

GERHARD ♦ Poor Health & Unexpected Help

Gerhard Dyck (1917-2005)



Gerhard became sick, and went to a specialist in Odessa. While waiting for his appointment, he made a lady named Lydia on the beach. Gerhard waited a long time before telling her he was German, but she was not put off by his nationality.

Poor Health and Unexpected Help

There seems to be a lapse in Gerhard's tape here. Sixteen years passed for him in the North. Then he became sick. The story continues...

I asked my daughter for help. But her husband, a Russian man, told my daughter, "When people discover that my father-in-law is a German, it will be very detrimental to me in my profession and at my work place." My daughter was saddened by his attitude, but she could not help me without her husband's permission.

I wondered where I could turn. Then I remembered that a private clinic with specialists had opened in Odessa. I traveled to Odessa, and rented a flat for one month while I waited for my appointment with the specialist. I had nothing to do with my time but lie all day on the coast of the Black Sea. Although it was September, the weather was still beautiful and many vacationers were still in Odessa.

I became acquainted with a lady named Lydia who had occupied a chair next to mine several times. We played cards and talked. One day as I lay in the lounge chair by the sea, I got another attack. I was stricken by a high fever, which usually lasted for 24 hours and left me very weak for several days. As I lay in the lounge chair, covered up and shaking violently because of the high fever, my new friend, Lydia, arrived. She asked, "What's wrong with you?" I replied, "I have a fever." She ran to the nearby sanitarium and brought the attendant with her, who took my temperature. It was 39 degrees (102.2 F). She called

an ambulance, and I was taken to a clinic. After I had received several shots, the fever subsided. When I had recovered for several days, the doctor was ready to release me.

In the hospital, Lydia came to visit me. She inquired about my illness. I explained to her my situation, and she was amazed that I had traveled so far to seek help. Lydia had a friend who knew the specialist in one of the clinics. She asked this friend to ask him to help me. The specialist came to visit me the next day. After a thorough physical exami-

nation, I was diagnosed as having an infected ulcer on the large intestine which needed to be removed immediately.

When I came out of the anesthesia after surgery, I was surprised to see Lydia beside my bed. She offered to help me in the recovery. In Russian hospitals, there are very few nurses; if a sick person receives no outside help, his recovery can be difficult. And so Lydia continued to visit me after her work hours for several days. All through my recovery she brought me juices, and special foods that I could tolerate. After two weeks I was ready to be released.

Again I faced the question, "Where should I go?" My daughter did not want me - she said her husband had forbidden her to have me come live them. I was



Gerhard and Lydia were married on August 20, 1978 in the courthouse next to the famous Odessa Opera House.

Marriage to Lydia ♦ GERHARD

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At last, after so many hardships in life, Gerhard found a good wife in Lydia.

not yet strong enough to face the hostile climate of the North. I considered going to stay with my brother, Peter, in Kirghizia, but he himself lived in crowded conditions with his three children and he also earned very little. I felt caught in a dilemma. Sensing my dilemma, Lydia offered me her home. Although she lived with her son and her mother in a little flat, she was willing to open her home to me. And so I moved into her home. Her little flat was only 200 square meters (650 square feet), but her 18-year old son was about to enlist in the army and move out, so there would be extra room. I was still quite weak from the operation, and Lydia and her mother did their best to nurse me back to health and strength.

After a time, the subject of marriage came up. Lydia's husband had died in an accident ten years earlier. She was 46 and I was 60. I considered the difference in our ages; 14 years was a big difference. And I remembered the hostility that my nationality had caused previously, and I was very reluctant to reveal it to her. I knew the consequences of such a marriage.

First, a Russian woman who married a German man would be condemned by the state; and secondly, the children would be taunted as half breeds and would suffer on that account. The Russian hatred of Germans was constantly nursed by the Russian people. But we could not seriously consider marriage until I had told her I was German. I shrank from such a revelation. I had suffered so much rejection and ridicule on that account, but decided since she had been so kind to me, she must know the truth.

When I finally told her, I was greatly surprised when she exclaimed, "Oh, my dear man, I was raised among German people! During the war I was sent to Kirgizia with my mother where we lived and worked among the German people. I have no hatred for them!" That was wonderful news for me. I had finally found a lady who had no hatred for and no fear of the German people.

We were married on August 20, 1978 in the courthouse next to the Odessa opera house. The flat was very small, but I was reminded of the German saying,

GERHARD ♦ Trying to Leave Russia & New Hardships

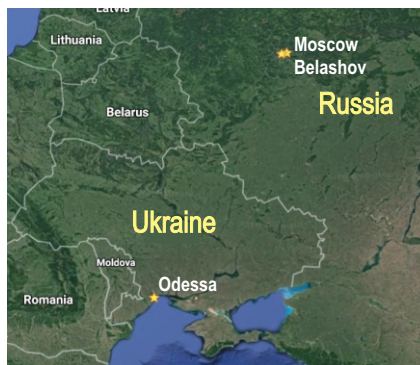
Gerhard Dyck (1917-2005)



Gerhard and Lydia moved to Belashov, where Gerhard received a home. They were happy until they decided to apply to immigrate to Germany, an act the Soviet government considered traitorous. Lydia was fired from her job in a clothing factory, and the couple was refused the right to immigrate.

