS ENDURING IMPACT

Introduction: To Sibylle the war was a permanent part of German history. And of European history. And of world history. It had permanently changed the world, not just in an objective sense but in a deeper sense as well. The fighting had stopped in 1945 but the war was still going on.

RS: Let's start by talking about the war. It had an incredible impact on everyone in Germany, especially your family. Do you want to tell us about that?

SL: I think it had an impact on the whole world, as I learned when I was a language student in England, when somebody of the English said so. It was a world war, not only in Europe.¹⁷ But the day I grew up it was very much the story of the war in Europe, and especially my father was a soldier right from the beginning, from 1939-1945. And this very much changed his life of course. So one could see even as a child, one could see there something had happened that was really... This still was not overcome and my father was thinking about that time very much. He was one of the fathers who also spoke about the war. Many fathers just never mentioned it. That's something I hear again and again. People say, my father never said a word. I'm sure my father didn't tell everything he had experienced. He just talked about those things, those experiences he could talk about. Later on, after he had retired he also worked on the subject where his part of the army, where he had served, where they had been, which people had worked there. He made it somewhat a scientific work on the wartime.¹⁸ My sister keeps saying that's been a kind of a psychological work he's been doing then – trying to understand. As a matter of fact, I had the feeling he had not finished his studies completely when the war started but he had to go into his regiment of the army.

RS: He was an officer.

SL: Not right away, but sooner or later, yeah. [He became a lieutenant]. He just had to join it and then he belonged to those troops that entered Poland. He doesn't tell much about Poland. That's a field where I haven't heard anything special, except the fact that being a soldier, he had to go back to his

¹⁷ She was with an English family when the husband said he had spent the war in the Pacific. She was confused and asked why the Pacific. He explained that it was a world war. This was a total revelation. He also said that Germany and Britain should have been on the same side in that war. This was a reference to the Soviet Union.

¹⁸ There was a veterans group who wrote analyses of specific battles and units. He was in this group.

university to pass his second exam. I think that shows how crazy the whole situation was right from the beginning. People doing a law exam and at the same time entering Poland. I'm pretty sure that was not just a joke. That was quite a heavy experience. So I think this was quite tough somehow. And then later on he spent some time close to the French border and more in the area close to Belgium. He has quite some pictures from that time. They were just waiting. He belonged to the troops that entered France. He used to talk about this time much more, always saying that there had been heavy battles in the north of France. Somehow there was a similarity to what his father must have told. So I always saw there is a similarity between World War I and World War II.

RS: So his father had been in...

SL: In France.

RS: in 1870.

SL: No, no, no, 1914.

RS: Oh, the first World War.

SL: Yeah, World War I. He must have been in a similar area for some time. So father and sons commemoration were somewhat close. You see, that's a point. Two generations, the first generation 1870 until World War I that was 50 years, so that was not the fathers/sons generation. But 1914 to 1918 and 1939, that was the fathers generation World War I and the sons generation World War II.

RS: Very close.

SL: Then my father was, there was a time France was conquered and German administration was sent into those parts of France that were under German rule. And at that time my father was somewhere along the coast of Brittany and he was in charge of a little place. We once visited that in the 1970s. He's revisited quite a number of places in France ever since. It's not so far away from here. He had friends who accompanied him. In general the situation in France was not difficult for a German soldier right after France had been occupied. There was this piece of time when he was in charge for that little place in Brittany. Then all of a sudden he was ordered to go east and from the very first day on he belonged to the troops that entered Russia. So the main impact he had as an experience of war he had from that time, being a soldier or an officer at that time in, with the troops that were fighting Russia. I always had the feeling those guys at that time, young guys being a member of these troops, they did not think about what it was, why they were fighting or why they were sent there. They were sent and that was their task. They did not wonder or discuss it or so. This is very strange for me because I never understood why this all happened. There was no logic from the very beginning, seen

from, as an historic development. My mother always said when the Nazis and Hitler were elected, her father said, this will be war. And that was in 1933. As he had been a World War I member, he was very distant to anybody who wanted to have war again. But in my father's family or my father himself, I have the feeling they did not doubt what was happening. It just was happening and you were a soldier for your country so you had to serve. There was never a clear story how this being a soldier took place, what was happening there, what was it about, what the rules. When we were talking about it, it was more a situation that he could talk about how officers gave certain commands or certain situation, but not a general telling. So it was more a situation that I might ask something and he gave me an answer or so. Something he told about was when he was wounded, what the situation was like. We visited this place – you might remember it, Sandomierz – I was surprised, at that time it was somewhere in Russia, but after the war the situation with Poland was changed. [Note: The border was moved]. So nowadays this place is in the very east of Poland. I had not realized this. His telling was, it was in Russia, Ukraine at that time.

RS: We visited it. There was a beautiful church with murals.

SL: He always talked about an area of barracks where they were standing outside and were talking about next steps to take or so. Some officers standing together and then it's very close, this place is very close to the Wisłoka (Vistula), the main river of Poland. So that was a kind of a border situation and the Russians were pushing from the east, so they were shooting and this place outside the barracks was hit and my father was hit as well. And he always said he remembers how he fell and then he doesn't remember anything else. He had a very good friend in the army, they kept friends after the war. And he said when my father was lying there, his brain was heavily damaged, so it looked like he would be dead. We have this saying, nobody would have given 5 cents for him. So the situation seemed to be very bad and it's really astonishing that he survived this heavy wound on his head. This was a central thing in my youth because we could see the damage at the head at that time. And you could see this time the head was damaged.

RS: A part of his skull was blown away.

SL: Mm hm. [Yes]. So this was a permanent thing to be seen. And I think that's really something that's been a point in that whole generation. At that time, when I was a little child there were so many men who had lost one leg or lost a hand or lost something. This was obvious. This was not just casual one or many, and many were in chairs, they could to walk at all.

RS: The first time I came to Germany was 1966 and I noticed this, I noticed the number of men who were in crutches or otherwise disabled in some way in the war. It was noticeable in the streets.

SL: Oh even then.

RS: Yeah.

SL: Yeah, it's something I remember as a child, that there were people... For example, a friend of my parents had lost two fingers on his hand. When I was a little child I always said, why do you have only three fingers, or where are those fingers? They made jokes and they said, he's been taking it away, like a baby.

RS: Sucking his thumb.

SL: Yeah, he's been sucking his thumbs too much. Because to a little child, you can't describe, it's been shot away. They didn't want to upset me. But this damage of my father was something that's been really central in the family as well. It was clear we couldn't touch his head. We should be careful not to touch his head because there was no skull, it was just skin.

RS: Oh, when you were children.

SL: Yeah. He kept saying that he remembers when he was set on a transport to a place to help him and he had a note given with him that he had to be, that he needed surgery within 24 hours and somehow they got him to a place where this could be handled. And then he woke up under surgery.

RS: During the surgery.

SL: Yeah, yeah. And the doctor said, now keep calm, we're doing everything and then he was unconscious again. So this must have been a tough situation. He always said, then those Polish nuns, Tschenssto Chau, they made everything for him. They were very, very good nurses.

RS: You told me once about the doctor who accompanied him on the train and made jokes.

SL: That was not on the train. That was when he had had the operation and this doctor also had some special operation. This was head and spine damages and he made jokes to get him out of the

depression. [Long Pause] I see it's difficult for me to talk about this because it's somehow similar what I have experienced. With my... And I had a Polish nurse.¹⁹

SL: What's really amazing for me, that he recovered, and he recovered so much that he was taken into war again. Although he was so badly damaged they put him into the troops on combat again. They had no people. As I've said, I'm sure there are many points he did not talk about.

SL: Quite often we talked about the Nuremberg trial and the main people within this trial. He had no doubt that those real Nazis, this was correct to put them into this trial. But the two leading officers – I do not remember the second name – the leading one was Keitel. He did not commit, Keitel, but the other one – what was his name? I have to look it up.

RS: We'll look it up. [Jodl]

SL: But he always said, that was not just to hang him. And then I asked, why were they sentenced to death. And he said, this and that, and several reasons, and also what he called in German, the Kommissars. There was this rule inside the German army that the Russian officers, those who were political officers had to be killed. They had certain signs so that it was clear they were political officers. And he said, yes, he remembers how those were taken aside.

RS: So they were not just military, they were political as well. Is that the point?

SL: They were, inside the Russian army, the party was always governing. So they were checking what was going on. There was always a party official inside the army. I wonder, have you heard about that?

RS: Yes, I know what the structure was.

SL: Those political officers were not taken as POWs, they had no chance. Most were just killed, just liquidated right away. And that's something my father has seen. He didn't comment it, but – you know, I asked you about the Nuremberg trial, you try to understand what was behind it. So there were questions I gave and answers I got. Yeah, and I think there must have been a point when all these soldiers and officers, members of the German army just knew there was nothing to be, nothing to gain anymore, the war was lost. We always have the saying after the Battle of Stalingrad, this was clear. My father doesn't tell, did not tell when they started to doubt that there was any perspective [prospect

¹⁹ Sibylle had developed a tumor in her eye that had metastasized. This was the only time during these five days together that she acknowledged the distress she was surely feeling.

of victory] left. I have the feeling he decided sooner or later, I think after he had been wounded at least, just to come out of that disaster, just come over it somehow. Keep alive.

RS: To survive.

SL: Yeah, yeah. He told that sometimes those soldiers also between them, each other, they talked about this. But this was very risky because as soon as somebody was meant to be not clear, they were sent to what we call the war courts. And there were not many chances then. So this was a situation totally under pressure from all sides. There was no escape. So this situation, to handle the situation



and to survive, this was something they decided themselves and did not tell. If you look in his, what we call *Sold Book*,²⁰ the key booklet every soldier has to carry with him, his – I still have it – and you see there are some, they had some times of visiting back home. And what's he been talking about was his last visit at home. It was when he had seen his mother last time. She died in 1945, after the war. And this was March or maybe even

April, I should look it up, not long before the war ended. But his parents lived close to Berlin, so he had a possibility to visit them. And there were some days when he was not a



soldier. He even wore civil [civilian] clothes. And he stood at home. And then the situation came closer and the day he had to go back to the troops, this place where his parents lived was taken over

²⁰ This was a book every soldier carried. It served as identification, but also recorded payments, home leaves, etc.

by Russian army. And he was there on kind of three days and so the question was if he would go out in his military clothes he would have been very obvious, so he went out in his private clothes trying to reach the troops again. The other possibility would have been to go to the Russians and say, here he is, somebody new for your POW, so that's something he just did not want to.

And he always, this were like a detective story of something, very exciting for us, when he told about this, that he left home in his good coat like a civil person very early in the morning so nothing was on and he knew the place, so he thought how to reach army branches of the German army. So he was lucky enough to leave the place, no Russians around who took him. And he went into the woods and he found, he had an idea where about... There were no real troops anymore. So he could not go what would have been the usual way, go to the station and go to the next place where he could meet the army. So he had an idea where to go to find some, because he knew the area and he found some. And they looked at him and said, ok, you're in your private clothes. So that's how it started in 1918, when the troops were no longer willing to follow.

This was a crucial situation for him because then he had to prove that he was not, that he had not tried to quit and they accepted this. Somehow he came to a troop where he did not belong to. Just said, I'm still a German soldier, so take me. And he was part of those troops trying to do something for Berlin, which was absolutely crazy. Nothing happened there. They all were on their own, they had no directives, nobody knew where to go, what to do. He told us as he knew the area, they had nothing to eat, so once in the morning late March, April something, he and some very young guys who also had to at the end of the army were close to an open field but they were still in the wood. So they saw a farmer plowing. They came into contact with him asking if he would have something to eat and he said not with me but I'll bring you something. This was risky because you just did not know at that time if he would come back with Russian troops or so. You just did not know. So this man did so. He brought some bread and some minor things, just something. And he said, these young guys, they said, please give us something out of this, so this was nothing, but they had to share it. The situation was really very difficult. I think he was able just to survive, just come through.

Then he went into Berlin where we had relatives and he stayed with them, which was illegal then and of course the whole place was searched for soldiers. And then he again was outside Berlin and the 8th of May then they had the information the war was over. And together with the others they just buried their weapons, he still had a weapon, but they buried that and got rid of it. He stayed for some time in Berlin illegally and then this uncle where he lived said, it's no longer possible for us to keep you. Too many know about you, so you just have to find a way out. We can't help you anymore. He was the father of a young woman, a cousin of my fathers who had been raped times and times at that time in

Berlin. It was after the Russians had come in. She was a very friendly aunt later on, but we always knew something had happened to her in Berlin.

SL: So my father had a possibility to get out of Berlin for the west and I have the feeling he was really clever always to escape any situation where he could have been taken as a POW. He's never been a POW. This is really amazing for me. And finally then he went to the area of Göttingen where he had studied – this is something I've learned from my parents. They've always kept in contact to people they had to go in a difficulty situation.



And Göttingen, he went into with his head damage, he went into a British military hospital and they checked this situation and then they gave him some kind of a stamp and he left. He was no longer a soldier. He had an official document to show he is out of the army and this is official and the British army has accepted this. Also he had never been in combat with British soldiers. The British more or less finished the war for him. Then he was lucky enough to stay in the British sector and was just happy to have left the Soviet sector, the Russian sector. He had no contacts to American soldiers. I do not remember that he ever mentioned any. He had been to Poland, to France, to Russia, in the end, the British. Yeah. But the whole situation in Russian, being in Russia and having the experience with Russians in the period of end of war, this was a trauma. Russia was a trauma.

RS: It was two parts, wasn't it? The fighting was fierce and then the occupation after the war was also particularly...

SL: I wonder what was heavier. I think the situation in Russia was heavier. He did not tell so much about it. But the time when the Russians had come into Germany, as narrative this was a trauma. Not only for my father, for the whole country. That's something I've always been told, now the Russians are behind the iron curtain, so there's some security. The iron curtain keeps them in line. But what shall we do if they really come. So the building of the Berlin wall was such a heavy experience again. And I wonder if I told you about how I experienced the building of the Berlin wall?

RS: No.

SL: For a family story there is one interesting detail. We had visited eastern Germany, my mother my sister and me had visited eastern Germany, visited my uncle, the brother of my mother, and this had

been for us as kids, it's been a time of nice holidays kind of thing.²¹ We were not aware about the political situation or tension or something. And the leader of the GDR had said, nobody's going to build a wall, nobody's going to build a wall – this was a pure lie. But what did I know as a six year old at that time. I had no idea. So my mother, my sister and me, we left GDR to meet my father, who was visiting friends in lower Saxony. Next morning we were sitting around the breakfast table with the family we were visiting and one of the daughters of the house opened the door and said, in Berlin they built a wall. So I never forget this because even as a six year old I saw this as pure horror, what's going on now, the Russians are coming.

RS: And you were on the wrong side of the wall.

SL: We were on the right side because we were in the west.

RS: You were in the west at that time.

SL: Yeah, in lower Saxony, we just the day before had left

RS: You had crossed over.

SL: GDR. And we were able to leave it because it was a guarded border with soldiers ordered to shoot anybody who would try to cross this border. At that border people were shot at that time. Not just told not to go, they were shot. So it was a difficult border, that's something we knew. Going across this border you had to have documents otherwise you would have been sent to prison if you had no documents. If you tried to go illegally you were shot.

RS: I remember in South Africa in 1980 when we first met, you spoke of your fear of the Russians.

SL: Definitely.

RS: That this possibility of an invasion was every present. And to me it didn't seem like a real threat.

²¹ Sibylle once told me a story of visiting this uncle. They asked in advance if they could bring him something. He was a handy man and said he would like a drill. Whenever I taught Germany politics I told this story (anonymously). I told students, if you want a drill you go to the hardware store and buy one. If you want five drills, they will ask you to wait while they go into the back to get them. If you want twenty, they will ask you to return tomorrow so they can get them from the warehouse. And yet East Germany, an industrial state, could not produce drills for people who wanted to fix their homes. Everyone in East Germany had a job, but not everybody who wanted one had a drill.

SL: I experienced this threat.

RS: But that was your fear, that this might actually happen.

SL: Yeah, they, we did not feel this building of the wall as a keeping away, it was a moving forward.

RS: Keeping them in.

SL: Yeah. But...

RS: I remember – go ahead

SL: I just want to finish this. One interesting, from my family history quite an interesting detail is the friend of my father's whom we were visiting there in Lower Saxony, sitting there at the table when the news came on the Berlin wall is built, this friend was the very friend who was with my father when he was wounded in Russia, who said, we did not give 5 cent for him. So they kept in a very close friendship ever since and we were visiting exactly these people. He was working. He was in charge of the woods around there, very much a person in contact to nature. He was calming down and said, we'll see, we've survived so many situations. And at that time of course at once everybody said, now the Americans must do something.

RS: In the late 1980s we, in Dearborn, had the famous theologian Hans Kung and this was a time when there was all the controversy over the American missiles in Germany.

SL: Yeah, right.

RS: And he was in favor of those. And many people in the audience were peace activists. They were opposed to those missiles. And so someone challenged him, why are you in favor and he said, well, perhaps if you woke up in the morning and looked out your window and saw the Russian army you would change the way you're thinking. That was, here was a man who was very much theologically on the left. I'm not sure of his political views. We viewed him as someone on the progressive side, but on that issue this was not a matter of progressive or conservative. It was just safety.

SL: Yeah, and it's logical because the Russians were not in favor of anybody who was anti-war, anti-weapons or even religious. They did not accept religion. At that time religion in Russia was not accepted. People were leaving, people with German origin were leaving Russia [to come] back home.

Their ancestors left 200 years ago.²² This was not back home, but it was a field where they could live in their beliefs, in their religion. People here turned up in the churches. You could clearly see that people had left Russia because they were not allowed to go to church. Churches were run down. Much different to nowadays when Putin is building new cathedrals.

