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*“A Nazi’s Child is an autobiography that throws some deep reflections on my life which was darkened by a Nazi father and three years of being locked up in a German reformatory during the 50s. I became brainwashed, humiliated and deprived of my identity, freedom, self-esteem, education, personal belongings and a chance to communicate with others. I became a number ...”*



*(Bildquelle: Archiv/Heike Freiwald)*

*The love I once so yearned for  
is now inside of me.*

# **A Nazi's Child**

**In Search of my Identity**

*Autobiography*

**Heike Freiwald**



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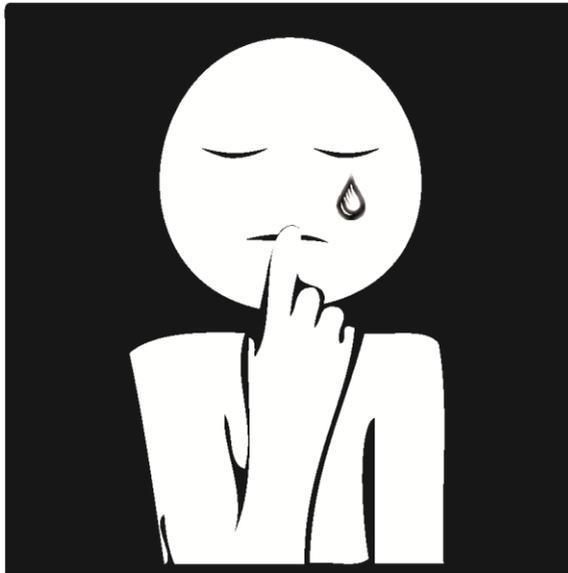
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# EHEMALIGE



# HEIMKINDER



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## *Preface*

### **A Person's Dignity Should be Inviolable**

*My story is dedicated to all former institutionalized children from the 50s to the 80s, children who have passed or have been driven to commit suicide, human beings who never became vindicated by German government, church or society.*

*Due to time our status has changed from being a number to a senior citizen, still burdened by our past of discrimination and injustice. Most of us are still in need of help provided by therapists, in order to find inner peace and freedom.*

*The fundamental rights did not apply to thousands of German children institutionalized by state and church after Nazi Germany's past war period.*

*We became isolated from society, stripped of our identity, personal will and freedom, violated on body and soul. We were malnourished, stigmatized and forced to labor without pay.*

*We became deprived of education, a chance for success in our future.*

*Most of former institutionalized children never found their purpose in life or a goal to reach and work for. We still are fenced in by former Nazi doctrines that ruled our mind and lives and left us with fear and panic attacks.*

*We are still treated like second class people and afraid to fall asleep at night in fear of nightmares, reliving the most terrible time of our youth behind bars, without permission to talk or communicate.*

*Heike Freiwald*

## Reformatory

**I**t happened on a Friday morning, one week after the incident “At The Hop”. Both of my parents were present but avoided to look or even talk to me. All I was told that I did not have to go to work that morning and I wondered why. Shortly after, a car arrived with a woman, introducing herself as a social worker, and that very moment I knew my father had carried out his threat to put me away.

For a moment I was not sure what to think or feel when my suitcase, already packed with my few belongings was brought by my father out of their bedroom where it was hidden. Everything happened kind of in a hurry without the chance for questions. My mother had tears in her eyes and I wondered what would happen to her when I was gone. Who would fetch the doctor at night, and who would buy the grocery at the neighbors store asking to run a tab? It was almost impossible to think my father would undertake my former chores.

The social worker took my suitcase while walking down the stairs, passing our landlady’s closed living room door, usually open as invitation to enter. They must have been gone I thought, feeling a sadness for not having the chance for a good bye. The car door was opened by a driver who had waited downstairs, asking me to sit down in the back, followed by the social worker taking the seat next to me.

My small suitcase became stored behind me, given a few moments more to look at the house where I had spent my youth, growing up with ambivalent feelings and fear for punishment, anticipating my annual visits to the farm and my beloved grandparents, looking forward to the middle of June, when a full bowl of ripe strawberries would await me at my landlady’s living room and I would reward her kindness with a bunch of daisies always in bloom around my birthday.

Thinking of both my landlady and daughter I called aunt Lieschen who always had spent comfort in times of sadness or pain, my eyes turned to their window in front of the house above the rhododendron bush where movements behind closed curtains gave away their presents.

