Great Barrier Island

Dear Cousin Constance,

What a surprise it was to receive your letter, and after such a long time. It must be over sixty years, if my calculation is correct, since I last saw you. You have, without a doubt, managed to dredge up shadowed memories for me, and I don't know if I should thank you for that. It is a strange feeling I have in replying to your letter. I have become that child again who stands in some kind of trepidation, looking over the back fence into a world of forbidden territory, wondering if he dares to climb over.

I think the last time I saw you was on Uncle Lewis's farm. I see you now as you were then, perched on the end of the kitchen table, reading to me something you had written – a poem if I remember – I see your sunburnt arms and thighs, and me trying to embrace you and you pushing me away, and all the time the blowflies swarmed over the window, and the sticky twist of the fly papers hanging from the ceiling; the heat of that hot summer afternoon. I see it clearly.

I see the farm with the hills rising above the old house. I see the blackened tree stumps where once the broadleaf forest grew; the matagouri and the clay tracks where the lean black and white cattle wandered. I see the corrugated iron shed where the harnesses were hung; the barn where the summer hay was pitched from the horse-drawn cart and stored for the winter months; the autumn ritual of working the east head where the cocksfoot grass grew wild on the hills.

I can see Uncle Lewis, his sickle honed to a razor sharpness, moving up the slope cutting the long seeded grass into sheaves, and laying them down to be picked up later for the threshing. I can hear the crisp cut of the sickle blade as I follow him. Then later the threshing with hand-wielded flails made of manuka poles and twisted number eight wire; the winnowing drift of the husks in the summer wind and the falling seed gathering on the canvas sheet; the cool shade of the karaka trees where we stopped and rested for

smoko and lunch; the smokey taste of the sweet billied tea and the oatmeal water and the slices of rich fruit cake the women and girls brought up from the valley below. And then the long weary walk home along the ridge following the horse-drawn sledge carrying the sacks of seed down to the valley.

In your letter you say you are trying to write a family history, and are wondering if I can help you. And you profess an interest in genealogy, and you are wondering how to begin. I don't know which particular family you are interested in. Bear in mind that what we are at present is a random result of many complex begettings that began a long time ago. I wish you the best of luck.

You say you are not sure where you should start. One way to start would be from the beginning, if you know where that is. I have always regarded genealogical research to be the preserve of those who find their present circumstances to be less tolerable than an excursion into a fanciful past. And by so doing somehow escape the godforsaken turmoil of the present.

You ask me about my origins and how I came to be living on this island. I suppose it began with my parents indulging in the two-backed beast, and their forebears before them, and on and on until you can go no further backwards.

You are asking me to dig into the midden of my memories and rake through the rubble that's been a long time buried. You want me to concentrate on a past that really demanded an annihilation of the need for recall. You ask me to break into that sanctuary, into that silence, and live again that which was best forgotten. In fact what you are asking me is that I become an archaeologist in the dunghill of my memory.

Where to begin? It must have started away back in that remote time when our great-great-grandmother of a hundred and sixty thousand generations ago stepped down from her tree and ambled inquisitively across the savannah with her sisters, thumbing her nose at nature and thinking that trees were for the birds. And then the storm clouds gathered.

I believe that is how it began, or something like it. We are the descendants of a mother whose genes got into a prepubescent state of chaos when she ambled across the savannah during a thunderstorm. What a fateful day that was for the planet. Which brings me to the conclusion that we are all cousins under the sun; burnt with, and scarred by, the same flash of lightning.

That may be so. However, I gather you are more interested in the immediate past that can be authenticated by reference to files of microfiche and the musty records of church and state. You should begin there. But at the same time, have a thought for those of our forbears who lived and strived before records began. Think of those fur-clad savages who settled in villages on the banks of rivers and the coasts in Northern Europe.

It was in Northern Europe where an element of my being originated. If you go to a small town north of Hamburg and enter the Lutheran church in Bad Bramstedt, you will see on the clerestory, commemorative plaques honouring soldiers of the town who died in the Great War. The name Westphal appears several times. This is the name of my mother's family. Her great grandfather had sailed from Hamburg on the *Skiold* in 1843, and arrived in Nelson the same year. He was one of seventy or so German settlers who, under the aegis of the New Zealand Company, settled in the Upper Moutere.