RS: Yes.

SL: From the ideology, religion was not accepted by the Russians, by the Soviet Union.

Dresden

RS: There is something you once told me about your father, I think it's worth repeating. You said that he was in Dresden when the bombing occurred. What can you tell me about that story?

SL: I have the feeling out of his head damage he had been to doctors, hospitals again and again. So as I understood he had been to Dresden for some recovery reason or some additional treatment or something, I can't tell. But he had been in Dresden downtown and Dresden was an open place, a beautiful place and it was somehow a place of recovery of non-war area. And he said for some reason he was sent not to stay in Dresden downtown but go to the edge of Dresden. Dresden is somewhat down to the, next to the river. There are kind of hills around, so he was sent to a place that's more on the hillside so that you can see down to Dresden. Dresden has had, well it was not a place where he was familiar with. We have no family relations to that place, much more to Leipzig. So he stayed there and as I understood it was some kind of a hospital and then there were these bombings and he said, those airplanes, the military airplanes – how do you call them? Bomber?

RS: Yes, bombers.

SL: Yeah. They were flying and flying in hundreds and flying and there was no, you just could do nothing. They just came, you were absolutely helpless and it was over days. So you could see them and they were bombing and the whole place, the whole city which could be seen from his, from the place where he stood aside. It was just burning, burning, burning, burning and nobody could do anything. And there was no German bombers, nothing, it was just over. Every year, beginning of every 12th, 13th of February we have some commemoras [commemorations] and people talking about this, how they had some cannons to shoot against to show they were helpless. Yeah, he said, the

²² At the time, we had conversations about these returning Germans, many of whom did not even speak German. They were resented almost as much as non-Germans. It was not an easy transition.

whole, the ground was shaking from the bombing, so it was a disastrous situation because you couldn't do anything. You just saw it.

RS: You watched it.

SL: You just watched it and the ground was shaking, it was a very, very special experience because as a soldier he had not had any experiences like people in other places who have the telling of, we were in the basements every night. The soldiers did not have this experience. So this was something extra he's seen. And as Dresden is such a myth, of course it's been a narrative of the family and our father's seen this. He did not talk about this as Allies, and how could they – he just said, this happened.²³

RS: At that point the American and British Air forces had complete control of the skies. There was no response to those bombings.

SL: That's what he told. You could not do anything.

RS: And those were vengeance bombings. They were not military bombings. They were retaliation for the bombing of London.

SL: And the idea of demoralizing the civil people, which was just the contrary. It didn't demoralize in a sense of, we give up. Yeah, I mean, when we hear tellings here, it's not been here in the last two or three years, but it was always very moving for me to hear a woman talking about the fact that she was born on the 11th of February in Dresden. And then the first bombing occurred and all the babies were taken somewhere apart. She never got to know her mother – her mother did not survive. And she had somebody say something about her mother so she had a small idea of what her mother had been. And you also heard of, because those women's clinic must have been very close to the river, so you heard of patients lying along the riverside and somehow trying to get shelter from this heat, which was not possible at that time. Stories you can't imagine. My generation, someone said, but we started the war. So take it as a warning, whenever you start a war, you don't know where your outcome.

SL: Strange enough, I mean, the family of my husband, he was born after the war, but my mother-in-law had six little children and they lived in an industrial place close to the [not clear]. So they've been in the basement every night. And they must have had the experience of being what we call Faschuta.

²³ The first time we met, Sibylle discussed Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse Five*. Vonnegut had been an American prisoner of war in Dresden during the bombing. The genius of the novel is that history is not linear. The past, the present, and the future overlap.

That means the whole house is collapsed and you can't get out of it. And somebody ducks you out if you were lucky enough and many were not lucky enough. They just got, had nothing to breathe anymore and they did not come out. So she has been blacked out once. And then she was sent to where it seemed to be safer, to somewhere east of Hamburg, in eastern parts of Germany, [Mecklenberg Vorpommeren]. Those parts were not bombed. But then she sat there and the Russians came. So the idea was, wouldn't it have been nicer to sit in the west where the Americans came and the British. The people were just trapped. Whatever you did, no safety anymore. And the telling in this family of a very strange person – Karl-Heinz's [her former husband's] father -- was that he somehow made it from the Wildebeet after the war to those Russian areas and took out his wife and the six children. So there are completely different experiences in other families. So that's something my family hasn't experienced, being, sitting trapped in a basement.

For example, I have a friend in the age of my mother. She once told me about when she was on a field, around Munich somewhere, maybe American or British, not bombers, but airplanes came and they just shot the people on the field. She saw people lying next to her. That's something my parents have never told. They have not experienced this. So it was so different, what people experienced and what they kept in their mind and what was their basic shock. My father has seen burning Dresden, but then off he was and some very few weeks later he had the possibility to visit his parents. I do not get this together, this was absolutely chaotic time. Then he had to leave and did not know how to reach his own army, so.

RS: It's strange to go from the bombing of Dresden to a home visit. It's strange, isn't it? You move from one...

SL: Yeah, it's not from the bombing Dresden right away to that place, there must have been something in between.

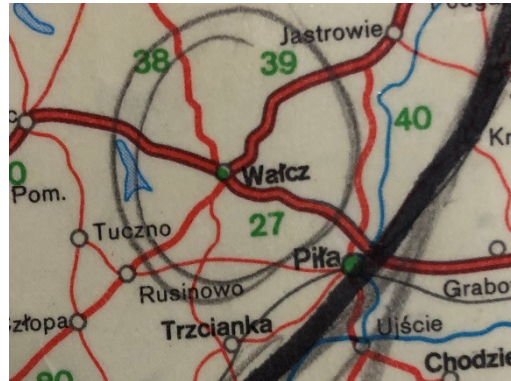
RS: Some place, some time.

SL: Yeah. So this was a permanent, you had no time to – that's what I wanted to tell so far – you had no time to reflect this. You had a pure horror and off you were and the next pure horror turned up. So it was a situation of only survive this. That's the basic message I take out of this narrative.

Her Mother's Experience

RS: Your mother's experience was very different, wasn't it?

SL: My mother was 15 years younger than my father was, so she was still a young girl. My father had started and had some kind of profession. But my mother was a schoolgirl and she finished high school during the war and lived in a rural area very far east from here. Nowadays it's Polish and it's a place not so far away from Danzig.²⁴ So the first years of the war did not harm those communities. People lived their everyday life so far. But of course all her school mates, the guys left into the army right away after they finished school. Most men were on war, so in that rural area many POWs had to, got taken for field work. And she saw her father who



had been a farmer was reactivated to work on a kind of mansion. And she said on that place there she did not live then, but on that place she saw Polish people who worked there and had the extra kind of housing, very poor. In the evening they sat together and were singing the national Polish hymn. She says, as she remembers her father was in charge and he accepted this. He did go against this or so.

SL: My mother did not tell about any Nazi situation or very much a political situation. She made this high school degree and she was able to study and she wanted to become a medical doctor. And she started to study in Danzig. She liked her studies. She stayed there together with a friend whom she had met in the Arbeit Dienst, all those girls had to work on farms or so for a year after high school. Of course that was a Nazi invention and it was a field of indoctrination, but those young girls took it as a first time off from home and meeting new acquaintances. She had two or three girls that she had known from that time, she's had friends ever since. Then she started to study and one of these girls of the Arbeit Dienst went together with her and I think that's very remarkable. She described how when she lived there in Danzig and around the 20th of July 1944 the Gestapo turned up and they searched the place and searched her friend. And her friend had had no information at all about her father who was involved into the assassination against Hitler and committed suicide before they took him. We've been to the Bendler Bloc in Berlin. He's shown there as one of those people who were involved into the assassination. He was a leading person in the Wolfschlag who was informed.²⁵

RS: Yes, we visited that place.

²⁴ It was called Deutsche Krone, now Wałcz. I bought a map of Germany and places east. Sibylle marked the city on my map.

²⁵ She could not remember his name at the time but it was Werner von Schrader. His wife and son (a soldier) were arrested but not the daughter.

SL: Anyway, her friend then went back home, she was from Lower Saxony. My mother kept studying, but second half of let's say 1944-45, there was no possibility to study anymore so she went home and they were debating more or less what would happen, what can we do. So they saw the Russians came closer and closer. Yeah. She described the insecurity that was clear for all those people there, they wondered if they could leave, if it wasn't forbidden to leave. If somebody was going to leave for the west, this could end up with a war court. So this was a very doubtful situation. And then as I understood, my grandfather had the initiative that as he was still managing this kind of a mansion place that the people around there, the village people, they all together were close to have a permit to leave for the west because the Russian army was coming up. And then he made clear that he wanted to have his daughter as a medical student accompanying this what they called the trek, which is a word you can also find in South Africa.

RS: Yeah, trek.

SL: Yeah. And this was accepted, so she was not sent as a nurse into the troops under the combat. That would have been the alternative. So they were quite lucky that she could join this. Up to that, she had been together with POWs and all kinds of people. She was digging trenches against the Russian tanks. And that's something you can still see officially.

RS: The trenches are still there.

SL: When you go there, I've been to that area and the tourist information gives you information where to find these trenches. Anyway, when they got the permit to leave and they packed, this was always a very, this was like a fancy story or something when my mother told about this – how they packed, how they made clear what to take with them, what to leave. And then she always described how they left the house and they put the key under a window and then they left.

RS: The whole family.

SL: The whole family. Then the whole area changed into a war area. German troops turned up and this had been a very calm area the whole war long, but all of suddenly they were close to a kind of a border situation. I think there you can see that she was still a very young girl and somehow they took it as a kind of a self-assurance. They took it as an adventure. Well, the situation was chaotic then, they had no trucks or something. It was horse wagons. And they made it over, happily enough, they made it over the Oder, the big river. And they were happy enough to leave somewhat quickly. And they had the possibility to stay with relatives. A brother of my grandfather lived across the Oder. She always said, the other day we were walking along a road in this little place – she and her mother were

walking, her brother was an American POW at that time. He had been with the Navy. So she and her mother were walking and my grandma must have had a hiccup. She said, right now, our father's going over the Oder and that was true. They could fix it and he and all those people from the village then also were clear to come over the Oder. This is a narrative, again, get over the Oder, then get over the Elbe, the river. That's the river along Hamburg. It's this, what to do when the Russians come, get over, get over. It's such a tight situation.

RS: Keep moving west.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RS: How long did it take them to get to their house to where she ended up? Do you know?

SL: I should look it up, I have her diary. What was so moving for me, what made me understand German history in a very basic point was the fact that the diary of my mother leaving home started with the 27th of January 1945 and it's the very same day when Auschwitz was freed. So these are two sides of one medal in my personal history. Two sides of one medal. [English: Two sides of the same coin].

Her Parents Meet

RS: How did your parents meet?

SL: My mother went to a place where she could meet another friend from the Arbeit Dienst, which I mentioned before where all these girls had to work in farms for a year. And she had met this friend with whom she has been studying in Danzig and she had met some others and one was living in Lower Saxony. So go west, go over the Elbe, and then go where? And she was in charge of a cousin, of two cousins, a girl and a boy. And she had these two kids together with her. I mean, she was 21 years old and you have no place where to stay, no house, no nothing, just you're free to move. And then she had asked before they left, she had asked this friend if it would be possible to come there. So that's what she was heading for and that's very close to the area. So once she was over that river she went and there she could stay for some time with this family and she also had her cousins with her. But she was not in a position to handle children. So she brought these children into an orphanage and then she stayed in this home of her friend. Actually had to find something to live on because her parents were still in the eastern part. They had not made it over the Elbe. And nobody could subsidize her or so.

So she worked in a hospital then out of her medical knowledges and then she literally learned how to type to be able to work as a secretary. The place where she stayed is the very place where my father

ended up somehow. I don't know actually. I have an idea. He also had relatives close by, so he came into that area because as he was sent into freedom from the British, where should he go? And he went to this relative and they were close by, then he had from his fraternity a lawyer was living at that area. So he now and then could help him a little bit. He had no job, nothing. And he also stayed in the very place. So my parents met sooner or later because in that place everybody knew everybody, it was such a small town. I found a diary of my father for the year 1951, which is quite some time after the war. But at that time, he had lived with those relatives and he had worked in the woods, because those other kids were working in the woods. The British had cut all the trees in lower Saxony, so they had to build up trees. Just plant trees.

RS: They were planting them.

SL: Yeah. This was over then, more or less, and it was not good for a living, so he wondered what to do else and he tried to get a job somewhere in economy or in a lawyer's business, but this all did not function. And this year 1951, it was really a depressing year for him as I can see from this diary. There was no perspective [job prospects] for him. I mean, he had been in, formally never worked in this field but formally [technically] he had been [appointed] a judge in Prussia, around Berlin. But that was gone, that was Russian. He would not have dared to set a foot into the Russian zone. So in the other areas of Germany they had their own people work, those people who were at home at that area, they had first range. And those who came over as a so-called refugees within Germany, also they were German they had no perspective. Then in 1953 – I think it was the beginning of 1953 – my father had the advice of somebody of his fraternity as he had studied in Heidelberg and this is southwest here. As someone out of this Heidelberg fraternity said, there is a place as a prosecutor in Offenburg. So if you want to take it, there's a possibility. He had never been to Offenburg before. This was absolutely out of sight, but right away he took this job.

Then as he had a job my parents decided to marry because there was an economic base. So we left lower Saxony. For somebody who's been born here I know parts of Germany out of the background of my parents that people here would not know. Nobody would know about that border area where they met, they married in a place called Wolfenbittel, which is not, nobody knows it except the fact that one of our biggest national writers, Ephraim Lessing, has been working in Wolfenbittel. Lessing worked in Wolfenbittel, that's a connection but not my parents. Yeah. So when I come there it's, when I go there to that area it's somewhat familiar to me, although I've never lived there, but the stories of my parents gave me a background somehow. Yes and out of that total chaos experience and total insecurity, they came here and built up some kind of security, built a family. So stabilized themselves and the society the way they could. As I say nowadays, my generation has had to work on

this stabilization, which somehow was too much, but they had to. Yeah. We did not know at that time that we were in a stress situation.

RS: No.

Hidden, Ongoing Trauma

SL: Just recently I talked to a friend whom I met as a kindergarten girl, we were both in the same kindergarten and we were friends ever since. So he said, for a long time I thought I had a happy childhood. It was much later that I understand it was not a happy childhood, there were very doubtful things in my childhood. Out of the instability of his parents, who also were refugees.

RS: The whole generation was traumatized.

SL: Yeah.

RS: And the next generation didn't realize but they were also affected by that, the children of people who were traumatized may not realize that they're also...

SL: Well, first of all our own traumas we were not allowed to talk about, to think about, or even to touch them because there was another trauma which nobody could understand, which is still not understandable, which is beyond understanding in a civilized context. It's the industrialized way to kill millions of people and always looks to this more or less. And the saying we did not know anything, that's just a lie. Something everybody knew. And for some reason we really worked on this as far as it is possible, and this is why I said, the 27th of January in 1945 is two sides of the same medal for me because when I was in Bundestag we had these Commemoration days of the freeing of Auschwitz. We did not only have it, we still have it. It was established as a public commemoration, public with a public meeting of the Bundestag and someone of those who overcame [survived] the camp speaking and this always has been very moving for me. This is really one of the most moving situations I've experienced in the Bundestag, year for year. I think this was necessary, but at the same time your own history was a little bit short. Your own family's experiences were within the family maybe, if people could talk, but it was not public. This is something we realize now.

RS: I was just thinking we have this term PTSD, which is post-traumatic trauma. After a thing has happened you seem to be normal, but you're not.

SL: Yeah, I work on this with my family cases, yeah.

RS: Yeah. And so you've got a case where a whole country has PTSD.

SL: Ron, I think, well Germans, yeah, but also other countries. Take the Balkan, take the Russians, how many millions of people did they lose.

RS: Yes.

SL: People were closed into a hall or church or something and it was just fired and people were burned. Terrible things happened. Not only to the Germans, the Russians just as much – even out of their own history with Stalin and all this. Take the Polish, whatsoever. When you look at what happened at the end of war in Czechoslovakia, they just got rid of all those Germans. They had reason to get rid of them. Take Austria, take Italy, take whatsoever. It's Europe.

RS: Yes, the whole continent.

SL: It's different. And even in Germany it's different, as I've just said. Some sat in the basement. My family never sat in the basement because of bombing. Others did. So even the narratives inside. Here in a place like Offenburg was not bombed.²⁶ It's still many nice places are here. But the other day – it's not so long ago – around the station there were some bombings [bombs exploding] , and the other day there was some construction done around the station and all of a sudden the working machine just were blown up because an old bomb had blown up. It's not so long ago around Frankfurt University 70,000 people had to leave their houses for one day because an old World War bomb was found, enormously big thing, so they really had to, for security reasons, they had to take out people. This is day for day you have such experiences and this is all over Europe. For a long time you could not turn up in the Netherlands. I think this is even one of the reasons why I'm not so familiar with this area. It was difficult to go there as a German. When we went to Brittany to see the area where my father had been in during the war, beginning of the war as I mentioned before, we went along the Normandy coast and we saw all those - you know, where *The Longest Day* [a film], it happened like this. And we went along the shelters and we heard people talk, [Le Boche, Le Boche, Le Boche] the pigs. Guess who was the pigs?

²⁶ Just a few weeks after I returned there was the 70th anniversary of V-E day, the end of the European war. There were German television programs of this time, including an interview with an American pilot who conducted bombing raids “south of Mannheim.” He spoke of how afraid he was during those raids. Sibylle said these programs were trying to report “both sides,” something highly unlikely in an American program. She noted that there was a monument in the Black Forest commemorating a place where an American plane had crashed. Perhaps Offenburg was not targeted but the area was not spared.