I thought about many times when I was asked to join their lunch after school or the dimes slipped into my pocket, and I realized that they could not bear to see me being carried away, it was too hard for them to say good bye.

Would this also mean a good bye to Wulf who had kept on writing letters I so desperately awaited daily. Would they be forwarded to me by my parents. My thoughts of Wulf turned into a wakeup call with questions about my current situation and future time to come. All of a sudden I realized that the threat “reformatory” always had an impact being the maximum punishment of a father’s right.

Reformatory, the last word needed for his climactically relief within his rage, that triggered the outburst of the same old story about the glorious years during the NS regime, when Germany was still intact, ruled by order and controlled by a government selected of elite people. I had been bombarded with that story over and over again in times of failing his demands or disobeying his rules, the words had been planted in my mind and still haunting me in reoccurring night mares.

The social worker started a conversation by talking about the length of our ride to “Forest Home”. She never mentioned the term “Reformatory”, it became transformed into an elusive imagination about a secure and protective environment. I started to ask a lot of questions followed by few answers: Including the first opportunity of my own room, being in the company of lots of girls and given the offer to learn many new crafts. She also gave the impression that I could stay in contact with family and friends by writing letters. That was the answer I had been waiting for, to be able to continue my conversation

with Wulf, enough comfort already to face unknown challenges in “Forest Home”.

About two hours later we arrived at the small village appearing like a picture postcard, situated at the foot of a larger mountain range and created by its community to an idyllic environment with its focus to the old Lutheran church dominating the market place. My ambivalent excitement became calmed by the beauty of the new surroundings, consequently connected by myself with my new home.

We left the small village and turned into a “private road“ bordered by pine trees on either side, leading us up the hill towards “Forest Home”. The closer we got the harder I could feel my heart beat, triggered by the memory of my father’s threat and the contrast transmitted by the forests beauty.

Since I was a little girl I had the need for beauty, reaching out for anything to cover up the ugliness I too often had to face. I found beauty provided by nature, beauty in the presents of my grandfather and kind people, beauty in my connection to my love and best friend, even in my imaginative thoughts creating personal happiness I found beauty, a beauty invisible to the eye but absorbed by heart and mind, a beauty to feel secure, understood, but most of all to be loved.

The car had to slow down admonished by the sign: Private Property, no Trespassing! Placed at the beginning of an endless seeming brick wall to the right, only giving view to the very distance, a gabled roof which belonged to the main building, domicile of the house-mother (Mother Superior) administration and various Lutheran nuns to be addressed as sister.

We had reached the main gate secured by a locked rod iron door separating the brick wall, allowing the first glimpse at the building.

The social worker rung the bell and admonished me to obey the sisters to make it easy on myself. A middle-aged sister dressed in a full length black skirt and same colored blouse decorated with a snow white starched collar around her neck, opened the massive wooden

entrance door on top of a few stairs. While approaching us, she carried herself somehow majestically upright without a smile, and I thought probably due to the seemingly uncomfortable bonnet covering the entire head, leaving just enough space for the face to be seen.

This was my first encounter with one of the sisters appearing in her daily black outfit, called habit, completed by the wedding ring on her finger, the symbol to be married to Jesus Christ as a reward for her dedication to defy all earthly temptations.

We were greeted and told that Mother Superior already was expecting us.

The social worker took my small suitcase for the last time in one hand, and my arm with the other as we followed the sister up the few stairs into the hallway. Maybe she meant to show a few sympathy by her touch, except her eyes revealed the same different unspoken knowledge I already had sensed this morning while saying good bye to my mother, a knowledge yet unknown to me.

While entering the huge paneled entry hall, my eyes became focused at the almost full sized statue of “The All Mighty” nailed to the cross, the largest wooden crucifix I had ever seen. It hung in opposite to the entry door, against the back wall and transmitted an instant kind of guilt, similar to the one I had carried with me throughout my youth, never knowing why and what to expect. My feelings even intensified after the entry door became locked and I felt helpless, helpless in front of the judge mental presents of “The All Mighty”.

Mother Superior had asked the social worker into her office while I had to wait outside, observing the voluminous interior of the hall, tempted to sit down, but uncertain about consequences. Instead I walked along the walls, gazing at all the pictures depicting paintings of the twelve apostles.

Everything appeared to be too overwhelming since I had arrived, the perfect white starched collar and bonnet of the first sister made

absolutely sense, emphasizing order and perfection automatically existing throughout the presents of “The Good Lord”.