What desperation, and what dreams sustained those migrants, as they began their arduous journey to the far end of the earth. They had embarked on a journey that was to take them far from the rural poverty of Northern Germany. The dream that sustained them, as they endured three months of a cramped and storm-tossed passage, was the belief that ahead lay the promise of a new land; the land of opportunity as promised by the agent of the New Zealand Company. The company had been established in London by Edward Gibbon Wakefield, one of those early opportunists whose aim it was to make capital from the exploitation of land in the new colony. When the settlers arrived in Nelson they found they had no title to the land promised them. Many, disillusioned by the chicanery of the company, departed for Adelaide, hoping to find there that which had been denied them in Nelson.

Those who stayed in Nelson eventually became part of a rural scene which was undergoing dramatic change. They joined with men and women from the English shires and Irish downs, felling the forests and burning all that stood before them; making the land bare, thus flooding the rivers and browning the sea with the silt of the land. Thousands of years of an isolated world fell victim to the axe and saw and fire. Grass seed was sown and another shade of green dominated the hills and valleys. The process of the transplantation of Europe to an antipodean landscape had begun.

These were the pioneers, the doughty trailblazers who, for reasons of survival and gain, were determined to transform a wilderness of unproductive forest into a land of pasture fit for the grazing of sheep and cattle. Primeval giants fell to grassed paddocks and barbed wire.

In Nelson the climate was kind; the crops flourished and the cattle and sheep multiplied. After the serfdom of Germany, the rural poverty and exploitation by large landowners, the settlers with a will to survive and multiply became as much a part of the landscape as their English and Irish neighbours. Old languages were put aside, habits changed and the country of their origin was only vaguely remembered.

The new land absorbed them. The fact that the soil they worked had been acquired in much the same way as the crown jewels of England had been obtained, did not dissuade them from thanking God for their newly achieved bounty. The seeds of a new nation had been sown. It still remained for the mores of the new society to be established.

With the settlers came the acolytes of Calvin and Luther, Knox and Wesley. There came the parsons and priests and the holy symbols from England and Europe. The churches were built and the foundations were laid for a system of government.

And while all this was taking place, other dramas involving land ownership were being acted out. The Maori, who had preceded the new settlers by a thousand years, was fast losing the tenure of his ancestral rights. His mana was being destroyed, and his beliefs in a

sustaining relationship with nature were being undermined by the missionaries of a new God, who favoured the lash, the bullet and the cannon.

And so, Cousin Constance, here is a beginning for you. It may not be the kind of beginning you were seeking. Quite frankly, I am not greatly interested in your project. To put it simply for you, I see little point in an inverted pyramid of names which tells me nothing about the kind of people those names are attached to. I am the wrong person to give you the information you seek. You need somebody who can peer backwards into the legitimate begettings of the forbears and the begettings of their issue and so on until you reach the end of the whole comic mess, but as I said before, I do wish you the best of luck.

Great Barrier Island

Dear Constance,

Your letter arrived the other day. I think you may be correct when you say that I have a tendency to misanthropy. I don't regard that as being too much of a sin, when one considers the human condition in all its contradictory aspects. I fear that it is too late for me to seek an anodyne to assuage the condition as I see it.

These days I find the small pleasures the most rewarding. For instance, today has been a day for watching the birds that visit me. They come in answer to my whistle; their reward for heeding it, a few pieces of bread tossed onto the lawn.

There is a family of banded rail, shy and secretive, who dart out from the scrub and long grass, the parent birds picking up a morsel and racing back to their sooty black chicks.

A speckle-breasted thrush perches precariously on my windowsill, cocking its head from side to side eyeing me with suspicion, always alert to the threat of danger. It finally takes a beakful from my hand and flies off into the tall trees beyond the stream. Somewhere in the branches above, it has a nest and young to feed.