RS: Yes, that was you, yes. I told you I was in Amsterdam just by accident when Mohammad Ali was fighting a German fighter – I can't remember who it was – for a championship. And the TV was on and all the Dutch people were cheering hysterically. Every time Mohammad Ali hit the German they cheered. It was so noticeable that this was not a normal sporting event. It was something else. In my country we were so lucky. We just sat there on our big island and made profits and made bombs and made planes and made tanks. In Dearborn where I live there was so much of that. Individuals had trauma, soldiers had trauma, but they came back to a victorious country. We made movies about war heroes and conquests and made ourselves the center of everything and it was so different. It produces an innocence. An innocence in a bad sense, that you don't recognize the situation.

SL: Therefore I think no war, there's absolutely no war that's worth doing it. It always causes terrible damages. And that's something I really needed time to understand. I have a whole row of books of war and post-war and around war, children and childhood. I also have a book about the situation where in the place where my mother first had come to, had had it for when she and her mother were over the Oder, which I mentioned before, in that place at the end of war. Hundreds of mothers committed suicide by going into the water and they put their children under water. It's not a joke, it's not made up, it's reality. Yeah, this happened. I think my mother had left when this happened. The very day when my father left his parents' house and made it to the woods somehow when the Russians had entered the place, as I've heard and I think that's true, hundreds, not just hundreds, but tens or thirty people, hundreds of people committed suicide. Pure panic, I have no idea. This did not happen here. But for a long time, nobody told about, talked about what had happened here. I don't know it because my family was not living here at that time. So it's still nothing that's talked about openly. But as far as I know, many young women were raped.

RS: In this zone.

SL: In this zone, yeah.

RS: Which was French.

SL: Yeah.

RS: Not Russian.

SL: No Russians ever was here.

RS: The Russians were the worst.

SL: Absolutely.

RS: Yeah. For vengeance reasons probably.

SL: Yeah. It was a time of total disaster. And I can see it meanwhile, as you asked if one of my grandfathers has served in 1870-71, as far as I know, no. but we've been to Denmark where a cousin of my mother is married to or was married to a member of the German minority in Denmark. And we've been to an area, the Danish-German border, it's called the Duppler Schanzen. Everybody in Denmark knows about this. And this is an area where the Danish still are very reluctant with Germans. And when we went there it's been a battlefield in 1866, I think, and it's been part of these unification efforts.

RS: That's right, yes. Schleswig-Holstein.

SL: My father said his grandfather has fought there. If I would say to my children, do you know something about the Duppler Schanzen, they would say, the what?

RS: They don't know.

SL: No idea.

RS: It was a big event in those days.

SL: Yeah. So I can see these unification of Germany with 1871 and this idea of a national unity then was, came into this World War I idea of the German emperor, which was foolish. Then it ended up with the national catastrophe in Versailles, and who signed, you can see, 200 meters away from here as I showed you that sign.²⁷ And this did not solve anything. So the next catastrophe came up.

RS: One after another.

²⁷ Matthias Erzberger was the cabinet minister who signed the treaty and was assassinated in 1921 in the nearby village of Bad Peterstal-Griesbach. He was a member of the Zentrum Party, the predecessor of the CDU. He was also a Jew, which played into the Stab in the Back conspiracy theory. The CDU, which dominates the city council in Offenburg, erected the plaque in his honor. Sibylle noted another issue about street names. Hindenburgstrasse crosses Moltkestrasse right in the middle of town. Moltke was a military hero so that is not controversial but Hindenburg, also a military hero, was the right-wing President who facilitated the selection of Hitler as Chancellor. Parties on the left have urged that the name be changed but others say it was named because of his role as President rather than his political views, so it remains.

SL: Yeah. And so altogether it was some hundred years of the liberal revolution which did not function and all those revolutionaries went to America.

RS: Thank you very much for those people. (Laugh). They were very good and contributed a lot to my country.

SL: Yeah, which we had not understood, so we didn't keep them, anyway So that was in 1848 and take 1945, so it's a hundred years of up and down and up and down and our national ideology

RS: Chaos and war.

SL: And nationalist ideology and madness. Total chaos again. So there's no sense in it and that's why I'm thinking, keep the diverse interests together and try to find a friendly way. There's much more sense in it. Still for me that's European idea, but also democratic situation and that's the next point I ended to politics.



Above, Karl Laurischk as a prosecutor. Below as a civilian in 1946



III

THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

Introduction: In Heidelberg, Sibylle began to read and think more seriously about the nature and politics of being a female. This became a central issue for her throughout her life.

RS: Let me ask you about your involvement with women's liberation. I remember when we first met, you talked to me about women's liberation and that you were in a women's group and you read and discussed things. This was at Heidelberg. Tell me what women's liberation means and how did you get involved.

SL: It was the time when women's lib was a subject which came over from America. It was not so much an original thing there, but it came over. At that time, I saw that having to decide which branch you would study or which possibility you would have in a profession, this was also a question of being a woman. At that time, I think it was much more than it is nowadays, although it's still a question that's open. Women do not tend to go into professions that really pay off. At that time, when I was finishing high school it was rather the question if women would go into a profession as such. Two or three girls of my class studied medicine. This was somewhat a women's field also. The absolute majority went into teaching and I had the feeling that's not the way I want to find an interesting job. So sooner or later it occurred to me as a possibility to study law, which was not strange for me because my father was a judge. But it was still a field where not so many were women. We were about one-quarter of all students were women. This was my motivation to find out about, is there a discrimination for women or not? Are there reasons, is there history, is there something behind, is it all made up, is it just a fashionable slogan coming up from America? It also was a question in the more left-wing thinking student branches, as I found out being in Heidelberg. At the same time, I had never forgotten that I, myself, had been expected to be a boy. My parents were absolutely sure I was a boy, so they had no name for me. And this was somewhat strange because I could not understand why it was so essential to have a son as the first child. My parents made no secret out of this. This was clear. It would have been better to have a son. So from my very first days I was confronted with the question, is a girl as much worth as a boy or not or what's the difference?

RS: You thought about that early, early in your life.

SL: Yeah, because of course I could not understand. I felt myself ok, being a girl. But at the same time I knew they had expected something else. So this is something I knew very early. At that time I

even thought about family law roles and how to solve this saving of the family name. I think they are connected with this girls-boys question. Yeah, but this more or less started as a real subject. This started with Heidelberg, the beginning of my studies. I also had seen that my mother had no profession. She never had finished her studies out of war circumstances and had not had the possibility to continue her studies after the war was over, so she just had a very minor education for being a secretary and of course she had a high school degree. So I saw during my pupil's times, being a school girl, that my mother was much better off in mathematics than my father had been. So I could not understand that she had no profession.

So I just mentioned my mother being the better mathematician and I found this amazing that she had no proper profession at the same time. I saw she had talents and possibilities, but she had no perspective [prospects] so far. I found this situation very much as being trapped. So this was another point why I was interested in the situation of women. It was a time when we still heard...."Well, my daughter. This girl doesn't need a qualified training, education for job or even studies. She will marry anyway." So this was still the idea.

RS: It still is today.

SL: Have her married and everything's fine.

RS: What year did you start at Heidelberg?

SL: After finishing high school, 1973.

RS: The feminist movement was very active at that point?

SL: Out of the 1968ers movement, yeah. Heidelberg was a left-wing university with a strong movement of anti-establishment students. So there also have been groups of girls who went into this women's lib field out of the socialist tradition. This was not so much my idea, I just wanted to know, is there a reason for this? It was not, I had no explanation.

RS: So a group of you formed a discussion reading group. Is that right?

SL: Yeah, I have no idea, I can't remember how this started. Maybe somebody asked for interested girls to call somewhere or so. In the end we were five or six girls, two were American. That's why I think this has been very much influenced, the impulse of women's lib came from America. We just started to read odd books – I would not read them nowadays. But somehow we had the feeling we just start and more and more. We were a group just talking and thinking over our personal situation and what's our perspective, yeah. We met regularly and this was really a good experience. I think it really

gave me some background. It backed me in a very isolated students situation. I was not happy with the law studies. I found that very dry and a very posh situation. Those studying law were very nose-up, very conservative kind of persons. Many of those guys were in fraternities, so this really was not a girls' field, but I had wanted it, to go into a guys' field, so.

RS: The fraternities were very conservative, weren't they?

SL: They are still, very much. Right wing. Quite a lot are right wing.

RS: I remember one of our first conversations you mentioned that you had read Engels' book, *The Origin of the Family*. I had read Marx, but I had never read that. So when I got home, I read that book and found it quite interesting. He has some weird views about women, but at the same time he viewed the family as a component of the class structure. And I thought, that's a very interesting approach, not one that I had encountered before. He also talked about some cases where women had bonded together to support each other – some anthropological cases in various countries. I thought those were very fascinating.

SL: I have no memory of reading this book and I've never read it again. But we went through it and meanwhile I see the plot that might be behind it. In Medieval time and even after the Enlightenment it was a privilege to be able and to be allowed to marry. So this was a class structure, I'm sure. If you go into the Black Forest and find out about the history, those who had families were those who owned the farms. The others were not allowed to marry and they had no stable situation. The girls probably had children without being married, so these children were of no worth. So this was a society in classes. And when this changed and we got the family law, and what I'm working on now, I still see there are differences within families and structure.

RS: It looks to me as if you have had a trajectory that started when you were a little girl.

SL: What's a trajectory?

RS: A straight line from when you were a little girl to what you are today.

SL: Out of that experience, I would say so.

RS: Family law – and as a little girl you started thinking. Ok, why did I not have a name for three days? And here you are involved in family law.

SL: Right. I think more or less I did what I was interested in, what I found demanding or what was of my personal interest. That's always been something I really took as an interest into subjects. It was

not so much an intellectual interest that I choose a subject and worked on this day and night just because I had chosen it. I needed some interest, some personal involvement.

RS: I notice in my university – I don't want to overstate this – but there are some people for whom feminism is an analytical exercise that you study where women fit into society. Almost the way you would use the same logic for how does some minority group fit into society. For others it's an identity issue. I find myself very compatible with those in the first category. Less so in the second category because they view males as somehow outsiders. You are in that first category, I think. You see women in terms of political interests and their rights and those kinds of things. It's just an observation about what I'm hearing and what I've experienced.

SL: You see, I'm convinced that every person no matter male or female has its own impulses and talents and ideas and possibilities. But I'd very often see that women do not dare to develop this. They stay behind this. And I think a real model for this was my mother. She was trapped in personal experiences and in tradition. She once said to me being the wife of a prosecutor it was just not usual to work. I mean, she worked all day long, but that was no work, not in a profession. Of course she worked, but not in an adequate way and never really developed her talents and possibilities. And I think this is really a pity. Boys, maybe there are enough examples where boys also could not develop what they wanted or what they could have done or where their possibilities were, but in general it's more accepted that boys go into an adequate profession or even it's demanded by parents. But the girls very often are kept behind. That's a tradition. She marries anyway. So why invest into her? Up to today I find it very inspiring for me to see if somebody can leave this trap, which a marriage quite often is, and get new perspective and even develop her own possibilities and stabilize their own life by this. For me it was clear, I did not want to end up like my mother. I felt pity for her because I could see this was not adequate, how she led her life. She was a depressed person.

RS: Partially because of this.

SL: That's why I keep saying, when I became a mother this was really a political event because it's not only a very personal situation and a wonderful experience, it's also changing your life and for many women it's the way into a trap. I can't change anything; I have the children; I have to take care for the children. So in Heidelberg I just tried to understand something about women's lib. But compared to today, this was much a different understanding of emancipation. It was really a beginning of finding a way, what's possible, what's behind this. This was a big change in society at that time. For example, I have this booklet with the assignment [inscription] of Alice Schwarzer. [She points to a booklet on table with inscription]. She was a young writer at that time. She really was an icon for women's lib in Germany. Before she became so outspoken, she had left Germany and had lived in France. So, she had seen something different.



After I came back, after I had studied, when I came back to Offenburg and I went into that group building up a women's shelter house. There were, again and again I met women and young girls and students like me who knew so much more about women's lib. They knew everything. I more or less was listening, I was not a barricade. I just made it. I just kept going.

RS: So they were, the subsequent generations have really benefited from your efforts.

SL: Definitely, yeah.

RS: Let's turn to a different topic.

SL: By that way – just another point that I could give in this circumstance – I think I described to you this discussion in the Bundestag and the quota of women on the boards of big companies. And you asked me if I've ever spoken to Merkel personally. I remember she once came into our Caucus when we were in coalition and we all were allowed to give a question to her. So I asked her what she's thinking about this women's quota for big companies. And she made... Of course this is a terrible question for the Liberals because they don't want quotas, especially no women's quotas. So this question was confronting my own party members.

RS: She threw that back at you.

SL: No, no. This question was difficult for the Chancellor, but also for my own people, because they don't want a quota. And Merkel has been Minister of Women's Affairs and she very well knows about the importance of a quota. But she had no majority in the CDU. The guys didn't want it. So she

was very careful with this subject, quota, and there was a permanent tension between her and Mrs. Von der Leyden in this question. And then she answered, well this is a difficult question, we are still working on this. It's still not solved. She did not say I'm against it. But she did not say I'll push it within the next five months or so. She kept in the middle. Now today I read there's a women's quota – on top side of the newspaper – there's a womens' quota for the companies run by the federal republic. What news for me. This doesn't mean much to you, but this is something I've really worked on.

RS: Yes. So this is just today?

SL: Today. [Pointing to the newspaper]. Because this is not, it was brought through by the SPD women's minister and SPD minister of justice. But they do not go out with this subject without Merkel knowing this and accepting this. [CDU and SPD were in coalition at the time]. So far the CDU's under pressure. The old guys can't help it. I wonder if it's understandable what I just say.

RS: Yeah, I do.

SL: It's a very special subject. But I've really seen it from the inside. So, women's lib is not a big question for me anymore. I have my attitude, but you have to gain it, it's not something you just understand out of nothing.

IV

A SEASON IN SOUTH AFRICA

Introduction: In 1980 Sibylle went to Johannesburg for one of the three placements (as we Americans might say) required of law students. Out of that experience, she understood things she had never understood before, not only about South Africa but also about her own country. It was also where she and I met and began a forty year friendship. I was there on my sabbatical, interviewing political activists and government officials. I was in the country for a month but we overlapped for a few days in Johannesburg, and then two days in Cape Town.

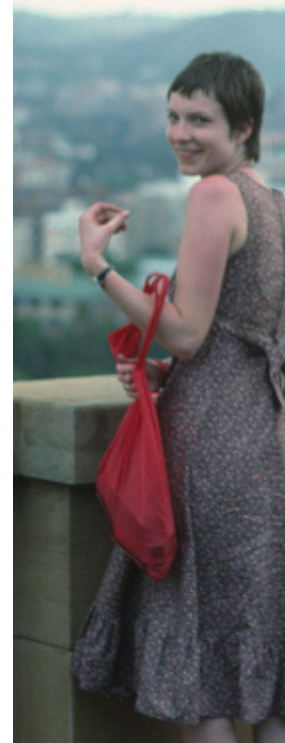
RS: You told me that there was a carnival, similar to what we call Mardi Gras, and that people go to that and there was a certain point where you did not go. That was when you were getting ready to leave for South Africa. And that was a new phase of your life. Did I remember that correctly?

SL: The point is, it's a certain atmosphere in town when there is a carnival. This is a very specific situation which only people who have grown up in town understand. It's a strange situation for anybody else. My mother really had difficulties to find costumes for kids because she had no connection to this habit. For us it was something that's been... Kids of the same generation always went out together and we had all kinds of costumes and felt very happy and easy going with this. It was some kind of time out because you were allowed to be crazy. That's what carnival still is. By the way, it's a Catholic habit, so it was something strange for my parents. There are parts in Germany where people just don't have idea of carnival. And once you're so close to this habit and you hear the music and the whole atmosphere, you just feel like go to such an event and meet people and go to dancing and events and just take part. It's a strong impulse.

So when I was booked on that plane to Jo'burg, the day before I was here leaving for Frankfurt then and it was the day before carnival started and I had the feeling I should go on carnival. But this was not an option because the next day I had to get off very early and just be prepared to leave to Jo'burg, which was really an adventure. So I really left. I think this was kind of a break between the habits I was used to and go to a different part of the world. I would have liked to go to one of the chambers of commerce in the States, but they were booked for years. I went together with a friend, so we looked for other English-speaking chambers of commerce. We also had an acceptance of the chamber of commerce in Cairo. But we got this from Jo'burg, so we took Jo'burg. At that time I had an Iranian boyfriend and he said, if you're going to go to those racists, he'll never talk a word again. He was

outraged. That's not possible, and he was very much left wing politically, so this was just no option. I had no idea, I just wanted to go somewhere.

SL: We had no accommodation. So we had some contacts and this was out of the international connections in Offenburg through Burda.²⁸ So one of the Burda guys had given me some address. When we were in Jo'burg, somebody of the chamber picked us up and we had a hotel for two days or so. And I called this address. This person said come over. We went there and described the situation. We were going to stay with a chamber of commerce [person who] had a recommendation and we were told he might have something. And all of a sudden this guy started to speak German. Up to that we were very properly speaking English as far as we could, and then he said, we should make it easier, we'll speak German. And it turned out he had left Germany in the 1930s. He was Jewish. Then he said we have some possibility, so he offered us an apartment to stay, which we took, and this was just fine. It was this starting in Jo'burg with no idea what it's all about. My friend had no idea. I had maybe somewhat more courage, but no idea either. So this was a really strange situation because the chamber did not help us. It was more or less this connection from Offenburg.