The social worker left in a hurry and I was asked to enter Mother Superior’s room, decorated in the same manner like the entry hall, except this time the crucifix of a much smaller size placed at the wall behind her chair. She welcomed me at Forest Home and told me that from now on I would be number 830.

Within seconds my identity became exchanged by digits, burned into my mind, an object marked by an authority willing to manifest their doctrines behind locked doors, yet under the protective cover of false pretension. What is left of a girl without a name, a Jane Doe, with the exception of being alive, punished by separation from society, locked behind closed doors.

I was told by Mother Superior to wait in the entry hall to be picked up by a sister who would take me to the place for newcomers.

In order to get there, we left through the back door and crossed the premises where I could count several more buildings in visible distance to each other, connected by well-groomed walk ways shadowed by huge trees.

On our way I was told to read the regulation sheet thoroughly, handed to me by Mother Superior, several pages depicting the house rules of Forest Home. I did not listen to the same advise already admonished by the social worker, my attention was focused on the large ring where several keys lined up by length gave away a certain rattle to each of her steps, a similar noise I had noticed before when meeting the first sister.

During my entire time within Forest Home, being rotated around several “Stations” (buildings) my fear only was connected with the key chains, the miracle weapon against my personal freedom, resistant to expressions of personal feelings. Many times I would dare to verbal disagreement about unfair punishment to other girls or

to myself, the proof of my unbroken spirit while accepting the punishment of utter silence behind a locked door, not knowing when I would be released again to the group.

One of the keys had opened the door to the building where new arrivals, so called “gefallene Mädchen” (bad girls) had to start a new life away from civilization, yet becoming civilized by obeying rules they were told. Rules of former discipline and order I already had lived by as demand of my father.

The sister took my small suitcase away from me and opened the door to the “workroom” where I faced girls different of age placed along the wall, sitting on a chair, forming a circle. Each of them was wearing a similar looking grey outfit, an oversized dress almost touching their same colored slippers made of felt. About thirty girls just looked at me without saying a word while being occupied with different hand craft. Only their eyes revealed individual emotions and questions I only could imagine.

Inside the circle, placed in the center of the room, an oval shaped table was occupied by two sisters on either end, resembling the appearance of the others I already had met. I felt like being mustered by them from top to toe above the rim of their glasses, and I knew that my reaction by showing a smile would be the wrong timing while being introduced to the group as: 830.

One of the two sisters pointed to the empty chair next to her while asking if I was familiar with needle work, being able to embroider my number 830 onto labels sewn into the cloth I would have to wear, my grey institutional clothing.

At school I always had performed well during needle work class and therefore capable of fulfilling the task. It was an awkward situation sensing the curious looks of some girls while sitting next to a sister with watchful and observing eyes towards the group, plus observing the result of my work. She seemed to be satisfied, nodded her head and said: “Gut so.” – (ok).

On my first afternoon in Forest Home I embroidered 830 numerous times with red thread onto a small white ribbon to be cut into labels.

Sometimes in between my work, I would look around without turning my head, trying to read bottled up emotions behind seemingly sad and voiceless faces. Nobody talked, yet conversed with their eyes, and sometimes one could hear a timid giggle to be silenced at once by the sharp reaction of a sister threatening punishment. Soon I learned about different kind of punishment connected with different kind of rules.

To be caught talking to each other during the day while working could mean to be excluded from meals or the group, locked up in your room alone with nothing to do but reading the Bible.

When I entered my room that very first evening I just was stunned by its interior: an iron bed, a chair, a metal washbowl filled with water on top a wooden console. A small towel with dark blue stripes, apparently cut from the same fabric that covered blanket and pillow upon my bed, was neatly hung over the metal bar connected to the right side of the console. The floor was made of wood, waxed and polished to a shine I never ever had achieved while working the stairway at home. A chamber pot, half visible to the eye while hidden below the bed, eliciting my very first smile that very day, a small relief to my jitters triggered by the vertical iron bars covering the outside of my small window.

I sat down on the chair, almost afraid of using the bed with its creaseless cover and thought about the girls who might have occupied this room before me, consequently sensing their pain and tears resulting from helplessness. Yes, I felt helpless, and like many moments before I thought of my grandfather's love, the only remedy that could ease my feelings. The same time I thought of Wulf and looked for the small suitcase, carrying my most important possession, my writing paper with matching envelopes, a few stamps and my fountain pen.

