

Deja's Life Story

The summer of 1933 was a wonderful time to be born - anytime is a wonderful time to be born, even if it was during the Great Depression. I loved my childhood, I could play outdoors during the summer until late at night and the winters were white wonderland in the northern latitude of Viljandi, Estonia. As a young child I was left to play while the adults talked at a Christmas party. I found the special punch and took a chance and tried it without asking permission; a little while later my parents found me stumbling around and put me to bed for a sound night of sleep.

My father was a musician, businessman, and truck driver. He made me feel like his favorite daughter: taking time to play, relax, and smell the roses. He and his friends would play music in our house as I went to sleep. Life during WWII under Soviet occupation was just fine until my 8th Birthday when my father did not come home. A couple of days passed before the news came: my father was found shot in a field with his knees sticking out of the ground. I had mixed emotions: the typical anger and grief, but I was puzzled "how could the Soviets treat him with so little respect and only bury him half way?" Later I discovered my father was a hero smuggling guns to the Estonian resistance. My grandmother gave me my most cherished saying, "Many things happen to the Doer - nothing happens to the Sitter. So to be able to achieve, you must take chances."

A few weeks later Germans pushed the Soviets out and occupied Estonia. My father's brother, Sass, helped look after my mother, sister, and I; giving us exotic fruits like bananas when sugar was in short supply. By the time I was 11 years old the Soviets began to reoccupy Estonia. This was our chance to flee and start a new life. We found a captain with a small, old sailing freighter willing to take us and a few dozen refugees to Sweden (a 100 mile crossing) for the price of half a pig. The night was dark and the weather was bad, perfect conditions to sneak away without been seen, Hide-and-Seek on a grand new scale. The Baltic Sea was rough, the storm broke the main mast, the freighter took on water, and the backup motor broke. The next morning a Swedish ship found us adrift and towed us into a harbor.

In Sweden the Red Cross greeted us, gave us shelter, found a foster house, and gave us some money: an odd custom but it worked for us. I started school right away but spoke no Swedish so I struggled that first year (except for Art class). The next 5 years were better but I was just an average student. Asa befriended me and became my best friend for life. Sweden was OK but we were treated as "Outsiders", so mother spent our life savings on 3 one-way tickets to Canada (to live the "American dream" and start a new life).

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