“Even in the smallest corner, there is room for the pair in love.” I regained my health and the next summer I found work in my old profession (teaching?) and worked five more years in Odessa.

What of my house in Irkutsk? A year after we were married, Lydia and I flew to Irkutsk in order to sell the house, and bring back with us what we could. A sad situation greeted us. I had lived with this family for some time, and had been especially fond of the daughter. She had been a bright and lovable child, but the hard life in the north and heavy drinking that came with it had taken its toll. The daughter was seriously ill. Her mother had died, and the grandmother had suffered a stroke. I left everything behind for them, and took only my accordion with me. A year later I learned that both daughter and grandmother had died.



In 1982, Gerhard and Lydia moved to Belashov, near Moscow, to begin a new chapter of their lives.

Trying to Leave Russia & New Hardships

One compensation that was granted to workers who had been in the far North was that after 15 years servitude, they could buy a home in European Russia. I had applied for such a home ten years earlier, which at that time cost 3,000 rubles. Now I received word that my house was in Belashov, near Moscow, and was ready to be occupied. Lydia and I decided to move in 1982. A new chapter of my life now began. Lydia and I lived in a three room house. We began to acquire furniture, and Lydia found work in a clothing factory.

Life with Lydia in Belashov was normal. We were happy. Lydia's son lived in Odessa, and my daughter lived in Kishinev. When Lydia received her vacation we visited them. I was now

GERHARD ♦ Leaving the Land of My Suffering

Gerhard Dyck (1917-2005)

Gerhard and Lydia left Russia in deep winter and found flowers in bloom and warm temperatures in Germany. They thought they had arrived in Paradise. "For the first time I felt free. I knew that the humiliation I had suffered all those years in Russia were behind me. Never again would I be judged for being a German," Gerhard said.



many would not receive us, then we would return to Russia. If that should happen, we would have a house to which we could return.

Leaving the Land of My Suffering

On December 30, 1988, we arrived in Germany. I had left Germany 43 years ago in 1945 after the capitulation. In Russian propaganda, Germany was always an enemy of the state, and we, the Russian Germans, had borne the brunt of that hatred. One can hardly imagine how bitter that hatred was, and how bitter for the Germans to live with such a hatred. We were constantly humiliated and discriminated against in the work place, in resettlement, and in every facet of our lives. But despite that, we had stuck together. Wherever I met a German, I thought of him as a brother because he was suffering just as I was.

Our flight took us to Frankfurt where we were transported by bus to Neurenburg. We were taken to a large hotel. I was anxious to see how Germany had

changed, and so the next morning Lydia and I walked the street of Neurenburg. What a pleasant surprise for us who had left Russia in deep winter to find flowers in bloom, warm temperatures, and a soft and gentle rain. We thought we had arrived in Paradise. For the first time I felt free. I knew that the humiliation I had suffered all those years in Russia were behind me. Never again would I be judged for being a German.

At first we visited my sister, Tina. Tina lived in Vettelschoss, near the Rhine where she had lived since 1943 with her husband. She had one son by a previous marriage, and three with the second. These were my nephews. They were big strong young men, each one more handsome than the next. All were married and had families of their own. When I met them, I was amazed. All had lovely homes and all lived in close proximity. It was wonderful.

From Neurenberg we were transported to Kochen where we were stayed for one month in a transient camp for new immigrants (this was January, 1989). Since I wanted to live closer to my sister, I telephoned her to come get us. For several months we lived with Tina, who had been widowed in 1978



Gerhard found that his relationship changed with his daughter and her family back in Russia once he came to Germany. His grandchildren came to visit, and he was able to help them financially.

Trying to Leave Russia & New Hardships ♦ GERHARD

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“
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mutual understanding again.
”

An immigration officer, to Gerhard, upon his leaving Russia.

65, received a pension and was not working anymore. But life in Belashov also had its difficulties. Public transportation was scarce. The city was large and most of the time the distances had to be traveled on foot. The market was 3 kilometers from our home. One could not purchase much in the stores, and even the few items became fewer over a period of time.

We now began to consider immigrating to Germany. I wrote to my sister Tina asking if she would send me a visa. A lot of red tape followed. It was an especially difficult time for Lydia. Not only was she ridiculed for marrying a German husband, but worse, now she was asking to immigrate to Germany. Such activity was considered traitorous, and she lost her job in the clothing factory. But she stood her ground and she stood by me. My application for emigration was finally rejected. I was told that as long as I still had strength to work, I would never be granted permission to emigrate. I concluded that to apply for immigration had been a bad error in judgment on my part. It had brought us nothing but suffering, especially for Lydia.