Yeah, then we stood there and we had to find out about this chamber. I had never had any contact to economy people before. Later I found out it was very much influenced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At that time run by Dietrich Genscher. No idea at that time, but I found out later on. We very quickly thought we can stay here all day long in Jo'burg or we do something else and find out about the possibilities to see something of the country. We were just lucky somebody offered us to rent a car. We rented this car and then we had to take it and drove back through Jo'burg end of the day traffic, with a left side steering wheel, left side traffic. It was pure horror. Yeah, so we had the car and we had a flat and we had ideas where to go. So where to go first, this was Pretoria, see the capital. That was our idea. And as my kids still say, they sooner or later had the idea, if you come to a foreign place, first you do go to a museum. Because that's what I always did when we visited any place, we went to the museum. So they had the feeling this is just . . .

²⁸ Burda is the major corporation in Offenburg. They are famous for sewing patterns but are also a media conglomerate of some significance.

RS: A normal thing.

SL: a normal thing, and that it's a habit. It was just my idea. So that's what I did when we went to Pretoria on a Sunday – what do you do on a Sunday in a place like Pretoria? We just walked up and down the main road and that was it. So we ended up in this museum. That's where I met you.

RS: You did.

SL: You know the story. So I really felt this is a totally new situation, totally different to anything I had ever experienced before. For me it was really strange to see how a strange or surprising, how easy going a racist state is functioning. This really gave me an additional insight in how Germany must have been functioning or how a racist situation in a place like Germany was possible. I saw it is possible. This was quite surprising for me.²⁹ And I understood this by and by – not right



away, but by and by. And even when we had left the country. I was there with this friend from university and we travelled a lot. But I had the feeling she had a different attitude or different way of experience this country and this situation. This was different. I couldn't tell why, but we had decided not to go alone, so we had applied together. And then I saw that living together we were not so, this did not really fit so well as I had thought it would do. But we got along.

I met these business people – first time I met business people. And I think it was a preparation for me to apply for an American company later on when I had finished my second exam, because I had more feeling like these structures or how the way of thinking, and it was an English American way of thinking. I still think it's been quite different to German habits. Very much an English way of thinking, yeah. I think after this visit I've never ever been so intensively visiting another country. I mean, three months, that's quite some time, but it was a very intense time at the same time because we were working there, we met people, we were not just tourists. You could see there is much wealth,

²⁹ In a subsequent discussion with Alan Boesak (below) he noted how white people would visit South Africa and go away saying that people got along and that the stories of racism were exaggerated. He said racism was a structure of power that was not visible. As he said to me, “What do they expect? To see people attacking each other in the streets because of racism?” Sibylle noted exactly this.

there is much poverty, a really racist situation. Very strange, very hard to understand for me what was going on there, how and why. So I think at the same time it was very interesting for me that you took us to somebody like this priest...

RS: Allan Boesak³⁰

SL: Yeah. This was also the situation of the mixed people, but it also showed me the impulse and the impact churches gave, the involvement of churches. Before I visited South Africa I never had any idea of churches and their influence on politics. I probably have heard about that but I had no understanding. This really changed my point of view. When I asked you, why are you so much interested in the churches in this country, you said religion is always politics situation, it's connected with politics. Meanwhile I just know that this is very true, but I had no clue about this before. So in combination of all these very different points of view and qualities you could see in this country and non-qualities, contradictions, this was really amazing for me.



At the same time, my life changed as I got the news that my long-term boyfriend, we stood together all the time studying in Heidelberg, got married at that time very quickly after we got separated and it

³⁰ Allan Boesak was a pastor in the “Coloured” branch of the Dutch Reform Church. The Coloureds of Cape Town are people who speak Afrikaans and are culturally Afrikaaners [i.e., Dutch and Christian] but who have a non-white ancestor that put them in a separate category in terms of legal rights. They were often called Brown Afrikaaners. Boesak was chaplain at the University of Western Cape in Belleville near Cape Town. He was a dynamic personality who had written a book entitled *The End of Innocence*. He argued that in a structure of inequality and injustice a person in the privileged classes who claims to be exempt from responsibility because they have not committed a personal offense is guilty of the sin of innocence. I had read his book and wanted to interview him. He was 34 at the time. He suggested I go to the Sunday evening service and then go to his home for conversation. By chance, Sibylle and her roommate were visiting Cape Town that same week and I invited her to accompany me. We were stunned to see a gathering of several hundred students there to hear his sermon. It was obvious that a pastor speaking of social justice had an enormous appeal, especially at a time when most non-white political organizations were banned. Afterwards we had a very nice discussion at his house. His wife Dorothy was gracious and lovely. He later divorced her and married a white woman. Boesak was the ANC candidate for governor of Cape Province in the first majority rule election. He lost, the only ANC candidate to lose a provincial governorship. He became head of the World Council of Reformed Church, an important high-profile position. He was later convicted of corruption in the management of contributions to a charitable organization he had established. He insisted on his innocence and was pardoned by President Thabo Mbeki.

was in that time when I was in South Africa. This Iranian friend, I just got fed up with him because he did not stop having contact to me although he had said, if you go to a racist country I'll never speak a word with you. This was much different after I had done this. So I thought, ok, what an idiot. This was quite a change. At the same time, it was really a central event in my life to have met you in South Africa. This was so special. And I'm very glad and thankful that we kept in contact ever since.

RS: Forty years.

SL: Forty years.

RS: Almost exactly.

SL: Yeah?

RS: I think met you in late February or early March.

SL: I just found a report of the chamber of commerce and I came there in the middle of February and two weeks later we went to Pretoria. I say we because I made this with my friend then, with the other girl in the apprenticeship in the chamber of commerce. You travelled on and I think there was something like you got lost in Portugal or somewhere

RS: Oh yeah.

SL: on the way back.

RS: That's a long story. I missed a plane. I got left in the airport in Lisbon, so.

SL: Some crazy thing happened.

RS: Yeah.

SL: We stayed in South Africa. I remember we made a trip, we had some small breaks and we really tried to travel as much as possible. We stayed there over Easter and travelled in the German area somewhere. We stopped in the middle of nowhere, absolutely nowhere. We stopped at a little church and went in. It was Easter Sunday and very, very poor people, obviously very poor people brought their babies to be baptized. And a missionary, a priest with a professional gown – what would you say?

RS: Robe, gown.

SL: Which was repaired again and again, you could see this priest was very poor as well, was baptizing these babies. This was very impressive. And on this trip we went somewhere in the mining

area and over Easter people went back home. So we were in our car and hundreds of workers were walking on the road, just coming in opposite to us. We had to stop. Hundreds of people were walking, somewhat like back home. They were all black and we were sitting two white girls in this car. This was a very strange situation. By the way, it was very strange in the South African community, society that two girls were travelling alone. This was not usual, we could feel. This was doubtful. Yeah.



Sibylle sunbathing on top of Table Mountain



V

BACK IN GERMANY

Introduction: After her South African adventure was over, Sibylle returned to Germany and began looking for a job, which she found with the Arthur Anderson accounting firm. Then she started on her greatest adventure, motherhood, and quickly realized that motherhood and politics converged.

SL: Well, I've definitely learned a lot [in South Africa] and much quicker than you think such a time is over. So we had to return to Karlsruhe, make our exams then. I was looking for a job and this was very difficult. At that time there were very few jobs for lawyers. So I applied for this job with a Nordic company and since I could speak some English, they took me. Again this was really a good experience for me because I got some insights into economy, again, which is not usual in a law study in Germany. It's one of the reasons why I said to my children, try to learn something about economy, that's always important. And more or less the first or second day I had started to work there I met my later husband. I had no idea about what is a balance sheet and we were trained on questions of balance sheet and how to evaluate things. This was a training situation of all kinds of staff people, so he also had to turn up there and there we met. Yeah.

I was 26, 27 at that time. So that's a time when you do not only think about – as a girl – you do not only think about having a profession but also have a family. Most do, I think. I was very much in love with this man, but this is something nowadays I hardly can believe it, since I'm divorced. This is a time that was difficult, seen from now but at that time I did not realize. Yeah, I very much had the idea of having a family. I wanted to have children. I was very sure about this. I wanted to have children. So we decided to marry in 1984 and I wonder if I've mentioned this – out of the change of family law in Germany it was possible to keep name for the girl, so I kept my name and it became the family name as well. This was quite important for me because my name has always been relevant to me and it's a seldom name and it's also an expression that it's not self-evident that only the men's name is leading name. It can be vice-versa. It's still not very familiar, but it is possible. So I thought that's really something. It was very strange for the people of my parents' age. They were very, very critical. Why do you do this? This is somewhat strange. They openly asked me.

Yeah and very quickly I had the first child. I had my daughter Vera. I thought this was wonderful. She was an easygoing baby. I had no experience with babies and I was very uneasy if I could manage, but I saw very quickly I can manage the whole situation. It's not too much. I started to establish myself here in Offenburg and we established as a family. I found new friends. Mostly because they

also had little kids. That's the way we met. At the same time I thought I should keep contact to my job. I should not leave my job completely, which was at that time very unusual. Also we were, our generation of good, educated young women, it still was not clear that you stay in your profession. And I had the feeling, well, having a child, that's nice, but that's not the only thing I want to do. Because I wanted to have some intellectual effort. And out of my women's lib work and – what's the word – passion to women's lib questions. So I was convinced I should keep to my job. My husband was not so happy about this, but he did not block it, not openly. More on an indirect way. And this was quite difficult for me.

This is I think where difficulties started. It turned out more and more that I was not going to be just a nice housewife. And I think he felt that he could not keep this under control. On the other hand, I'd always seen the situation of my mother who had been no professional working woman. She has led a life as a housewife, as we say here. And this was frustrating for her intellectually. This was not her thing. I saw for some reason she was trapped and I did not want to repeat this. So it was clear I want to work as a lawyer. So I started in the arrangement of my husband's taxes and auditors office, I started as a lawyer, but on my own. I was not a clerk. I worked on my own ever since. But I had not an own office, it was really a ridiculous situation. But nevertheless I kept to this. Meanwhile I also had my second child, Kai. So I had quite a lot to do with my kids and my job was not the main thing. But I did not get away from the idea of having my own office and my own job. And having these two little kids, this was a very important experience for my life. I would say it was the most important experience.

RS: Working in that office.

SL: No, having children.

Motherhood and Politics

SL: Out of this experience it was clear for me that it's necessary to have a good starting position for children, especially when you give birth to them. And this was my entrance into politics. My children were my entrance into politics. They made me a politically aware person, which I was not before. Although I have just described South Africa was politically demanding, but I still was not a political person.

RS: it's interesting, for some women, I've heard, becoming a mother takes you away from the external world.

SL: No, it put me into the world.

RS: Yours was the exact opposite, wasn't it?

SL: Yeah, definitely.

RS: How was that? Explain what that means.

SL: Up to that time I had no idea how politics work. Society is working, how is society functioning, what are the impulses, what is going on, what is the possibility of the single person to give an impact to have influence, to speak out about the living conditions. I just had no idea. I mean, I've been to Heidelberg, which was a very political university at that time, very left wing. We had big demonstrations, police and everything. It was just an opera, it was a very, very tough time. But nevertheless, I sat in my little room and studied law, tried to finish exams, read my newspapers and did not really understand what it was all about. It was not my question if the, for example, the riots went on because of raising the price of the tram fare. This was not my question. So in Heidelberg they were on the road thousands of students and hundreds of police people, but it did not really reach me.

Having these children and having decided under which circumstances I want to give birth to them, which was really a question. First I went to a Catholic hospital with a low condition, which I did not know, but a good reputation because the nuns were fluttering around, everything's fine, we are the best, we pray day and night and everything will be good. But then I found out it was clear that I would have a caesarian with my first child and I looked up the medical conditions and I thought you can pray as much as you do, the medical condition is not convincing. So I went to another hospital. And I had decided this with 29, no idea what the conditions could be, but with a clear understanding that I'm responsible for this child. I thought of somebody who said politics and religion are linked. [Smile].

So at that time I knew that's not the right place and I went to another hospital here in Offenburg. I just wanted to do anything that's necessary and that's important for my child. And when I had my daughter with two or three months I opened the newspapers and they said they're going to close down the birth department in the hospital where I had had my daughter and the leading hospital will be the one which I had not accepted for me. So for me was clear, out of political reasons and not out of medical reasons, they choose to close down, politics was choosing the option to close down a good, equipped birth department in favor of a less equipped department, but political on the right side. Because in that Catholic hospital at that time, no abortion was possible and nothing else which would be in women's lib ideas. So this was a political decision. And this was so clear for me that I thought this can't be possible. At the beginning I could not believe this. But then I saw this is absolutely the goal of the political level. From Stuttgart and here downtown as well. And I had no idea about the

structures. I had no idea about how hospitals are organized, how the financing structures are. I had no idea about so many things.

Then there were meetings, a People's Initiative³¹ was founded and I just went there. No idea, I had never been to such a meeting before, no party meeting, nothing. And there we got information that the medically much better house was to be closed down. And something I had seen on an unprofessional level was given on a professional level again. So many, many, many women were against this development and we collected undersignments [signatures] and in the end within three or four months we had 25,000 undersignments, which is quite a lot in a place where it's not, at that time, it was not usual to collect undersignments at all. So we had heavy discussions here on the local level but also in the Parliament in Stuttgart. Nothing did help. This department was closed down.

Becoming a Candidate

SL: So my second and my third child I gave birth not in Offenburg, not in this doubtful place, but in Lahr [Schwarzwald] where they still had a functioning birth department. And then, of course people had seen me acting and arguing and the Social Democrats asked me to run for city council and also the Liberals. I was very much against the CDU because they were backing this Catholic place. There was still no other party in the city council. It was CDU, Social Democrats and Liberals at that time. Now the Liberals always had argued for free choice. It's not acceptable just to have the choice of a religious run department and I thought that was an acceptable reason, so I found them quite senseful, how they acted in this discussion. Of course as Liberals they were not friends of religious structures. This has always been the CDU. The Social Democrats were not so clear. So I think this was the reason why I accepted to run for the city council for the Liberals. I was not a member of the Liberal party at that time. But first time I ran for the city council this was at the end of the 1980s. I ran for the Liberals first time. I was not elected but I had an acceptable number of votes.³²

³¹The practice of Citizens Initiative (Burgerinitiative) began in the early 1970s when activists became frustrated with the established structures and political institutions, and their inability to address issues that activists considered important. The American referendum process allows citizens to propose legislation which is then put on the ballot and can become law. The Citizens Initiative is more a public demand that leaders and legislative bodies address an issue.

³² Throughout this whole conversation, I noted that for Sibylle her political engagement came from the bottom up. By that I mean she was not activated by the charged political environment in Heidelberg or an ideology but by engaging real people dealing with real issues. Or as they say, all politics is personal.

Once you understand this game, you know what's an acceptable number of votes, and there is some perspective in it or not. So they asked to promote me if I would run for the Parliament in Stuttgart as a second – not on the first level – but as a second candidate.³³ They always have on the parliament we have a first and a second candidate. And for my husband this was, he was not so happy that his wife was going into public. So second candidate was just acceptable. So I ran. As a second candidate you have no votes but you are on a flyer and you are in public and the name is given around. So this was some kind of advertisement.

SL: So this was a very intense time. I had these little kids, I had this development with politics, which was absolutely not in my view or in my idea or something. And I felt this very interesting. At the same time I had started to work as a lawyer, so this was quite a little bit much at one time. But at that time I had the feeling it's now something I want to do and I have to do and I can't get rid of this and it's my thing. I was not aware that it might have been too much, I just kept going. This was all in a very intense time, it more or less was within the 1980s. Then I had my third child, Ellen, and this was a time, I don't think I have any memory because it was just too much. It was just get through the day with these little kids and do a little bit in your lawyer's office and at the same time keep going with this party connection. At the end of the 1980s I still was no member of the party, but the party kept close to me. At that time one of the leading persons here in Offenburg really promoted me. And I could see that he for some reason had interest that I kept close and could make it possible to enter the city council, that was his goal.

At that time, because to enter the city council you need some reputation, you need to be seen in a place. So they even organized to give me a kind of a, not a job, but I became leader of this little group of people working with foreign children. This was a social activity and I organized this as leading person. Of course you do this as well to promote your law office. You also have to be seen for the law office. So I worked on that even in addition. In the end, in 1994 I was elected into the city council first time. Meanwhile we had had the reunification of Germany, so I entered the Liberals at the first of January 1990, just after the reunification. I thought, this is the step I should do now.

³³In the German electoral system, half of the members are elected by proportional representation and half are elected by direct constituency or district elections in which the person getting the most votes is chosen. A small third party such as the Liberals can elect candidates on the PR ballot but has almost no chance of winning a district seat. This nomination gave Sibylle a chance to campaign and get known but did not risk pulling her out of her family and sending her to Stuttgart.

This was so unexpectedly, the reunification and the whole change of the country, this was extremely new situation for the whole country.

RS: It just suddenly appeared.

SL: Nobody had ever thought of this. I remember you once asked me, do you think there will be a reunification? I said, I don't give up this idea. I doubt if I experience it. We did not think that we would experience it but I had not given up the idea. We had discussions if we should give up the idea of reunification in the 1980s.

RS: Helmut Schmidt said in his memoir that he thought maybe in 50 years Germany would be reunited. About the time that memoir came out, Germany was reunited. Nobody knew.