In the pohutukawa are two wood pigeons, lovers in the high branches with no interest in my offerings, and too aloof to come down to my level. A flock of kakas, screeching and wheeling high above the garden wait for the fruit on the pear and apple trees to ripen.

There are the mynas, those migrants from a far continent, who scavenge on the outskirts, always alert to danger, and numerous enough to be a threat to our indigenous birds. Like us, they are the migrant invaders.

As everywhere, there are the sparrows, the feathered mice, picking up the leftovers, too numerous to count or identify separately. They are the avian masses and are under no threat of extinction. They,

like the mynas, are the adaptable ones.

The cock chaffinch who came throughout the winter months no longer visits. I can only wonder what has happened to him. I spend time with them all, trying to understand their so different lives. With them, I escape for a while from my everyday cares. I try to enter their world and by so doing, I think that I can better understand my own.

In your letter you ask me so many pertinent questions that would be difficult to answer truthfully. Mainly because in answering, there would inevitably be so much left out. The omissions might be of more importance than the answers actually given. This letter then may convey to you an inkling of what the years have been like for me, and by outlining those years, answer some of your questions with, of course, selective omissions.

Memories of my early years seem to pass fleetingly like shadows behind the reality which is the present. I remember when I was about three years old, standing with my ear pressed to a wooden telegraph pole listening to the wires singing overhead, and my father saying that if I listened carefully I would hear the voice of my mother. I didn't know then that she had died in childbirth. There may have been some cruel irony in the game he played with me, but I prefer to think that he missed her more consciously than I did, and that if I heard her voice, then he would hear it too.

I don't remember my mother. Whatever passed between us in that brief time until the birth of my brother has gone. One reminder I have is a faded photograph of a tall slender woman leaning shyly against a boulder on a South Canterbury coast.

I began my schooling in Timaru, the town where I was born. What little I remember of it has never encouraged me to return there. Looking back, I see it now as a town like other provincial towns of the day, as being severely restrained by a stern Bible-dominated hierarchy. Churches of every denomination abounded and all good citizens obeyed the stern dictates of St Paul. A sad puritanism prevailed upon most of the people. It certainly lay heavily upon me.

School was another introduction to conformity. It was said by the elders who guided us, that the best way to get along was by not kicking against the pricks. Those who stepped out of line were severely dealt with. We were a bunch of skinny-legged kids constantly on guard lest we be found out for some misdemeanour. We assembled every morning for prayers, followed by saluting of the flag before being marched soldier-like into classrooms where we sat with our slabs of slate and after good mornings to "sir", set about with our slate pencils and copied what "sir" had written on the blackboard. The screeching sound of the pencil being drawn across the slate at the wrong angle can, when remembered, still set my teeth on edge.

I don't remember when we started using pen and ink for our work, but memory of the desks with the lift up lids and the inkwells set in a hole on top, and under the lids the scrawl and carvings of previous pupils, comes back to me. There were the pens with the sharp nibs which could dig into the paper and which were used by some of the more masochistic and daring of the boys to tattoo themselves.

I think that any personal development that took place for me during those years was not because of what the education system had to offer, but rather in spite of it. The seeds of rebellion were sown in those formative years by the very people who were intent of making a good citizen of me: They may have failed in what they had set out to do. However I am grateful for some of the tools they provided me with.

Yes, Cousin, all that may be so. I am looking back over seventy years but who can say that I don't remember it clearly.

You may not remember your Uncle Alexander, the poor drunkard, the man who married my mother's sister. We were visiting one day at his home. My brother and I were playing in the back yard. We threw stones on the roof and our uncle rushed out the back door, his face covered in white lather brandishing a cut-throat razor, and screaming obscenities. My brother and I ran like cowards who, in perilous emergency, think with their legs. I tell you about this episode because it may give you some idea what it was like to be

born and raised in Timaru. The event was another ingredient in my education.

The Great Depression had begun and the spectre of poverty moved like an obscenity over the land. It was a dark force that seeped into our home. The time for real survival was upon us. Whereas in the past it was possible to stay just ahead of poverty, by the means of wages from my father's job, now was the time to experience real hunger.