Two years later, Lydia's son, who had been in the army, returned home and was married. Our life became more complicated with two more adults in our crowded quarters.

I made a second application to immigrate to Germany. Lydia agreed. An entirely different attitude prevailed now. No one asked us why we wanted to leave Russia. When I met with the immigration official, I found that he understood the Germans in Russia in a way that no other Russian I had met ever had. He



had worked in a German settlement along the Volga at one time, and understood the German situation. I was amazed at his openness in his remarks to me, “The biggest mistake that Russia made was to disburse the German settlements on the Volga. The area that the German people settled and farmed brought the best and richest crops in Russia. Now it is a wasteland and no one farms. The people who have been resettled into those areas are too lazy to work the land. It was the gravest mistake that the German people were uprooted and sent into exile. The Germans were Russia's best workers. A good manager does not drive his best workers away, but that is what Russia has done. I am concerned about the humiliation that the German people have suffered.” He promised that he would do all in his power to help me with the immigration.

After four months we had permission in hand to leave Russia. The official gave me one last piece of advice. “When you arrive in Germany, do not nurse a hatred for Russia. In the past the two countries have not been enemies, and we must strive for mutual understanding again.”

We sold our possessions and gave away what we could not sell. We packed just a few items. We could not sell our house, so we left it. I wondered if my Russian wife would be accepted by the Germans. In the back of my mind, I entertained the thought that if Ger-

Helping Family In Russia ♦ GERHARD

Gerhard Dyck (1917-2005)

and was alone in her house. In October we found our own apartment in Linz am Rhein as Wolfgang, Tina's son, wanted to remodel her house. As a new immigrant, Lydia was required to take a 10-month language course to learn the German language. It was difficult for her, but she began to speak the language.

We corresponded with our friends in Belashov and sent them photos of our new life. Their concern had been for Lydia who was Russian that she might receive similar treatment at the hands of the Germans as the Russians had meted out to the Germans in their country. But there was no reciprocal hatred. Our friends were amazed at our new life.

Helping Family in Russia

Things began to change in Russia as well. In 1990, Gorbachev was in power. A new openness in Russia prevailed, and the USSR was losing its grip on the empire. The republics were given autonomy. My son-in-law, who had had an important position in Moldow, lost his job because each country wanted to have its own nationality in its employ and he was Russian. He suffered much through this humiliation, and I believe it contributed to the heart attack that he suffered at the time. My daughter telephoned me for help when her husband was in the hospital. I thought of the time when I had no place to turn, and because of my nationality, they had not wanted to have anything to do with me. What a change of events! I knew what the right thing for me to do was. I had understood their situation then, and I understood it now. Of course, I helped them. Our roles were reversed, and overnight I became the best-loved father-in-law. My



Gerhard, right, visiting his brother, Peter Dyck, and Peter's wife, Katie, in Germany.

grandchildren all came to Germany to visit me, though the five years we had lived in Belashov, not once did anyone of my family come to visit. To them at that time, I was no more than "that poor German who lives there" and was of no interest to them.

I could not hold that against them. I understood too well the situation from the inside. Now they were in a similar situation in Moldow. I bought used cars for my grandsons and was able to send them back to the Moldow with cars and goods which they could sell. Each made several trips, and each time they re-



Gerhard bought his grandsons used cars when they came to visit him in Germany. They drove them back and sold them in Russia, helping to better their situation.



Gerhard and Lydia

GERHARD ♦ Life In Germany, and One More Wish

Gerhard Dyck (1917-2005)

turned with cars. Through this means they were able to purchase a home, and better their situation in Moldow.

Life in Germany, and One More Wish

I was amazed at how quickly Germany had been able to rise after the war. With the help from America and England they had quickly become an industrial power again. Although Germany had started the war, it seemed to me that only the Germans in Russia had suffered the full consequences of their actions. The Germans in Germany had stirred up a soup of hatred, and the Germans in Russia alone had to eat every last drop and morsel of that hatred.

No wonder the Russian Germans want to return to Germany! They have suffered so much because of their nationality. They want to return to their country of origin so that their children will remain German. They leave in Russia everything they have owned and known including their own homes.

Those who are able to return to Germany have to start their life over again. It is very difficult for them. They have to start a new career, or retrain, because

the diplomas and credentials issued by Russian institutions are not valid in Germany. Our teachers, our engineers, our doctors who come to Germany cannot find work. They find employment mostly in jobs that the German people deem beneath themselves. But despite this setback, they seek to immigrate because they have suffered so much humiliation from the Russian people. Another dictator like Stalin could arise and grind them further into the dust. They seek a better future for their children.