SL: Nobody had an idea, they had no plans, they had nothing in their files for how to manage the situation, nor did the GDR have. We have quite a number of television programs because it's 30 years now. How do we remember that time, how did we manage that time, what are the feelings, on, on, on. This was an acceleration of everything. Nobody really could think what's going on. For example, my husband at that time went to former GDR and worked with companies there which were totally bankrupt and run down and needed help and know how. So did many people. All the judges here went to Saxony for two years to build up a justice system. There was none. If I think of this time nowadays I think not only privately, I had a very accelerated life, also the public situation of the whole country was in an uproar. Absolutely unpredictable. Yeah. Interesting. Very demanding.

So I started with the city council in 1994. This is the year when my eldest daughter was 10 years old and my youngest daughter was just entering school. At that time I thought of just go to the school board and have your information from your own kids and get to know the schools. I worked on school questions. I was critical in many points. But that's what it was. I had no ambitions, I just was curious to find out what's a city council about. I had no idea. When I had studied law we had to work on communal law, as we call it. Is it a word in English? Community law?

RS: Yes, community law, municipal law, administrative law.

SL: This was one of my worst subjects. I had no idea about it, and I was not interested, and I thought it's all rubbish and it's not my thing. I was lousy in that subject. Now I was in the middle of the whole subject. And as ever and ever again, as soon as I got a practical contact to a certain question, this was interesting for me. As long as I had to read books about something, this was not so special for me. Then I could see there are real questions, there are real situations to be handled, there are real decisions to be made, not only a theoretical question – should we build a road there or there or a

school there or there. And I had ideas then and this is something I really liked to elaborate and to present and to give reason why I think it should be done this way and not the other way around. We had heavy discussions then. Yeah. As ever in my life I met people who backed me – I did not ask them, they just decided to back me for some reason.³⁴ And in Offenburg, two people decided to back me out of the Liberals range and they had influence and also some people of the Stuttgart level,³⁵ saw me. Once we had somebody visiting who was a friendly person. I had no idea what kind of person. Somebody from the Bundestag, ok. And after the evening we did talk for a short session. So I knew this person from that point on.

Then in 1998 we had the next Bundestag elections. Then you'll have to be -- a candidate has to be elected [nominated] from the local party and somebody of those persons who were backing me said, would you like to run against the candidate that we are going to vote for, who is the candidate tonight. So I was called in the morning. At that time I was still a greenhorn [Laughs]. I really was naïve. I said, how come you want me to do this. Ok, I said, let's fly. And with one vote I won this election for being a candidate. The other person ever since wants to kill me [Both laugh].

RS: I can imagine. You just came out of nowhere and suddenly you beat the favorite candidate.

SL: You only think about candidate, man. And the other person who had asked me always kept saying, he was stupid enough not to take his wife with him for that evening. He would have had one more vote. Ok, out of [not clear] candidate [*laughing*] when I think about this today,

RS: This is very funny.

SL: I still think it's not true. I really had, when I came back home, I was divorced at that time. So I did not have to explain anything to anybody.

RS: Except to your children. What did they think?

SL: They did not understand. They, the children, do see the situation different, and I did not use them for political purposes. I never made them turn up with me, home stories or things. I think it was difficult enough that they were children of a prominent mother, which you are as soon as you're in the city council. Somehow you are more prominent then. And at that time it was just a candidacy. It was

³⁴ This is quite a remarkable statement. Here is someone who as a little girl during kindergarten lice inspection was detecting and analyzing patterns of social injustice. Others saw in her those qualities that she did not see in herself.

³⁵ Stuttgart is the head of the Land, and also where the party had its headquarters.

not being in the Bundestag or something, it was just being the candidate. And now, I learned something about the game I had no idea before. Because I never had been to a party convention, building this party list for all those to be elected. I had never seen the circumstances and how this was organized.

RS: So the candidates are ranked in order of preference. If you elect five, the first five get chosen.

SL: First six in... If the party is in the Bundestag, if we have the 5%. But here we need six MOPs on this list. So the first six places are essential.³⁶

RS: And what was your rank?

SL: Now this was 1998 and I was running first time. And I reached number 12, which is quite good for somebody who's never been in that race. And when you're seeing whom I had kicked out at that time, because you have to kick out people. You do not just get number 12 because you are you. They test you. I was just happy, number 12, ok, I could go back home and they did not say look, she ended up at 41 or something, out of reach of anything. Twelve is acceptable.

RS: Yes.

SL: And then I had four years of being on the road. Inside the party and here inside the whole area, you have to be backed by your area. And that person who had met me from the Bundestag, I learned later on was somebody who was a genius in playing this game. Against him, you never could get on anyplace. This was really a man of power.³⁷

In 2002, it was no question that I would run again and the party here accepted this completely, There was no coup necessary. But of course the question was what is possible in Stuttgart in this party list election. It's a party convention, especially for building the list. Every party has it, also the CDU, but it's not so important for them because they [are the largest party in many places and can win direct

³⁶ The 5% threshold for a party to get into the Bundestag is a national figure, but allocation of seats is localized. In Baden 5% of the vote for the party would mean six seats. She was number six.

³⁷ Sibylle and I had many conversations about her career but never once did she mention the name of her patron/ sponsor. Likewise when she discussed factions and squabbles within the party in Berlin, she never hinted at her own side. For example, she spoke with warmth of Mr. Westerwelle when he was party leader and praised his ability to present a good image for the party, but she also noted his weaknesses. I never knew if she had supported him or those who challenged him, although she discussed the issues in that dispute. And she was sincerely touched when he got a disease which ended his life very prematurely.

seats without benefit of proportional representation]. And then I was the candidate of the Liberal women of the whole country [Land]. They had their own backroom meeting where they made up which women they would support. So I was number one for them. And I was on a good range of my own regional party. So for this person who was doing the whole job, this was a good position. And he set me against the candidate who was very much backed by the secretary of state [Foreign Minister] at that time, Mr. Kinkel. It was one of the mayors.

So this was quite a prominent person. Much better known than I was. When we turned up at that party convention and it was clear that I was going for place number six, people said to me that Kinkel has changed color because for him was clear then at that moment that he had lost his gain. And I mean this was against the Secretary of State at that time. Not himself, because he was leading candidate or second candidate [on the list]. I think the leading candidate. But he had not the influence to control place six. It's a mere question of numbers. I hardly knew what I was speaking to the audience, but it was clear that I was meant to put on this play, so I made this. And we had not a good [result in the election]. We had low votes [just crossing the threshold]. So we really were just six people from the Liberals from Badenurg who came into the Bundestag at that time. So this place number six was really . . .

RS: Critical

SL: Yeah. Otherwise the whole party would not have been in. This is something they combed out, because we bring more votes for the general election than other countries [Lands] of the 16-member [states in the Republic].

RS: We were watching this election very carefully from Dearborn, Michigan. And Vera called us and said, mom won. You had probably told her. She was very excited.

SL: She was with me. I wonder if Kai and Ellen also came with me and I'm not so sure, but Vera was 17 or so at that time, so she understood what was going on, yeah. Yeah, then a completely different chapter of my life started. Consequently, I've always been counting on women's votes, on women's point. And I've always worked on women's questions. This is something that's really been consistent in my political play. So I think it's understandable when I say having children made me into a political person. This is the most political situation a woman can have. It is so. To see it under, out of the view of a society, out of a power situation. Women, once they are mothers, are suppressed very often and that's a political situation. Or not. Like me, this gave me some drive, some new power, some new responsibility.

RS: When I think about you ... I mean, I think about politics all the time but I could never be a candidate of office. There are certain skills that are required. To get the nomination, to win votes, to deal within the factions in the party, to deal with the voters. You have that combination of qualities that made you successful.

SL: I think politics is very much also dealing with psychology. Politics and psychology are very close together – otherwise you couldn't handle power. If you do not understand psychological connections, how to get the feelings of a people, how to reach them. That's a psychological moment. So I think politics also has to do with psychology. And power has to do with psychology. Something I had no idea, I remember when I was a child and I always was thinking about what could be my profession. When I was four years old or so I said, I'll be a hair dresser and I'll study in cut school [cosmetology or barber school]. So I knew a hairdresser is a profession. But I have to study. That's something I knew at that time.

RS: Even then you knew

SL: This was not possible in Offenburg so I had a solution, I'll go to cut school. Thinking about this today, I think it sounds like a joke, but it was something I really had in my mind. Later on I was thinking about my profession. I remember when we were still, I was in fraushuler so I must have been 8 or 9 or so. It came up, what could I be as a profession. I said, I will never be a lawyer because I have to speak out in public and that's not possible. I will vanish. This is absolutely not possible. All people will listen, not possible. This was very clear. The profession of my father was a horror for me because everybody would listen to him, so I thought this is very, the idea made me feel very uneasy. Then I decided to study law because I wanted to go into a man's field out of this women's lib idea, not stand as a housewife, not have the fate of my mother, but go into a field where something's happening. I had not so good marks to go into medicine. I was not able to think of any engineering profession. So what was left? I did not want to become a teacher, because all the girls became teachers. So I thought, well try and somehow maybe you'll manage this public speaking. So this was not so intimidating then.

RS: No. you made a very good choice. It suits you in many ways, doesn't it?

SL: I did not know this, but I was curious. I think that's a point, I was curious to find out. And I had no idea about political work, but in this People's Initiative with the birth departments, I very often saw that people listened when I was speaking. By the way, my first speech in the Bundestag I was just shaking, nothing else. But they were listening.

RS: Now speaking of Citizen's Initiatives, talk to me about the graveyard. To me that was one of your great achievements.

SL: I was always sensitive when somewhere a people's initiatives turned up because I think it's something uniquely political as a situation when people themselves say, we want this in a different way or we want to have this changed or this is our opinion and we stand up for this. Not as a party, but as citizens. Later I've been speaker for, we call it burgerinitiative but more or less it's people's initiative. As Liberals we said, it's a basic right of people to be active.

Two Supplements by Ron

The last few minutes of the recording were erased [damn!] but I know the story. There was a rezoning plan to demolish the Offenburg cemetery and to build a large apartment complex in the space provided. Offenburg had a shortage of housing so having more residences was an attractive idea.

Also, there were profits to be made. However, this cemetery had started in 1871 and has many beautiful and unique stones for many prominent persons.

Demolishing a historic cemetery such as this to acquire land for apartments was not a good idea. She and her friend Tomas Bauknicht, a "gardener" who took care of graves and was on the city council, set up this



Citizen's Initiative. In the face of public resistance,

the city council members who were supporting the demolition project reversed themselves.

Moreover, they even denied there had ever been such an idea, even though the plans were drafted and in the public record. Sibylle was very cynical about how elected officials could be strongly in favor of a position but reverse themselves so quickly in the face of public resistance. She was even more cynical about how they could deny they ever had taken that position. When I noted how significant it was that she and Tomas had organized that Citizen Initiative, she declined to take credit. She said Tomas had organized the effort and she had just supported him. "Many people" deserved credit.

A Personal Comment: I have done research on gravestones and have written academic articles on the subject. I have visited many hundreds of cemeteries. This is one of my very favorites. Not only are there prominent persons buried there but it is filled with wonderful stones, many from before World War I. I have been there perhaps six or more times. Once Tomas walked around with Sibylle and me (see photo) and told stories of the individuals buried here. He had exceptional knowledge and affection for this cemetery so for him the issue was personal. This is a public cemetery but the

culture of the city is very Catholic and many stones have Catholic themes. There are 21 separate sections including is a section for nuns and a section for soldiers. There is also a Jewish section, which is quite fascinating in its own right, that many of the individuals in that section died in Auschwitz or elsewhere. Cornelia Kalt-Jopen and Martin Ruch wrote a book on the cemetery: *Wer liegt denn da? Persönlichkeiten auf dem Offenburger Waldbachfriedhof*. (Buhl: Deutsche Erstausgabe, 2017). Sibylle has always been modest about this issue but I disagree. Perhaps I am biased because of my affection for graveyards but I think saving this cemetery was one of the significant achievements of her public career.

Story Two: The Offenburg Synagogue: There is a second case where Sibylle again is too modest. It has to do with the historic synagogue in Offenburg. Once she said she would like to take Jane and me to see something. We went into a dress or cloth shop that had a curtain hanging down the wall.

After speaking to the owner, whom she knew, she pointed up to the area above the door where there was a balcony. She asked if I knew what that was, which I did not. She said, this was a synagogue and that was the place where women would sit. Then she pulled back the curtain to reveal a mural. It was a Jewish mural, a bit faded, perhaps 200 years old. I wish I had



a nice photo or remembered the specifics of the mural but I don't. However, with those two bits of information, I could see that this was a religious structure. But then she threw in a second dimension of information. By 1847 the Synagogue had closed but the building remained. This was the year before the pro-democracy Frankfurt parliament that called for fundamental reforms in the political system. Those activists had held a pre-Frankfurt meeting in Offenburg to prepare their demands. I was very stunned by this information. In my typical American manner, I blurted out that if this were in my country it would be a designated historic monument. I explained that we have historic buildings that are now government-owned and often are museums with exhibits, but we also have historic sites where there are plaques indicating the importance of such a place and outlining the historic event or events that took place there. Those facilities are privately owned but are regulated by the government in that they cannot be changed in any way that compromises the historic character of the place. This building, I said, would definitely be a designated historic site. We finished our visit but Sibylle did not forget that comment. She raised the issue with the City Council and began to press for some acknowledgement of this historic place and the events of 1847. In what she found to be a common pattern, the first reaction was negative: We do not need to do this. We do not have the money for this. But then the response changed. Soon the CDU embraced the project and declared

that they had been supportive from the very beginning. They decided to turn the building into a meeting hall for the City Council. Today the ground floor looks a bit functional, and the wall holding the mural was removed for space reasons, but the upper floor of the building has become a museum describing the history of the Jewish community in Offenburg and some of the events of 1847. It features prominent Jewish personalities and has a photo exhibit of Jews who were taken away. It has a part-time director, who was kind enough to show us around on a subsequent visit. Sibylle has always been generous in her praise and she told me that had I not made that simple off-hand comment about having this designated as a historic place, none of this would have happened. To say that I was pleased would be an understatement.



VI

CHILDREN AND POLITICS

SERVING IN THE BUNDESTAG

Introduction: If it was motherhood that got her involved in politics it was reunification that led her to the Liberal Party, the Free Democrats. And it was the Liberals who led her into the Bundestag. Once there, she had to navigate political intrigue, and to define her own role.

SL: Out of all this chaos of the war my family, my parents, had experienced, a part of this was the ongoing German separation into two countries with a very dangerous border between. I had different questions to solve. For example, the women's lib questions, but also the catastrophe of a whole country, a whole nation who had been governed by murderers and pretended not to have known. There were contradictions, which I felt were obvious, were ongoing and this German separation was a clear sign so far. And I had the experience to have children and this made me a political person, as I keep saying, because right away I saw what political decisions, how they would have an impact on my children when they closed down this birth department in the hospital. This was not a really spectacular, but for me a very obvious question. So I went into this People's Movement [citizen's initiative] and I learned how the administration works when they close down such a department and I was somewhat, somehow I was sensitive to public questions.

Having little children, what could you do? So I ran for the city council once but was not elected in the late 1980s and I ran for the Landtag, which is the lower parliament in second row.³⁸ So there was no difficulty, or no danger, to be elected. It was more a promotion kind of thing. But I kept to the subject, being responsible in a political way. Then all of a sudden this big contraction coming out of the wall and all those traumas my parents had to suffer. The Berlin wall went down. Being a very little girl this was more or less my very first political impression, the wall was built. Now this wall went down. And this was such a miracle – as you mentioned – that's true. We sat there and we just cried. It was overwhelming. And this was end of October, so the 1st of January 1990 I entered the Liberal Party because I saw that the Liberals worked on this. And the very first thing I saw how the wall went down was actually when the Hungarians opened the fence. In Hungary I saw this half a year, nine months before I saw it on TV, the Hungarians are going to open the fence. And they literally cut the

³⁸ See explanation of ballot above.

fence. So there was no clear dangerous iron curtain kind of thing. Far away from Germany, but between Hungary and Austria. And when I saw this, it was absolutely clear that the wall could not be kept. As you asked me when I remember when the wall fell down, it fell down in Hungary. That's something – I thought about this – and that's something I can say for sure.³⁹

SL: So when it fell down we had not expected to ever experience this. But that the development was into that direction. That was clear. And those people in masses going out in East Berlin and in Leipzig, especially Leipzig,⁴⁰ which has always been a kind of a free place because it's always been a big merchandising place where people made business and met people from other countries. And it's since medieval time that's been a very open place, big fair place. And when you saw how these people did not care what would happen, they just walked out, spoke out and those idiots from the Communist party, they did not know what to do. They were totally under stress. Nowadays, recently they released discussions inside the highest level of the Communist party and it's unbelievable how uneasy these people felt and had no plan.

So somehow the wall fell and two months later, having seen how Dietrich Genscher and other Liberals kept to the Reunification, this was clear for me to enter the party then.⁴¹ And by the way, Liberals in western Germany always have been, very many of them have left the eastern countries of Germany. Before the wall was built they fled because they did not feel free in a place of Communist

³⁹ There was a fence separating Hungary from Austria. At a certain point, the Hungarians cut that fence. I remember watching an interview on American television with the Hungarian foreign minister. The interviewer asked if they were not concerned about what Russia might do. He mentioned the 1956 Hungarian uprising that was crushed and said, "After all, you are behind the Iron Curtain." The Foreign Minister corrected the reporter. "No. We are not behind the Iron Curtain. We are a free and independent country." Even in Michigan that was a dramatic statement that showed how quickly history was shifting.