What had happened to my personal belongings? My first impulse was to ask the sister. I turned around and noticed the closed door behind me without detecting a door handle. In my amazement about the tiny room I had missed the sound of the turning key, locking my door from the outside.

For the first time I finally understood my father's threat. I was locked up in a tiny room, a cell where a locked door with missing inside door handle and a barred window would become a daily reminder of being a fallen girl.

What had I done to deserve such severe punishment? Why was I incarcerated like a prisoner, stripped of my identity, silenced like a free bird kept in a cage? In times like this I always could reach for the only remedy that would return my strength and willpower: Friederich, my grandpa, whose love and former teachings about the beauty of nature would let me forget my pain for a while.

That very first evening in Forest Home I promised myself to endure, even beat this kind of inhuman punishment with a spirit strengthened by the memory of a man with a wide-open heart for Love.

I still had remained on the chair thinking about my life, when dusk became changed by dark and the bare light bulb at the ceiling was turned on from the outside, spending just enough light to read the document listing the so called "house rules."

Again, I was overwhelmed by total disbelief about the dos and don'ts leaving no space for any personal freedom. Each day had a strict, regimental timing starting with the ring of the bell at 6am as a wakeup call.

A sister would walk along the long hall way unlocking the doors next to each other before she had switched off the bell. Besides waking up the girls, the bell was connected with each room, hindering anyone to leave without becoming detected. There was no snoozing left in the morning, one had to hurry to line up outside in

front of the door carrying the chamber pot while still wearing the institutional night gown.

The line would move slowly toward the end of the hall way where each chamber pot became controlled by a sister before one had to empty its contents into the only toilette located at our floor. After that, one had to hold the pot below the faucet to receive some water for rinsing, controlled again by the sister who made sure that nobody had used their pot for a bowel movement, otherwise one had to accept punishment. All chamber pots became piled up to be cleaned later by the girl assigned for duty and placed in front of each door with one's personal number pointed to the front.

Three times a day one could use the toilette, before breakfast, lunch and dinner, given each time three small pieces cut from an old newspaper.

All of the sudden the light went out, it must have been 8pm and I only had read part of the paper. This would be the last time wearing my own clothing; tomorrow I would look no different from all the others, dressed in a grey institutional uniform representing the reformatory, my future prison, blinding the ignorant public with its comforting name: Forest Home.

The window inside my room obviously had a different function to a regular one. Besides the bars, its location was high up at the wall, only to be reached by using the chair in order to take a closer look at the outside. When I had entered my room that evening, the small opening only gave view to some branches of a tree growing in front and I was ready to look at the entire picture. By using the chair as a ladder I was able to admire the huge tree with arms reaching out to the bars in front of my window like holding on to it. That very moment I had found the only friend who would interrupt some silent nights by stretching its branches through the bars, saying hello with its soft brush against the window, soothing my loneliness.

For a moment I felt content and disconnected from my worries while thinking of my grandfather who had introduced me to beauty I always had searched for and found during times of personal agony and despair. Before I laid down, my last view lingered for a while at the small wooden cross hung at the wall above my bed, its simplicity revealed by the moonlight.

It was still early, the time of day when people at the outside would enjoy the rest of their free time with varies entertainment, and my thoughts went back to a few days I had enjoyed myself together with other teenagers “At the Hop” dancing, talking enthusiastically about our musical heroes while gazing at the boys who never could compare to the one I loved. I started to wonder how Wulf could possibly react if he found out about myself being deprived of my freedom and distant from society for my own good, so to speak.

The public always had a certain image about a Reformatory as the place where bad kids would be sent to be reformed, children who had failed to obey the law or their parents, children who had ended up in the gutter. Knowing about the ignorant and prejudiced public opinion, Forest Home would haunt me for the rest of my life, no matter how the judgment about my person was based on controversial facts, unfair in my mind. Tomorrow I would write a detailed letter to Wulf about my father’s decisive action, it would make him understand without being judge mental.

The length of my staying at Forest Home was uncertain to me, based on the improvement of my character I was told, a reason to question myself if Wulf would wait for me until I become released, a question that would torture my mind that very night and in many more to come. Before I finally fell asleep I realized that my thoughts were free, untamable, undetectable, the only personal possession left to me.

The next morning the sound of the terrible bell with its jarring sound announced a new day to learn about the rules of Forest Home.

