

**Go to your father!** Proposed name for the Memoir. By: Willy Halpert, March 17 2013 Saddlebrooke.

Sometime end of August 1942 during WWII I was with my father and one of his friends standing and talking on the sidewalk in a street in Antwerp Belgium. The day was sunny and many were walking or standing around the shops or sitting in the open air cafés. There was an ongoing din of conversations some music and it seemed like a normal day despite the war and the later evening curfews. I was watching people and sometimes listening to the conversations and was maybe a little bored.

All of a sudden the street noise stopped with an ominous silence. People started to move fearfully to the building sides and then we saw that many black dressed SS soldiers and Brown shirt Belgians were approaching from both directions. My heart started beating and I feared the worst. They were coming straight for my father. He told me not to worry that we have money in Switzerland, told me some of the details I have since forgotten, then he pushed me to his companion saying in a loud voice "go to your father! - I have to go".

The friend grabbed me and held me as if I was his son and whilst we moved away in an unhurried manner he told me not to look back. The next several hours are until now a completely blank. The only salient remaining memory is that this was the last time I saw my father, mother and family.

Next without knowing how I got there, I was at night in the back of a canvas covered truck sitting alone bouncing on a wooden bench gripping the edge driving for a very, very, long time through farm land and forests with no lights. After an interminable time we arrived to what seemed to me to be an ancient castle with a huge portal with evil dragons and was brought into a hall and was given over to a monk who tried to reassure me that all was well. But I was in a state - I could neither say anything nor understand what was happening. I was brought to a huge dormitory given clothes and a sleeping robe and told to have a shower and return with the robe on. I was then led to a bed that was assigned to me.

I was told not to be afraid as there was a monk sleeping in a curtained of section in the middle of the hall. An eerie yellowish nightlight was always on in the dormitory and bathrooms. I must have eventually fallen asleep crying quietly under the covers as I was shaken awake in the morning by the supervising monk. The monk showed me how to make up the bed and where my orphanage clothes were behind the bed and where my toiletries were stowed and towel and washcloth were hung in the bathroom. I was shown around the immense building, the chapel for prayers, the school rooms, gym and recreation and sports' inner courtyard before rejoining the others at breakfast. I could not eat nor say anything with all these similar looking grey uniformed strangers eating and staring into their bowls. They did not speak nor try to make contact. After breakfast I was taken to the Father Superior's office and left alone with him. He then said that I should not speak of anything other than that I am a war orphan and all my family died in a bombardment in Antwerp. I understood the implications but was left fearfully thinking what really happened to my father and family. I was not to shower in the common showers to be explained that I had a malady that needed a special soap. Thereafter I was showering with a group of boys that were no different than me not realizing they were also hidden children. Slowly I returned to some normalcy by attending school, choir and music. I felt a duty to my father to try and recall the information imparted to me before his arrest by reciting what I still remembered to myself in the only private area which were the separate toilets in the washrooms. As time went by I kept forgetting some of the information and eventually only remembered the sum which was an easier round number. I do not know for how long but it seems to me most of the time I fell asleep crying and having nightmares not daring to get out of bed with dire consequences that made my circumstances even more disastrous. One night the supervisor then on duty who may have been aware of this came to me when I awoke screaming from a nightmare. He took me to another room and told me that everything will be alright after the war that we cannot do anything now, as that would endanger my family. He told me not to cry as my father would want me to be strong, good and study. That first kindly talk must have so impressed me that I took the wish of my father so much to heart that it has been with me ever since and has strengthened and stood by me for the many tragedies and trials that were yet to happen.

Comment: How does one after so many years know the exact feelings and words of when you were so young? One usually remembers the worst, best and most impressionable experiences and describes them in terms and emotions of today. To me it feels almost like another Willy telling the story.