⁴⁰ There was a church in Leipzig near the square where there were regular Friday afternoon services. These services were often packed, an act of affirmation and defiance. After the service the congregation would go out into the square and have speeches about freedom. When we visited that church after Reunification, there were two signs that caught my attention. One said, "We want to thank the secret police who attended our services during DDR times. This was your only chance to hear the gospel, and you were welcome." The second sign reassured people that the cameras in the church were not connected in any way to the police. They were to record the service for the sake of shut-ins who could not attend. It was obvious that well after the fall of the communist regime, there were still people who were afraid.

⁴¹ Genscher had presided over the reunification of Germany and was considered a hero. If I remember correctly, he was originally from the east and, if I remember correctly, became the first Liberal ever to win a direct seat, not Proportion representation.

government, and out of this feeling they had a clear direction to reunification. So all of a sudden I was in this party. Then the situation, my personal situation changed. I was elected to the city council in 1994 and I was very much backed by our local party leaders and also people in Stuttgart saw me.⁴² They're always looking who is coming up or is there any kind of talent. So somebody saw me. Not knowing this, but feeling there is a field where my talents are of worth, I made good discussions in the city council. They promoted me and more or less out of a coincidence, they promoted me to run for office. And this did not happen right away in 1980, but in 2002 this came true.

In the Bundestag

I had the idea I could do something on women's lib again, since that's been always my subject. But when I came into that very small Fraktion at that time, it was not clear for me into which field I could go. And strange enough, because normally, this is very difficult to enter, they took me on the committee of legal affairs. We were three Liberal MOPs on this board of about 30-35. So we were really a small group. That's where I met for example Mr. Röttgen, who is now running for office as the leader of the CDU. A very, very good lawyer and I also met Mrs. Lambrecht, who is now Minister of Justice, SPD. All sorts of people. And I had to work on European law questions.⁴³ There was an extra committee, sub-committee, to work on European law questions. That was really interesting because I had no idea what it's about. But by then still being in the city council I had the possibility to join questions I was working on in Berlin and also could offer here in Offenburg, so I permanently kept in contact with the local situation and I found this very fruitful. But I could see in the legal committee I would never make a career because there you're number three and you stay number three because the Liberals, it's one of



⁴² Stuttgart is the capital of Baden-Wurtemberg, where the Liberals/Free Democrats have their headquarters. "People in Stuttgart saw me" means she had caught the attention of top party leaders.

⁴³ The European Union has its own laws and legal system so this was a serious (and complex) new area of study. It was also an important area given the tensions between German and EU laws and policies. Sibylle was a committed Europeanist, if we can use that term. She once proposed a joint French-German electoral district for a member of the European parliament. This did not pass, but it showed her creative way of thinking.

the key areas of the Liberals. And so far my women's lib thinking made me free enough not to stay in this trap. Maybe they even took me into this as a trap to keep me under control.

So we had this early election, because [former Chancellor] Schroeder kind of resigned. And I could reach a reelection because this was so unprepared, so the party was not prepared to kick me out. So I kept my place. This was very unexpected for the party, the party had thought a different way, I'm sure. But because this was such a quick situation, so I could handle quickly and had the possibility to organize the reelection. And surprise, surprise I went into a committee that nobody would go.

Committee for idiots. I went into the family and women's committee. For the Liberals, that's of no interest. Who wants to go there? Some girls who are of no interest and let them do, nobody's thinking about this. On the other hand, if you see, I'm absolutely sure that Merkel's power is built on her knowledge of the inside the party of the women's structures. How she comes from a very small lander structure [a small state], so she has no home power as we call it. But she's always been working in women's structure, so I could see this and I had the feeling as long as I keep on the women's structure there's some chance. And one of my, somebody in my office said, and you need a special title. They all had titles and the first three years I had no title, I was just in the committee, so that was it. So I said, ok, I want the title of being speaker for the integration questions [minority affairs]. And in the Fraktion they all said, ok, give her the title of being speaker of the integration questions. Who cares, lousy subject of no importance. Who cares? We'll never think about this. There's no money to be made. What's the use?

So again, that's a crazy girl's idea. I had this title for, I would say, six or eight weeks and they turned up: Couldn't we make an arrangement? You would get some kind of co-title thing. They had forgotten to take it into the committee of inner-affairs [internal affairs]. And living close to Strasbourg where every change of the year, some hundred cars were burnt and riots were going on because France had not solved the integration question. I saw this will be a thing. And it's of course a question of inner-affairs, but they were stupid enough not to think so far. There was a little part of integration questions in my committee. So I had reason to ask for this and I did not give it up. Then I also took the head of the Liberal women and inner-party organization of little influence, but I took it against somebody out of Nordrhein-Westfalen, the biggest inner-party structure. I think then those officials in the Fraktion started to take me seriously.

Third Election: In the Coalition

SL: Then I was reelected the third time and I'll never forget, then we came into a coalition with the CDU, so we were a governing party. And it was said that we would have three heads of committees.

And once you're head of a committee, you were inside the governing process. One was finance. What was the other? I can't remember right now. Maybe Europe or something. And the third was not clear. And the most intricate – somebody who's organizing all posts and is in all groups and everywhere at the same time. Very many manipulating – maybe it's manipulating. Intrigue. That's the word, you just pronounce it differently. Very "intriguing" but very powerful person at the same time. We met in the canteen and he turned around and said, Oh, Mrs. Laurischk, we've set the other two to leading positions but the head of the family and women and youngsters committee,



that's still open. And he looked at me and I said ok, if you tell me this, I'm interested. He said, ok. So this is quite likely. I was so surprised somehow. It was totally unexpected for me, but in this minute I knew this is the question. So I took this and this was really an interesting task because you organized the whole process of the session and you're in contact with all the members of the committee and meet people that you do not meet otherwise, and especially a governing situation, you meet the coalition partners regularly and somebody from the ministry. Sometimes even the Minister. But politically more interesting, the secretary of the leading person inside the administration. So it was made clear what to work on, what not to work on, how far we were in a same level of thinking and of being able to vote, because you can't just give it into the Bundestag and say, we'll get the things fixed. It's all organized. So this was really interesting.

SL: At the same time you always have discussions with your colleagues and there were so many people that were not convincing for me. This was tough. So there was quite a lot of frustration. Something I kept as a subject all over these 11 years was a big traffic project we have here down in Zuboden. It's a European project because the trains should run from the Netherlands down to Italy, and Switzerland has already built all the tunnels and all the equipment to have this extra transport line. But Germany is very complicated in plannings. So for example this had to be planned here in Offenburg and in the first one it had to be, the idea was to build a new track through the middle of the town. So I know this town very well, and in the beginning I thought that's ok, but then I found out it would harm the place. It would be dangerous because, dangerous transports would be run straight all through the place. We had a big People's Movement here. All the ministers of traffic, the heads of the national railway, they all turned up here again and again. Not just once a year, three or four times. And we had really a heavy struggling People's Movement. And also in the city council I always kept

my little fraction together and we had a clear position not to build it all through the town. Now meanwhile it is clear that there will be a tunnel outside the town. It will cost about a billion Euro, so this was really a thing and I was involved in this very strongly. The People's Movement always had the possibility to be backed by my office equipment and office facilities and knowledge. On this example I could see what an amount of information you can get once you are really involved in such a thing. This was unexpected for me and it was a development because I had no training on this.

SL: There's one other thing that I worked on family law question, like alignment and other kinds of specialties. So I even worked out that in the coalition treaty [agreement] there was some position that this should be changed at this certain point. It's too difficult to explain what kind of point that had to be changed, but my position was in the coalition treaty. And they didn't take it. Liberals, again, were too stupid to understand what they could make out of that subject. They did not take it and put it into reality.⁴⁴

The next administration after we had to leave Bundestag, then the Social Democrats took it as their point and they changed law. So nowadays more or less it's something that's very often in my cases. Ok, you were the one who gave the first push. Nobody had had an idea before I made this a subject. I remember when van der Leyen was a minister of the family department, she once made an invitation and we talked about this point and all experts were taken from all over the country, how to change it and how to handle this. I had the feeling this was one of the first days that this turned up in the Bundestag. But then the Social Democrats made a real point out of this and it was the alignment a question again, alignment for children especially. And I've been working again and again from the very first time, even in the law committee, on protection of children in general and especially against sexual abuse. And I've been, when this subject came out, inside the Fraktion they took me as an expert. At the same time, I tried to implement the question of integration policies, but this was tough. I was the speaker, the colleagues working in the committee of inner affairs had different attitudes and the integration politics never has been solved. This evening they'll, the head of state and I think the Chancellor also, they will take part in the commemoration and they'll find brave words, but they have no idea of how really to implement this.

There I could not do so much because my party did not understand it. And if you're not backed by your own people, it's difficult to reach something. So this key points, there was much, much more

⁴⁴ Sibylle thought the Liberals were blind on women's issues, and that this contributed to their catastrophic defeat in 2013 when they failed to reach the 5% threshold and were eliminated from the Bundestag.

and many things I do not remember even. For example, I took part in three elections of heads of state. Mr. Kühler, who had been head of the world banking system, Kühler, after him he retreated. He was fed up somehow. Then Wullf came. Wullf was Merkel's man. He was the governor of Lower Saxony, but he was not a strong person. As president of the state, head of state, he had to retreat [step down] when they asked for giving up his immunity because some financing of his house was somewhat strange. The prosecution brought nothing, but as soon as this was asked for, he retreated. He had no backing at that time. So under such experiences, I really watch the situation in the States very carefully. Things are much different. And then after he had retreated, Mr. Gauck was elected and he had been the leader of the Gauck Commission.⁴⁵ He was the one who was in charge to check all those Stasi files, which are still checked. He was a very respectable person. In his former profession he had been a pastor in the GDR. So he was somebody who came from the GDR as head of state. This was senseful I think. And I've met other presidents, like for example Mr. Scheel, who was a Liberal. And I also met – I'll tell you later on ...

To have a personal contact to people of that level, that's much different from a city council, as you can guess. This is really different. And for me it was not understandable that here in Offenburg they never accepted this. So sooner or later, I was not only fed up with the Bundestag but also with the city council, which I had made for 20 years.⁴⁶ It's really senseful, once you've been working in politics very intensively, it's senseful to leave it at a certain time, because I think it's really harmful if you get addicted to it. And there are many people who are addicted.

RS: So you stepped down.

SL: Mm hm. [Yes] I decided not to run again. And this was a good decision, yeah.

RS: And the day you left office, suddenly a burden was gone.

SL: Yeah, I stayed at home and I had my everyday life and had my tasks here with my office. I had to organize this change. Yeah.

⁴⁵ When East Germany collapsed, the files of the secret police, the Stasi, contained reports on millions of people. Some prominent anti-Communists had been informants. Innocent people had been monitored. No one knew what to do with these files. In the end, they put Joachim Gauck, a prominent pastor and resistance leader of exceptional integrity, in charge. This was called the Gauck Commission.

⁴⁶ Under German law it is possible for a member of the Bundestag to be also a member of city council.

RS: And you love the practice of law.

SL: Mm hm. [Yes] I think this is very senseful. It's a contribution to society to work in a senseful way inside the law system. And of course, once you've worked in the legislation you have more insights also in working in the general law assistant. That's given me quite a benefit, no doubt about that. So the idea, instead of being driven,

and feeling I'm helpless like my parents had as a central situation in their life, I thought there is some sense in doing something instead of being driven. You could see this very well – unfortunately you couldn't understand – but after this former MOP and being on a very left side in the political spectrum but at least somebody who speaks



out against the right wing guys⁴⁷ that they are not, they do not act responsible and that's not acceptable and that will not be acceptable. As a whole range of parliamentarians, they stand against this. This is quite moving for me, although it's not my political color. But there is a basic understanding of democracy and I think that's really necessary again and again after we've had such a catastrophe in this county. So it has to deal with both.

⁴⁷ Sibylle was very outspoken against Neo-Nazis. She received such threats that security officials came and made her house attack resistant, with bullet proof glass for example.

VII

REUNIFICATION

Introduction: Reunification was a dream fulfilled. None of the great minds, with all of their strategic thinking, could have anticipated that they would wake up one morning and the wall would be open and the East German state would collapse from its own weight. But once the celebrating was over the unification of Germany raised two new problems: How to integrate the extremely different halves of the country, and how to define the role of a united and powerful German state in a European system where many people still remembered what had happened the last time Germany was united.

RS: We haven't spoken of reunification. That is a very significant topic.

SL: Yeah, it's been a very chaotic time, very surprising, very thrilling time because we, here in Germany, nobody had expected to even see a reunification within lifetime. People said that's over, that will not happen anymore. But those who said it will, we do not give in, we want this, said, I will not experience this. This may happen in 50 or 100 years, but... Yeah. So this is, we do not have so many experiences with revolutions in Germany. So this was really remarkable to see how those people in GDR were fed up and even had no... They did not hesitate any longer to go out, to speak out, to say they can't bear the situation any longer. And they went in masses.

RS: This was November of 1989.

SL: October.

RS: October of 1989. Do you remember the very moment when you heard that the wall was down, that people were just walking through and the guards were not shooting them?⁴⁸ This is the kind of question they ask people of my age. Do you remember when Kennedy was shot? How did you feel?

SL: By the way, I know how my mother told me that Kennedy was shot when I got up in the morning. She said, President Kennedy has been shot. I remember this. I was in the bathroom. I do not

⁴⁸ A personal memory: In October, 1989 my university had asked me to escort a group of alumni for a two-week safari to Kenya where Jane and I had lived and taught when we were young. We were in a game park. We got up at dawn and made a morning drive to see animals. We had come back for lunch, and went to our rondavel/cabin to have a nap. I had a portable radio with me and decided to listen to the BBC news before I laid down. They said that the wall was down and people were pouring into West Berlin. I thought to myself that I really wish I were in Berlin. But then an elephant walked by the window and I thought, "But Kenya is also ok."

remember it precisely when I heard the news about the opening of the wall. There is no clear moment except that this guy from the party board had this TV interview and said, we'll bring possibilities to open the wall or to open the border. And somebody asked, so when will this happen, and he looked on a piece of paper and said, as far as I know, right now. And that was an interview that was in GDR TV. So we did not altogether watch this because it was broadcasted in the GDR TV. But of course right away this was given on our news. And then the wall was not open. People went to the wall, to the places where you could go through the wall and those policemen there, they stood there with their guns and they did not know what to do and they had no information from above. This was not a clear situation right up. Now everything's open. They quite often repeat a film about this situation on a special passing where hundreds and hundreds of people came and said open this gate, open it, we want to go through, we will come back, just open it. And those policemen, security people had no idea what to do. At least they were, they had no order to shoot. Then one of the officers after hours said, even if I'm going to prison or something will have happen, I open this door now. This took hours. So it was not a clear moment. What you saw on TV when people were dancing on the wall was a day later or later on during the night. So there is no clear moment. And I think I understood it the next day. Then we permanently had TV on and watched TV. It was a totally exciting situation. Two days later my cousin stood here and they never had been to the west and they just had booked a train and came up from the Hamburg area. Yeah. This was really something unbelievable. And still when we watch it or when we have reports on the commemoration day my generation and those who remember this – my kids do not remember this so much. Although I've been with them to GDR, they don't remember this. But my generation we still say this is not repeatable. That was unique.

RS: I don't think you remember this, but I called you that week.

SL: I know, yeah.

RS: And I said, how are you reacting, and you said, all of Germany is sitting in front of the television crying. That's what you told me.

SL: Definitely. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, we were so moved, we could not believe it. And it was a peaceful revolution. This was quite something. The people had wanted it.

RS: Yes.

SL: And they went through screaming we are the people, we are the people. That's the main democratic impulse. It's our will.

RS: When I discuss this with students, which I don't do much anymore, because times have changed.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RS: But I always say to them, this is the first time a regime just disappeared without a shot. Just people woke up and the army was gone. And the regime had disappeared.

SL: Yeah. It was not just as easy because those people who were used to be in power they just had no idea, no clue what to do, how to react, how to handle the situation. But at least they did not shoot.

RS: I remember Kohl was asked, what is going to happen next. And he said, we Germans are very good at working out federations. We will be able to figure out some cooperative arrangement. It looks as if there was no assumption that East Germany would cease to be a country, but there would be a federation. Do you remember those deliberations?

SL: He could not keep to this for a long time because people wanted the deutsche mark then we, they started screaming not only "we are the people" but then they said "we are one people." Then the situation was driven to go together. There was no plan on both sides, what could we do? And Kohl worked out his ten points plan and then were the negotiation with the Allies. Thatcher was very much against reunification. And Gorbachev backed it. But there were these two plus four negotiations.⁴⁹ What could happen with these two parts? You can argue if the solutions that were taken are good solutions or not, but we have to handle it. I still think it's ok that it's one country, but the difficulties are obvious. If anything else would have worked better is very doubtful. We just don't know it. But I very much thought it's a wonderful development because it was a very depressing situation for years and years, this being separate. This was very depressing.

RS: And being aware of the condition in the east. Yeah.

SL: This was not healthy. This was a permanent wound. So this wound seemed to be healed or at least less painful. But at the same time, when I, just yesterday evening I saw this program on how a functioning company in the east was just run down and just was hit into pieces on [to serve] western interests. People in the east very quickly learned – very quickly learned – that they might have been

⁴⁹ The two German states plus the four former occupying powers: France, Soviet Union, Britain, and the US. The powers recognized Germany as a sovereign state, and Germany recognized its own borders and renounced all claims to those territories lost after World War II. Chancellor Kohl also agreed to stay within NATO and the EU, thus integrating itself into a Western alliance and political structure, and to move towards the Euro, i.e., putting the awesome German economy within a European system.

able to get rid of that left-wing domination and regime, now they learned about another regime. And they were betrayed and felt very unhappy. Many, many people lost their jobs and lost their bases. This was very harmful for the feeling and for the acceptance of the reunification in the east. That's a pity. It could have been different.