I remember going to buy a pound of potatoes from the green-grocer, and when I took them home it was found that there was half a pound of soil in the bottom of the bag. I remember the chagrin I felt when I had to take them back. I suppose even green- grocers in those days had to make a living as best they could.

However, it was possible to escape from the poverty that had entered our lives. Caroline Bay, where the grey green ocean stretched forever, told us that there was a world outside the confines of our backyard. We would join with the sea birds on windy days and wander to the small port beyond the breakwater. And flowers grew in the gardens below the cliff.

Before my father lost his job and the car that went with it, it was possible at weekends to travel out into the countryside. I can feel the warm nor'west days when the air was rich and drowsy with the sharp smell of the summer blue gums, and the soft grass on the hillsides where we stopped to have our picnic while my father fished the Pareora river.

There were the visits to distant relations who lived on farms. And there were girls with freckle-faces who led me into haybarns, dusty with the harvest of last seasons mowings; the play of children who in their play lost the innocence they were supposed to possess.

There was cake and biscuits for afternoon tea in the kitchen with the grown-ups while the flies buzzed away the hot afternoon. Then the return to Timaru town and the smell of melted tar on the pavement outside our home. There was a sadness in the return. The freedom had been brief and I was alone again in my room,

thinking about the girls in the hay-barn.

Early in the 1930's we moved to Christchurch where we rented a house in the suburb of Linwood. My father was now on a work scheme devised by the Prime Minister of the day who, for a pittance of pay, had the unemployed engaged in soul-destroying work in the belief that no one should be helped who would not work.

We stayed in that house until we were moved on by the bailiff, who over the next few years became our most regular visitor as we moved from house to house. Each move saw other items of our furniture finding their way into second-hand shops, and each move was more easily accomplished than the previous one, as our possessions diminished. Kerosene boxes replaced chests of drawers; pictures disappeared from the walls, and wardrobes made way for curtained recesses. We had become impoverished suburban nomads.

Every week we queued for handouts of white bread and golden syrup and the odd pound of butter. The hospital board had been assigned this task to help the needy; the thinking being that it was better to dole out something to the half-starved than have them die in the streets.

There was a bacon factory called Kincaids, where for sixpence we could buy a bag of pork bones. Although most of the meat had been trimmed off them, they were regarded as a weekly treat. Specked fruit could occasionally be had at the greengrocers and once the rotten parts were trimmed away, we could have a fruit salad.

My father's first task when we moved to another place was to dig up a patch of garden and sow it in vegetables. Many good sowings were abandoned when we moved on. There were days when he cycled to New Brighton and fished off the pier. I suppose, when looking back, that we fared better than some, due no doubt to my father's industry.

At Christmas we lined up with other kids and their parents for the yearly hand-out of toys and tinsel. I remember the sweet smiles of the middle-class church ladies as they handed out largesse to the

ragged-arsed urchins. Most of the toys were made of tin and fell apart before the season was over. The toys somehow symbolised the state of the country which was falling apart and was seemingly beyond repair. While the state was slipping further into the chaos it had created, and seemed powerless to stop, the church was endeavouring to pick up the pieces by offering their succour in lieu of government failure.

While my brother and I were only on the fringes of what had happened, and were only vaguely aware of our family circumstances, our parents shouldered the real burden. After all, we had been raised during the period of collapse and had accepted it as the norm. My father, however, became more and more bitter, and that bitterness manifested itself in a cruel act that was to affect my brother and me for a long time to come.

The school we were attending at the time was holding a fancy-dress party, and our father decided that we should go as swaggers. He dressed us in rags, complete with bowyangs on our trousers, and swags on our backs with a billy and a frying pan. We dared not disobey him for fear of retribution by way of his malacca cane. When we entered the hall we were greeted by jeers and laughter. It was a hateful time. That experience engendered in me a festering rebellion that was not to manifest itself until many years later.