But when they arrive in Germany they do not receive special treatment. There are many regulations set in place to slow the tide of immigration. For example, immigrant Germans who are entitled to a pension receive only 90% of

that pension; those who have arrived since 1995 receive only 60% of their pension; and non-German spouses receive no pension at all. It highlights the fact that they are really not welcome in Germany. The latest regulation requires that all who wish to immigrate to Germany must pass a language test. This is a severe blow to the Russian Germans, because for many years the German language has been strictly forbidden in Russia. Many of the younger German generation, who has grown up in Russia and suffered

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Gerhard, upon arriving in Germany and finding it recovered and healthy.



Gerhard and Lydia settled in Linz am Rhein, a small village along the Rhine River in central Germany 25 kilometers SE of Bonn.

Life in Germany, and One More Wish ♦ GERHARD

Gerhard Dyck (1917-2005)



Gerhard enjoyed music all his life. Playing the accordion at his home in Germany.



much because of their German nationality, never learned German because it had to be done secretly and was too dangerous. And now Germany does not want to accept them because they do not speak German! This seems harsh.

The native Germans often asked me, “Why did you immigrate to Germany? You had a good life in Russia!” What is one to say to such a question? How can one even begin to answer? It became clear to me that the German population had not been informed of the mistreatment of the *Volksdeutsche* (German people born outside Germany) by their adopted countries. But this ignorance is understandable when one considers that the German First Secretary of State (*Offensteiniger*) recently expressed, “I would rather have ten black people from Africa in Germany than one German from Russia.” Such a statement greatly insults the Russian Germans, many of whom suffered and died in labor camps in Russia under severe persecution and intense torture. Much of the German labor force in Russia was required to do super-human tasks, and they perished because of mistreatment and starvation. How those people suffered!

Lydia finished her language course, and even though it had been difficult to learn a new language at 57, she began to speak German. A deep wish for me remained. I longed to travel to Canada where my mother had lived, and my two sisters, Annie and



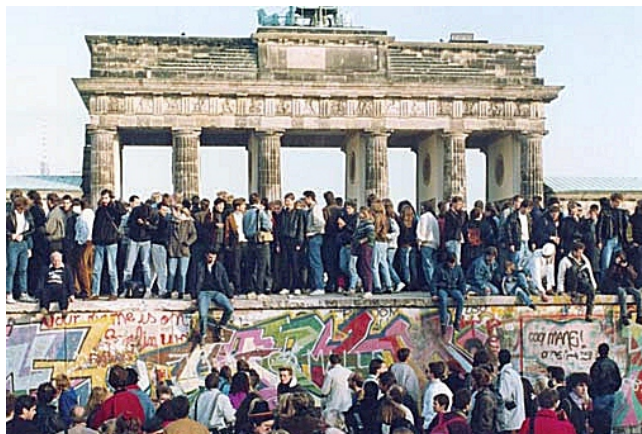
Linz am Rhein is a tourist town.



Visiting with Gerhard's three sisters in Germany.

GERHARD ♦ Real Freedom

Gerhard Dyck (1917-2005)



Gerhard and Lydia had been in Germany only ten months when the Berlin Wall came down on November 9, 1989. It was the worldwide symbol of the defeat of communism in the Soviet Union, which had been the source of so much grief in his life.

Neta, lived with their families. I longed to see them again. My sister Neta's four children had all visited us in Germany. They were all grown, married, and had families of their own. For several years I hoped and planned to go, but each time my plans were changed because my grandchildren and their friends came. It seemed everybody in Russia wanted to see how we lived in Germany. Until 1990, it was difficult to travel. But after the Berlin wall had come down, everybody in Russia was anxious to see what the West was like.

I have now come to see my relatives and many of my former friends in Canada, and have visited my mother's grave. I have often wondered how some of the friends of my youth have fared with whom I grew up in Nieder-Chortitza and who were fortunate enough to immigrate to Canada. I must conclude they all live first class. All are rich. They live in large houses. Some own large businesses, and earn big money. They have their churches. They are free. One can see that these people have real freedom. They can go where they want, and do what they want. The people in Canada have had a very good life.

I am leaving these thoughts and memoirs to my relatives and acquaintances in the hope that their children will do all in their power that such events as I have retold here not be repeated. I wish you all the best, and most of all, that you will retain the freedom you presently enjoy. May God protect you in all you do, and may He continue to grant you freedom.

Gerhard Dyck, 1997
Translated by Agnes Ferngren



To Gerhard, who had lived under Soviet repression, as a Gulag prisoner, and then an exile in Siberia, the freedom of the west is remarkable. Gerhard saw the open border between Canada and the United States when he visited his sisters in Abbotsford. "One can see that these people have real freedom," he said.



A sculpture in Chortitza devoted to the Mennonites, like Gerhard his family, who disappeared from the area.