RS: It was impossible for the eastern economy to compete.

SL: Yeah, but there were parts who could compete.

RS: Yes?

SL: And what they described yesterday was that they also had somebody, a wealthy man who had all positions to invest into this eastern company. He wanted to build it up again or take it into a normal market situation, and this person then was ruined on purpose as well. So there were really bad structures in behind. And that's something those people in the east had much more to suffer from than those people in the west. And this gives a division to the country again, and still.

RS: Even to this day.

SL: Yeah. And this division is now on a political level because the frustration of the people there has a name now. And sad enough, it goes into the right. For quite a long time there was a left-wing level to take up this frustration, now it goes into a very radical right-wing development, and that's really, that's just bothering me. I don't see a solution right now, but we have to work on this. This is difficult still.

RS: So to start with, the political reaction was neo-communist. They were hard leftists who called themselves something else.

SL: Yeah.

RS: Now there's a right-wing reaction, which is really unhealthy.

SL: Yeah.

RS: Even worse than the... The left wing was really more logical and political. This is something different.

SL: Out of frustration and out of lack of responsibility for the whole society, just break it into pieces, just harm it. This is... Yeah. You have to take care of people, you have to, in a political acting, you have to be close, be in communication, think about what's going on, think about the office, not just

say, well that's a minority, I don't care or we don't care. That's not enough. And that's what happened.

RS: Gunter Grass was afraid that a reunited Germany would be a security threat to Europe. This was something that he spoke about.

SL: Well, some took it like this.

RS: That has not happened though, has it? I mean, Germany has been integrated into Europe in a very stable way.

SL: I think so. We always, in general, all political levels always backed the EU and the idea of the EU and the peacemaking factor of the EU. So we really did not go into any national radical ideas. But now this frustration which built up, the right-wing AFD party, that is something else. I wonder, we've always been close to France in the EU question and living so close to France, for us here it's self-evident. For somebody who's further off from France it might not be so self-evident, but here it's just closest. It's the situation shows us how big the advantage is of a united Europa. But this is really insufficient to see that Merkel is not giving importance to the EU, she just keeps out of any initiative or impulse. Since we've backed more and more other countries entering the EU it became a very difficult structure. To moderate such structure is difficult. Meanwhile, I sometimes have the feeling people expect more from Germany than we do. For example, have foreign policy in common. This is more or less not possible up to now. There are too many different interests. Yeah, I've been raised with the idea, never ever again say anything what people think would be good for the world. This is, out of history. It's a difficult situation.

RS: I was very happy when the wall came down.

SL: It was a miracle.

RS: Yeah. I was very happy for so many different reasons. And I hoped that for the sake of my own country --- once the Soviet Union disappeared the United States was left as the dominant power, the hegemonic power. There was only one great country. And I had hoped that Europe might counterbalance us. When there's only one superpower and no one can stop them, they do crazy things, like invading countries where they should never be there. And I was hoping Europe could somehow create a cohesive bloc. That has absolutely not happened. In fact, the opposite. The Americans can easily play one country against another and divide Europe. We see President Trump who seems to have that policy of dividing Europe and creating divisions. So many of the dreams I had were delusions because they were never going to happen.

SL: For me it's very clear that there are other developments in the world that leave Europe somewhat aside. So as we can see now, right now we're clearly because of the links of the economy, America and Asia, especially China, in a controversial situation. Russia is an enormously big country, but in the same way enormously behind its possibilities. That's a tragedy. Meanwhile I've met many Russians who we always have feared so much. We found out they're human beings. So here around you hear a lot of Russian people live here, so I can see what a pity they are not moving more forward, so they are not a positive factor still. The idea of Europe is much more complicated than just say we don't want to have war again and therefore we do not fight against each other but cooperate. This is an idealistic idea, but politics is never an idealistic business. It's so tough. So I still keep to the European idea and I think that the exit of Britain, the Brexit, is a big mistake and real loss for Europe. It's a heavy burden, which shows how difficult the situation is. I have no solution to this.

RS: And this just happened a month ago, so we still can't see the full implications of that.

SL: No, no, no. We will, we will.

RS: That disastrous action.

SL: We will. And instead of really working on stabilizing a situation, this is a step of destabilizing and this is not... That's not thoughtful, not at all. But so far I think this is really, the demands or the, these are the questions the next generation has to work on. This is really nothing that's bothering me personally any longer because I think I'm not going to solve this, you see. I open the newspaper, ok, at least some steps you've been working on. There is some change. This is an opening of the society

RS: Last week I outlined for my students a very difficult problem in American politics and I said, the good news is I'm going to leave this to you to fix. My generation, I said, I'm about ready to leave the political system. And my generation didn't seem to do this very well, so I hope you will be able to do better than we did.

SL: I see it the same way, absolutely. There are challenges that do no longer really bother me. Of course, I'm interested, but I see how difficult it is. For example, to see somebody who I really know personally, Mrs. von der Leyen, and her way and her career, it's also an example of women's liberation. She has seven children, but made a career and kept to it and really made it into a top position politically.

RS: What is her current position?

SL: She's the head of the EU. She followed Junker from Luxembourg. These are the persons who meet all those leading persons of the 27 members. They're in a permanent communication process.

Yeah, they also present like a chancellor or something, leading person of the EU as such. It shows that, the fact that these people are not so well known, shows how difficult the construction of the EU is, because they come from different countries, not only from one country. And it's the first time that Germany has somebody in this position. Yeah. We had the idea to make a central line from Paris to Warsaw over Berlin. So have these three prominent bigger countries in a permanent ongoing process and ongoing discussion. But this even is so difficult. By the time this is functioning it's hardly enough. I wonder whether now we have the new refugees at the Greek border and this is a permanent EU problem, really a difficult problem, because all the other states inside the EU say, thank you, we don't want to have them.

RS: When I lecture on the EU, I put on the board the major countries by population and by proportion of the whole EU economy represented by the country, and of course Germany's at the top of both. So I ask my students, Margaret Thatcher was very opposed to the EU. She always said, we fought Germany twice in this century and now we're subjecting ourselves to Germany because they're obviously going to dominate the EU. So I ask my students, why do you think there has never been a German heading the EU? That makes them think. And the obvious reason is the Germans are smart enough to know that would be a scary thought, that maybe Thatcher's right, so they've laid back. You know, let the Dutch do it, or the French.

SL: Luxembourg.

RS: Luxembourg's not going to frighten anybody. But there's now a German heading that.

SL: Yeah, this was a coup of Merkel, this was a coup. And she gets, it's her way to get rid of somebody that she says somebody into a responsibility. So here you have something. So you have to work. It's very clever, very often I see in my cases I think it would be so easy if my client would just make some demands to the other party, say I expect you to do this and that and the other one would be just flat. It's so easy to see, but if you can't do it because you don't know that's a possibility, then you do not use this tool. Merkel really uses it. She's very clever. Yeah, well it's still the idea for years we've been in a situation say, you know, we don't want to give too much money into the defense department – we call it defense. We don't want to be misunderstood. We are not going to prepare a new war or something. We are just calm and easygoing. Let the Americans do it. And it functioned. Everybody was happy. Now our armies are run down. It's unbelievable. Nothing's functioning.

VIII

VISITS TO AMERICA, VISITS TO EUROPE

Introduction: Sibylle first came to visit us in 1981, right after she completed her studies. We spent the time in the Detroit area. We returned the visit in 1988 when she was married and had two children. In 1995, after her divorce, we took her on what we jokingly called The Homeland Tour, a majestic trip around the Midwest, including to our home area in the southern tip of Illinois. In time our visits became more common, and we began to plan holidays around those exchanges.

RS: You wanted to talk about your visits to my country.

SL: Mm hm. [Yes]

RS: We were trying to think, Jane and I were, if you've come to see us seven, eight times?

SL: About.

RS: Something like that, yeah. We've traveled together, seen things. You've brought each of your children once. We've taken trips just the three of us.

SL: You see, for a long time America was the miracle in the West and the land of honey and butter. All the pop stars in the 1960s and 1970s came over and we learned English and this opened the world to us. This was really something we were interested in. Everybody of my generation sooner or later wanted to go to America just to see it, to have a feeling for this way of living and California. Completely different landscape. We had no idea how big the country is, but we had the feeling we should see it. So I decided after I finished my second exam, after I had met you in South Africa, to make a trip to America not just for 10 days or so but a longer period of time to see the country and to understand what the country's like, not just a short trip. I met a girl in Heidelberg who also wanted to make such a trip and we decided to make it together in a rented car. And I also had the possibility to see you again, so there were all kinds of reasons to make clear that this trip will happen.

Now I applied for a job at that time because I had finished my exams. And I applied for this American company and they said, well ok, you got the job, so you'll start the first of September. I said, I'm very sorry but I will be in America at that time and you either accept this or I can't work for you. And I mean usually they were a tough company, but being an American company somehow they could understand that I wanted to see the country. So they accepted that I would start the 1st of October.

We started in New York and, again, two girls like I had started my English language trip about ten years before travelling to London, which was big, but New York was much bigger. So this was overwhelming. And after this we went to Washington and we stayed with the UN secretary from Austria, this very strange guy who had been a Nazi. Ok, so.

RS: Waldheim.⁵⁰

SL: Waldheim, yeah. I won't forget when we were in New York we sat in a cafeteria or something and we were talking and my friend had a Mannheim accent and then somebody turned around, sitting next to us, and said, you're from Mannheim – well, yeah, Heidelberg. And he said, oh this is nice to hear you. When I was a kid I lived in Mannheim but I had to leave. This was a German Jew. And we were so surprised to meet somebody like this and he spoke to us. I had been in Israel before so I was surprised that he felt, somehow he felt happy to hear the language and especially the dialect. So, yeah.

RS: I've heard this before, that Jewish refugees to America miss the German language.

SL: Yeah, yeah. The intellectual level is the language. Very often Jewish people were very much interested in having a good education for their children. But under such circumstances it must have been difficult to go to into a new language. For example, I heard this from Thomas Mann, who never really reached the new language. He's one of the most elaborate experts on modern German language.

Anyway, then we made it over from Washington to San Francisco. San Francisco was this “flower power” place where we felt to be young and easygoing. One of my friends for Heidelberg had gone to San Francisco, so we met her there. This was again completely different to the east coast. That's something you could feel and we rented a car, an AMC Spirit. And this car had air conditioning. This was not known in Germany at all. So this was pure luxury. As we found out, traveling in Arizona we would have died without the air conditioning. So we drove down Big Sur to Los Angeles, past Hollywood, went into Nevada. So this was a dream.⁵¹ We got along very well, the other girl and me. So this was really a nice trip. And then we went back to San Francisco and there we separated. She went to somebody, some people she knew I think in northwest. What's north of California?

⁵⁰ I only have one regret about this project. When she mentioned Kurt Waldheim, the Austrian diplomat and later head of the UN, I did not follow up with a question of clarification. He was a very significant person and it appears that she knew him before he became famous (or infamous).

⁵¹ In Arizona she hiked to the bottom of the Grand Canyon (in August!). They brought a book of traditional songs and spent their evenings singing. As Jane and I learned more about German culture we realized this was not unusual. She taught us a song about Sabinchen, a Frauentzimmer who was murdered by a bad guy from Treunbritzen. This became a regular feature of our road trips.

RS: Oregon.

SL: Yeah, I think she went to Oregon, yeah. And I went to Detroit, where I met you. And this was something completely new again. So I fell from one surprise into the next. This trip was really something, very special. As you took me into the family and I met your wife and met your sons. Jane was very friendly and you made it possible that even my friend Linda could come there. So again this was something completely new because my parents never would have been so easy going. This was so unusual. In Germany, you kept to yourself. So when you took me to the university this again was something so unknown to me, the style of lecturing, that was so new for me that students could speak to their professors and they were discussing things and were expected to discuss things. We had a style of universities where you had to listen and after an hour you had to go and that's it. Find out what it's about more or less. This was not a communicative style of lecturing.

So I saw there can be different ways of living. Yeah, this is something that's been very impressive to me. This was really a wonderful trip. It also made me curious to work for an American company. I saw that's another side of America, because we had to perform. Each week we had to give in reports how we had performed and what the realization was and the economic side of America, the economic thinking. That was not clear to me. But that's something I really learned in that audit company. Yes, ever since I just had the dream to go back once in a while to visit you again and to have such a wonderful trip and see a wonderful way of living again. I always had the feeling that places like New York, that's so completely different to any city you could see in Europe. This was really a challenge and I just had the idea I would like to go back once again. But then I got married and I had little children and there was no opportunity to do so. I think the next time I visited was quite sometime later. I think you've been visiting here and also Jane's sister, Janet has been visiting here when we had moved here into this house. But it was not that I had been to America again. I'm not quite sure when this happened.

RS: When was that?

SL: I think when I had come to the city council. I remember that we went to St. Louis, visited the family, it was Jane's family and we sat around the table and you mentioned that I was in the school board. So it must have been after 1994.⁵²

⁵² It was 1995, the time of the Oklahoma City bombing. The St. Louis Globe quoted an anonymous security official as saying that the bombing had been planned in a Pizza Parlor in Detroit, an obvious reference to Arabs. In fact the bomber was Timothy McVeigh, a white nationalist.

1981. Sibylle in Detroit.

Jane and Sibylle on river front, Windsor, Canada in background; Sibylle and Renaissance Center.



Sibylle wearing her new hat and pullover from the old downtown Detroit Hudsons Department Store

RS: So did I misunderstand, I must have, if I said school board.

SL: Yeah. No, I was the kind of school board, committee for schools. So you mentioned this and that's the way I figure out

RS: To get a date.

SL: Yeah. Somehow I had organized that I think it was not a long time, it was possibly less than two weeks, maybe even ten days or so.

RS: Maybe.

SL: But somehow I had organized that my husband would take the kids and I think I was divorced at that time, because I had the divorce in 1994. I think this was one of the reasons why I thought I just have to go out somehow, see something different. The father took the kids and somebody else was also in charge, so I could organize to leave for a reasonable time. And I'm not sure if I've even been to New York at that time, but I think I came to Detroit directly and you had figured out what we could do. Again, we went to a university too and I heard you lecture. And this has always been something really special for me because I found this so intense and so open and so directly that I could see that your students took something with them. And I could not remember any professor of my own studies who was so close and so open and so direct in finding out about questions and teaching so directly. The only one I would compare was a professor who had studied at Chicago Law School, so there was probably some American background with him.

RS: He had some techniques.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RS: I remember that trip, we drove to Chicago.

SL: That's what I think.

RS: Went down to Springfield, which is where Jane's mother and sister lived. And we saw the tomb of Abraham Lincoln.

SL: Yeah.

RS: And then we went to St. Louis where she had her cousin, and then we drove to southern Illinois, which is where she and I grew up.

SL: Yeah, that's what you showed me.

RS: And we took you to Southern Illinois University where we had attended as undergraduates and then we drove back through Indiana. So you saw a part of America that Germans never see.

SL: Definitely, definitely. That was clear for me right away when we traveled and when I saw what you showed me. Chicago was just smashing for me and I keep saying, it's the American place for me, for my taste. And I think it is. So I was fascinated what you were showing me around. You remember when we went to that restaurant where they had the spare ribs?

RS: Spare ribs, oh yes, and you had to wear a bib.

SL: Right.

RS: That was funny

.



Kai in Chicago



Homeland Tour, 1995

Lincoln tomb; Sibylle and Jane in Springfield, Sibylle at St. Louis arch,

Sibylle at Cahokia, Illinois, a pre-1500 Native American settlement



SL: This was fun. So we went to Springfield, we met your sister-in-law and your mother-in-law. And they had been to Chicago, it was over Easter and your mother-in-law was very well off. Also she had quite some age at that time. But she was very, very lively and very entertaining.⁵³ (Photo shows Ron, Janet



Craynon, Helen Williams, Sibylle, Evelyn Tully, friend)

RS: Yes, she was a wonderful person.

SL: Yeah, that was wonderful to go to St. Louis to the Arch. That's something we're laughing about still because it was so frightening for me.

RS: Oh there was a big storm.

SL: Yeah, it was shaking and I did not feel well at all. And by and then they show it on TV and I, when somebody's here I say, I've been on top of that building and it was shaking.

RS: For two minutes. You got to the top and went down.

SL: I could not bear it. It made me feel so uneasy, I could not... Pity, but, yeah.⁵⁴

RS: It's all right.

SL: To go into heights, that's not so easy for me. But when it's even shaking, that's too much. Yeah. I also met your family, Jane's family – this was interesting for me. Absolutely. And we went to the friends you had in – what's the place, Carbondale.

RS: Carbondale. Carolyn, Jane's high school best friend. Yes.

SL: This was wonderful.

⁵³ Helen Williams had her 80th birthday two weeks after Sibylle left.

⁵⁴ We did not realize it at the time but this was a legendary storm. There was a young ranger in the arch trying to reassure people with light-hearted commentary. She said, "The arch has the capability of swaying four inches in either direction, and we have an eight-inch sway. It doesn't get any better than this." Sibylle took the first elevator down!

RS: So you got to meet all of our relatives and friends.

SL: This was wonderful, this was so special. This was really medicine for my whole somewhat sad situation. This gave me some backing and some new perspective. And that's something I always felt when I was in America. I have a friend who is traveling quite often in America and she's been to Hawaii several times and she says Hawaii that's just the place where she feels at home. There is something in this generation, by then you talk about America and then it turns up, oh I've been there as a student or like my friend Ellen she has relatives there. My generation is really interested in the country and the way of living, which has changed, of course.

RS: A lot.

SL: But still I think it's something very essential that I could show it to my children as well.

RS: Each of them came, one at a time with you. That was very nice. Each one visited Chicago.