Still half asleep I stumbled out of bed and lined up outside holding my chamber pot in front of me after the door became unlocked, thinking about the dos and don'ts so far read. To watch everybody dressed in their oversized institutional nightgowns, holding their night bowls away from their bodies like one would hold a dead mouse, was actually a reason to laugh if it had not been such sad reality.

A chamber pot was nothing new to me since I was a little girl, able to walk, sharing my parents' bedroom. Every night my father picked it up from underneath his side of the bed and placed it on the same spot it had been put the night before, in front of the small crease separating their two beds. Sometimes I would talk, half asleep while using the chamber pot, enabling my father to ask all sorts of questions, consequently revealing negative or positive things I had done or not done. And sometimes I would get punished for things I knew better not to do but unable to resist, wondering how my father could have found out.

Again, it was a sad picture to watch some girls still half asleep, carrying their pots with one hand while using the other to free their face from a few strands of untamed hair. It took a while to overcome the shame I endured each morning while walking the line to the end of the hall way, where a sister would make or ruin my day, depending on the contents of my chamber pot.

After my pot was controlled and piled up with the others, I was handed a bucket filled with water, a floor and dusting cloth for cleaning my room, an everyday routine I would get used to. The document had especially pointed out to be thorough about the job, a sister would do daily rounds, checking the cleanliness of one's room while using a glove.

This chore was nothing new to me either, having cleaned our kitchen, bedroom and stairwell at home controlled by the watchful eyes of my father, already had taught me to give it my all in order to avoid punishment. I did not mind crawling underneath

the bed in order to reach each corner, and I did not mind to clean myself afterwards with a small washcloth while standing naked in front of the small washbowl filled with cold water, come summer or winter.

My worries were connected with the moment a rattling key chain would announce the sister on her way to my room, and the noise of all different key chains would develop a phobia still appearing in nightmares. It was the second day and I remembered having exactly one hour for cleaning the room and myself, plus getting dressed before the sister would open the door to let us out.

This time we had to line up two girls next to each other, dressed in our institutional clothing, guarded by two sisters, one in the front and the other at the end. Somehow it was a similar scenario to soldiers marching on their way to their exercise, guarded by two sergeants. Our group resembled the same regimental behavior without an enthusiastic song coming from our lips and wooden shoes on our feet. We were accompanied by utter silence, a silence that unleashes physical pain after days and days of endurance.

We had crossed the premises and walked towards a small wooden building considered "The Chapel" to participate at the daily worship, held each morning by Mother Superior at 7am. Several groups from different stations already gathered in front the door still locked, showing a nosy interest towards us newcomers while waiting for the House Mother to unlock the building.

It seemed like each moment of the day was connected with a certain rule, and this time it was ours to become incorporated into the group, to be the last to enter, to be seated in the first row. The Chapel was furnished with long wooden benches placed in the middle with just enough space to sit without the comfort of a backrest.

This time the sisters used the chairs lined up against the wall on either side of the benches in order to overlook the rows and check on us girls.

Altogether Forest Home had so called 150 inmates, girls of various ages and of various backgrounds.

Some of us were orphans, pushed around from one family to another, consequently ending up with the wrong people. Some had committed a petty crime without being given a second chance. Some older girls had become influenced by the wrong person, helplessly ending up in the gutter. And a few of us just unlucky by having picked the wrong parents, altogether a reason to be locked up behind bars, to become reformed?

Reformed by sisters who were chosen or had decided to be chosen to rescue lost young souls with the two words: discipline and order, without realizing that those two words were once idealized by people wearing the same colored clothing, reforming by exchanging identities with numbers, killing behind fences without knowledge to the public.

We did not have to face the ultimate punishment, we only got robbed of our chances to develop a brilliant mind or explore the hidden gifts inside of us. Only a few of us had a future chance in life, only the strong ones who did not accept the daily brainwash while afraid of punishment, punishment covered up by The Holy Book, The Bible.

In the beginning of my stay in Forest Home my feelings about the Sisters became based on my imaginative connection to their dedication, I respected them because of the idealistic conviction to help wherever needed, an important principle based on their holy order. After a time of effortless tries to elicit at least a smile from their faces which automatically would influence and change their inflexibility, my opinion towards sisters with the image of virgin living did not balance their attitude towards young people who needed help instead of receiving punishment.

To live with my new acknowledgement helped to ease my frustration, made it much easier to endure their daily brainwash and