SL: Right. And again to the university. I think that's very essential.

RS: I always arranged for them to meet students.

SL: Right. Yeah, I don't know what it's like today, but in my days this would not have been possible with a German university and vice-versa. This was much more blocked, much more closed down situation, much more distant situation. So this was really wonderful. And I think you especially, you gave the feeling it's fun to learn things, to learn new insights, to study about questions. It's not a burden, it's something that gives you perspective. That's good to do. That's so much different to the German situation. And the other times I visited was when I had to go to America on political purpose and I could arrange it to stay some days longer so I could...

RS: Yes, you were . . .

SL: Added to stay with you.

RS: You were going to a meeting in Canada⁵⁵

⁵⁵I was teaching a 6:00 class on comparative politics with units on Germany and the EU. Sibylle was scheduled to speak at 6:30. The students were excited. Jane was to pick her up at the airport at 4:30. The time kept passing. No Jane. No Sibylle. They came walking in at 8:00. She had been detained for hours in security. She was traveling on official business with a German diplomatic passport but the U.S. had just switched to scannable passports and hers was not. She was very patient, just sitting there, not pointing out that detaining a member of parliament on official business could justify a diplomatic protest. We could laugh later but it was not a nice experience.

SL: For example, yeah.

RS: and you came and stayed with us and then we drove you over and went to Niagara Falls.

SL: Yeah, wonderful.

Photos: Ellen in the seat Rosa Parks refused to give up, thus sparking the legendary Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Civil Rights movement; Sibylle and Vera at Lincoln's tomb and at the Lincoln Presidential Museum; Jane, Vera, Sibylle at Chicago Institute of Arts.



RS: And then dropped you...Where did we drop you? Toronto?

SL: Yeah, in Toronto. And then I had, I met some colleagues there and we went to different places and also to the oil fields where a normal person would not be shown around. This was very interesting because it's a very polluted situation and they wanted us, as MOPs, they wanted us to have a friendly attitude. I'll never forget this trip to the oil fields in an army machine two hours or even more over nothing but bushes until we came up to that northern place.

RS: Welcome to Canada.

SL: This is something you can't believe.

RS: It's enormous, Canada is enormous.

SL: It's unbelievable.

RS: It's a wonderful country, by the way.

SL: I guess so.

RS: We in Michigan love Canada.

SL: I guess so. It's very friendly where we were around, eastern parts. But this was something special.

RS: Detroit is 10 miles from Canada. I could be in Canada in half an hour.

SL: Yeah, yeah. So whenever I could make it possible to visit you, which is not so easy because it's so far away, I made it and you always took me. I sometimes was somewhat surprising, but you made it possible.

RS: Yes.

SL: I really felt welcome and this is something I'm really thankful for because it's not a self-evident experience.

RS: And we had a wonderful surprise last summer when you came with Ellen. You had always told her you would take her as soon as she finished her program. And she did so you brought her.

SL: And then she said, now I've finished it and I would also like to see America. And she said this, I thought so there is some possibility we should make it. So we did. It was really a good experience.

RS: It was very nice.

SL: Absolutely. And vice-versa I loved when you came here because we made wonderful trips which I would probably not be able to make on my own and we found out about eastern countries and new perspectives. It was like discovering Europe. It was this way for me, because I haven't been to Vienna and Budapest and Warsaw and Breslau and all these places.

RS: Those were wonderful trips.

SL: I had no idea what it's all about.

RS: You're a great traveling companion. We had a lot of fun together, the three of us.

SL: Actually, that I had met you made it possible for me to get closer to this dream of America because it's been a dream here. Many people kept it as a, when we grew up we kept it as a dream to go there and our parents never dared to or had no initiative or had no idea how to do it, so this was really something of the youngsters. I mean, of course there were tellings of the famous ugly American. Everybody was happy to have one. My family had none.

RS: You had none, too bad. But you had a friend, that's good enough. So these interviews have been wonderful. They've been going on for five days. I don't know how many hours.

SL: Quite a lot.

RS: But it's been great to talk to you and I think this is a great project we have.

SL: Ron, again, it's been a wonderful offer. As you said, you spoke this through with Jane and you both had the idea, well you both talked about this, so it's again a real gift you gave to me. And as we know each other so well, ever since it is been possible I don't think it would be possible to have such interviews with everybody.

RS: I know, it helps that I knew the person.

SL: Yeah, this was a good way to reflect. And therefore thank you very much.

Our visit to Offenburg, 1988

Vera and Kai as children. Ellen on the way.



Some Shared Vacations: Our trip to the Lake District in 2013 produced two favorite experiences for Sibylle. One was our visit to the Castlerigg Stone Circle. She found this to be one of the most amazing things she had ever seen. The other was when the Queen unexpectedly (to us) showed up at Windermere. The photo of Sibylle seated was at Innsbruck when we went into the mountains, 1995.



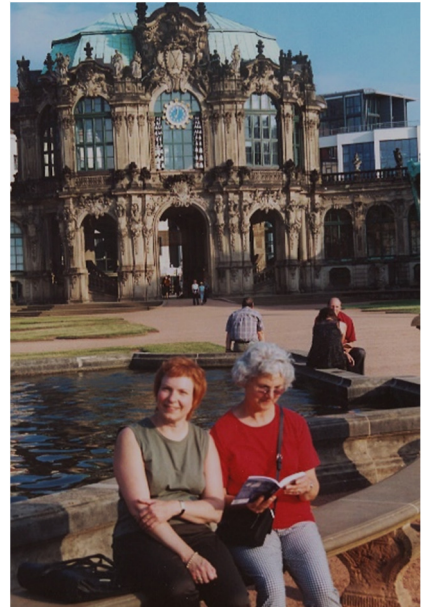
JANE'S REFLECTIONS

Once upon a time, in the year 1980 an American professor on sabbatical in South Africa went to a museum and met two German girls who were doing an internship for their law degrees. Who would have thought that this would turn into a friendship that would last more than forty years? Well, if you plug in the fact that one of these young women had an interest in politics and current events nearly equal to that of the American professor, I suppose it was more predictable.

As the wife of that professor, I am a nearly-equal beneficiary of that friendship, for one of those two young women kept in contact long after the other young woman moved on. When her law studies ended, her father gave her a trip to America and our home was included in the itinerary. Our transatlantic friendship was well on its way!

After Sibylle married and had small children, most of the visits involved our trips to Europe, but over the years there have been many visits in both directions and several meetings in England.

Throughout that time we have traveled, laughed, eaten, and talked endlessly (I admit the discussions between the two “politics fanatics” usually carried on long after I had gone to bed). We have become very important to each other’s families. It has been an amazing and rewarding relationship.



Once we were on a road trip and ate outside by a river while watching the sunset. Ron took a picture of Sibylle and me eating dinner. After that I always insisted on having a picture of the two of us eating (in Poland, Berlin, Interlochen, St. Louis, Chicago, Offenburg, Detroit, to name a few places). Of course, if I took the picture, it would be of Ron and Sibylle.

I think one of the advantages to international friendships has to do with realizing that there are multiple ways of living one's life. Some of these are trivial, but they illustrate my awakening to that fact. I remember long ago being amazed when I saw Sibylle carry out glass for recycling—a bin for clear glass, one for brown, one for green. Germany was far ahead of the U.S. on the recycling (and whole environmental) front. And there's more:

- Bike lanes that really work! With their own traffic lights!
- The decisions that go into choosing a secondary school for one's children
- Buying rolls fresh from the bakery for one's breakfast
- Arts and culture so important to society that they are included in the budget
- Schools that don't feel a need to keep kids until past three in the afternoon
- Kids biking to dance or recorder lessons on their own after school
- Health insurance that seems to work for everyone
- Kinder eggs
- Eating a main meal at noon (actually, that's how I grew up)
- A tradition of community singing clubs, keeping folk songs alive
- A public transportation system that works
- Seeing firsthand the effects of reunification of two halves of a country, one which had been behind the Iron Curtain, a part of the world that had been a mystery to me
- Amazing family records that, with help from Sibylle, made it possible for me to find my German immigrant forbears (in fact, I think this picture was taken in the town of Wyhl, where we found records of my Kohler ancestors)
- And a legal system that is not based on British Common Law. Over the years we have struggled to understand a way of conversing about law, since things just don't operate in the same ways. But I have so often been shocked to hear Sibylle say (of family law), "We try to work out the best way to solve the situation." Since our courts seem to operate on an adversarial basis, this is a whole different approach. And as I understand it, the parties in Parliament also work with the idea of compromise. Hmmm!



I'm sure there are many other details, but this is a start. Vera, Kai, and Ellen, thank you for being a part of my life. I look forward to many more opportunities for comparing cultures and sharing stories.

And most of all, thank you Sibylle. Your friendship has meant the world to me.

Jane Stockton, April, 2020



EPILOGUE AND RON'S REFLECTIONS

After I was back in the States, Sibylle said she had thought of several topics she wished we could have discussed. I suggested that we conduct a long-distance interview, with her recording on her mobile phone. That never happened. However, I did make a list of things I remembered from our conversations over the years and have decided to incorporate those recollections into this Epilogue. These are my memories of her views so I cannot guarantee they are fully accurate, but I always paid close attention to our conversations so I believe they are close.

When we visited eastern Germany, we saw all the modern signs of consumerism. At the famous Spreewald tourist site, the streets were filled with all the predictable vendors selling ice cream, pretzels, and a host of delicious treats. Sibylle explained that during DDR times, the only things you could have bought were pickles.

She also told how young people from West Germany would go to East Germany for vacation. They would wear a pair of Levi jeans and would take an extra pair in their suitcase. The East Germans loved Levi jeans and would pay dearly for those. The exchange rate was so favorable to the Deutschmark that those young people could pay for their vacation out of those sales. When we were there, we saw a store selling Levi jeans.

I think it is obvious that Sibylle agrees with Kurt Vonnegut in the idea that history is not linear. The past, the present, and the future co-exist in time and space so that one can move back and forth from one point in history to another in a short time. The Nazi era was over but in another sense it was not. For example, if there were any two regimes in the world that were polar opposites they would be Communism and Nazism and yet in a sense that was not true. Sibylle once said to me, "I need to try to understand why the two worst regimes of the twentieth century were both in my country." This was a remarkable insight that had never occurred to me. To me, East Germany and West Germany were two distinctive countries. To her, they were both Germany. She was not afraid of Nazism reemerging but thought there was something that had produced both Nazism and Communism and it had not gone away.

I once read a novel which assumed that there had been a negotiated end to the war, an end that left the Nazi regime in place. It was not quite an enlightened regime but it was a normal regime subject to the normal stresses of governance during a time when there was no war. I asked her what she thought would have happened if Hitler had been assassinated and an anti-Nazi military regime had come to power in 1944 and negotiated an end to the war? [Note: This was purely hypothetical. The allies had

a policy of Unconditional Surrender]. Would that regime have evolved into something that might have been, if not liberal at least tolerable? And might it have evolved in a progressive direction?

She was absolutely adamant that any regime growing out of the Nazi era would have been a Nazi regime. The mindset of authoritarianism and racial superiority and resistance to liberal ideas would not have “evolved” into anything resembling a modern state. It had to be destroyed. This seems a shocking statement, that your country must lose for it to become free. And yet on May 8, 1985, the fortieth anniversary of V-E Day, the day Germany surrendered, German President Richard Weizsäcker delivered a remarkable speech in which he referred to that as “a day of liberation.” And in 2020 the Bundestag declared a holiday to commemorate the 75th anniversary. Sibylle was totally in favor of these things. When I wrote earlier that she was fearless in looking at her country’s history, this is what I meant.

Once we took a trip into the eastern part of the country. She had not been there since reunification. We spent the night with a cousin. She was a doctor. Jane and I slept in a spare room in the attic. As she was settling us in, the cousin pointed to a hole in the wall where there was to be a light switch. The wires were sticking out. Obviously the job had not been finished. She said with sarcasm, “Communist efficiency.” The demand for freedom was very powerful but that regime collapsed partially because the communists were incompetent managers.

Sibylle saw problems but she always believed that problems could be managed or resolved. She once said, during a time when there were attacks on Turkish immigrants, “Perhaps we should have considered German history before we admitted large numbers of people so different from us.” That was not a statement against the Turks but an acknowledgement of reality, and a determination to fix the problem. In a similar vein, she was concerned about admitting a million Syrian refugees into the country. She recognized the humanitarian issues and saw practical benefits in terms of a young and energetic element introduced into the population, but she was worried – correctly as it turned out -- at the possibility of a political backlash. She was spokesperson for minority affairs, and was actively engaged in working with the Turkish leadership, locally and nationally. She also once came to Dearborn for the specific purpose of meeting with local Arab-American leaders and with individual persons to try to figure out why the influx of Arab-Muslim immigrants into the United States was working better than a similar influx into Germany. One is reminded of Jefferson’s concept of the “science of government.” If we create proper structures and pursue correct policies we can resolve, or at least manage, problems. That was her view also.

She was a passionate supporter of the European Union. This grew out of her awareness of how destructive nationalism could be. A hundred years of war was enough, and “Europe” was the solution. We discussed this many times, whether the EU was a temporary phenomenon, or whether it would lead to increasingly integrated structures, or whether it might collapse entirely. To be certain, the vast expansion of the EU to include countries dramatically different from the original members created serious problems. And the disappearance of the Soviet Union removed the threat that was the unspoken impulse for integration. And then came the financial crisis in Greece. The simple fact was that if there was to be a bailout to save the Greek economy from its irresponsible national leaders, Germany would have to be the major banker. Sibylle’s position, which she expressed strongly within her caucus, was that it was better to spend money on Greece than to spend it on the defense budget. From her point of view, you never really solve problems. You just manage them to keep them from getting out of control.

Once she attended an evening discussion in my living room with my class on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. After an hour of discussion, I asked her if she had any thoughts on the issues. She said that once when she was a girl she had gone to stay on a kibbutz. She was hitch hiking towards Galilee and was picked up by an Israeli family. They were very cordial. They were speaking English. They thought she was Dutch. She told them she was German. Without saying a word, the husband stopped the car and told her to get out. “No German will ever ride in my car.” As she put it, there she was, a young girl, a young German girl, standing alone in the dust of the Galilee. In telling this, she was not blaming the Israeli couple. She just wanted the students to understand how intense the feelings are.

Sibylle’s law practice was central to her identity. This is ironic for someone who had initially been hesitant about that profession. But when she left parliament and returned full time to her practice, she felt she had found her natural talent. In fact, she used almost exactly those words. She said, I have the ability to find a way. Her specialty was family law, and most (but not all) of her clients were women. She saw them come into her office, some having been beaten or intimidated, many hesitant to speak and reluctant even to express their own interests or preferences. Her job was to help them see their rights and to make sure those rights were honored. Once she told about an immigrant who had been offered a settlement by her husband and how the woman had said to the judge, “I do not accept this.” This simple statement –expressing a preference -- was a triumphant act of affirmation of her self-worth. In another case, there had been an exceptionally controlling husband, a medical doctor. The couple had two children and he wanted custody, not because he would be a better parent for the children but simply to defeat his wife in court. The judge gave custody to the mother. The case was so acrimonious that on the days when the father had weekend visitation rights, the mother

would drop the children at Sibylle's office and leave so she would not even have to see the father. The children would play in her office until the pick-up. She told me the father seemed to have an unhealthy anger and she did even like being around him but she agreed to this unusual arrangement just to help her client. One Friday afternoon the children played until the father picked them up. Then he took them to an isolated place and killed them. He could not stand the thought of "losing" in that struggle with his ex-wife. She told Jane and me that she stood at the gravesite during the funeral and sobbed and sobbed and sobbed. That may have been the worst day of her legal career. She was very friendly towards men but in so many cases she saw the ugly underside of gender relations.

When I spoke to her during my visit, six weeks before her death, she said she had transferred many of her clients to other attorneys but had kept some and was continuing to practice. I asked how many she had remaining and she said about fifty. I must have looked surprised at the number. She said something she had said earlier, "What am I supposed to do? Lie on the bed and stare at the ceiling?" She would never do that. When the body said "enough" she would quit, but not until that moment. Quitting was not what she did.

In the last year or so of her life she joined an English language study group. Everyone was a retiree who spoke English and the instructor was a volunteer former English teacher. They would meet once a week to speak conversational English. One week they read the tweets of Donald Trump. (I laughed out loud when I heard that). She also continued to go to political meetings and to public events (such as the book discussion by the former priest). This was not a woman who would stop living.

In the process of revising and editing this, I came more and more to realize what a remarkable document it is. Sibylle was not just a political person and a public official. She was a keen observer of history and society and the world within which she lived. She was quite possibly the most deeply intellectual person I have ever known. She read voraciously – day and night as she put it. She saw patterns in history that others missed. Small incidents, which others would overlook as mundane or insignificant, would hold deep meaning for her and revelations about how the world works. To borrow a metaphor, it was as if the whole world could be seen within a grain of sand. I wanted to do this project for her family but also because I believed there was some historical significance in her life. In her small family, in the observations and life experiences of this one person, we see in a sense a microcosm of Germany history.

I want to finish this project with a final, personal thought. Sibylle was a friend such as I never had in my life. From the time we first met, we resonated. She became a part of my family, and Jane and I became a part of her family. Near the end of her life she told me that I had always been a source of strength and stability whenever she faced difficult circumstances. “You have encouraged me in everything I have ever done,” she said. How ironic it was that I had thought exactly the same thing about her. Whenever I had a problem or faced a difficulty or challenge she had always said, “You can handle this.” Or, “Keep working on this.” Our connection was intellectual, but it was also personal. She brought something into my life that was unique and special. I am so happy that we both went to that museum on the same day.



12 December 1954 – 22 May 2020