Well, Cousin, I don't know if this is of any use to you. Some of it, however, may give you pause to think that you were perhaps more fortunate. I am curious to know how you fared during that dark period which still haunts me after all these years.

Dear Cousin,

Yes, indeed, I have told you a great deal more than you asked for. However, having started I feel a compulsion to continue, if only to set into some kind of perspective the whole crazy pattern of my existence. I find myself digging up a past that should have been destined for demise. If after this letter I don't hear from you, that will be the end of it.

My schooling continued at Christchurch East School. It was there that I came in contact with other kids whose family privations were similar to mine. They were tough kids whose circumstances had made them into little gangsters. That some of them graduated to become adult criminals shouldn't be wondered at. Whatever privilege or position their parents had enjoyed in the past had been ruthlessly taken from them by the foibles of a system gone wrong. The children inherited some of that bitterness and distrust that was felt. Where the state had failed in terms of equality for its people, some of those kids became adept at acquiring other people's property, and careless of the consequences, set about their own kind of equity of distribution.

There was a desperation in that school with its asphalted playgrounds and grey stone buildings. There was little joy to be had from the stern discipline of the teachers, who, although they had employment, no doubt suffered from the climate of the day also.

However, it was possible to escape from the grey winter of those days. Our spirits lifted when at weekends my brother and I set out to walk the miles to the Port Hills. Once we had run the gauntlet of the suburban streets, and fought off the odd encounter with belligerent kids when we passed through their territory, there were the open hills and valleys for us to explore. There was a wonderful sense of freedom on those grassy slopes that rolled down to the vast open plains below. And beyond the plains on a good day, there was the outline of snow-topped mountains. By climbing above the smokey haze of the city we entered another world. It was a world

that sustained us, and through our involvement with it, we could never be destroyed by the ugliness we had left down below.

About this time I was making crystal sets from bits and pieces scrounged from rubbish dumps or from more affluent friends. On the hills we climbed I slung antennae from trees and rock outcrops and tuned into music and voices coming like magic from the open skies. There was Uncle Scrim speaking into my headphones, spreading his message of hope to the people. I wonder what happened to all those words that came down the wire through the coil and the crystal. I wonder about all the transients that visited us and went as quickly as they came.

By now we had reached the age when we could ride bicycles. From the rubbish dump and from the bottom of the Avon river we were able to find bits and pieces of discarded machines. We found wheels and frames, handle bars and chains which we assembled in the washhouse at the back door. We were rewarded for skinned knuckles and much grease by having a "bitzer" ready for the streets. Christchurch with its vast flatness was an ideal place to push a bike, excepting when a nor'wester was blowing and one had to ride against it. There were days when we were aided by precariously hanging onto the back of a bus, careering along in the partial vacuum the bus created. That we weren't injured or killed tempts me to believe that there was some God looking after us.

Hagley Park and the river Avon were extensions to our backyard. Mobility had given us wings and at every opportunity we were away and out of the confines of our home. We became explorers in the bigger world outside. Dark and hidden places held a fascination for me. Why, I do not know. There were abandoned houses and the overgrown remains of orchards where we raided the trees of their fruits; the sheds with sad reminders that once upon a time someone cared. In the park there were the piss-smelling dunnies where old men exposed themselves to us and gave us sixpence if we would look and not tell anyone.

We were growing up. We were being exposed to a wider world. Childhood was slipping behind us, and all too soon we were being prepared for adulthood. The old men in the park were living dark

shadows of a puritan underworld that we would need to adjust to.

I obtained a bursary that allowed me to attend West Christchurch High School. Somehow my parents managed to scrape up enough money to buy my uniform. How they managed this I will never know, for although my father was no longer on relief work, and had been granted a small pension for injuries he suffered in the World War, we were still a poor family. The only item of clothing that didn't conform to the standard was an overcoat made of a heavy material that hung on my thin body like a brown shroud. For this reason I wore it only on the coldest days. It was on one such day when we were watching a football match, that a Jewish boy in an upper form came up to me and between his fingers like a London tailor felt the cloth and remarked that it was good but the fit was somewhat gross. Again I suffered the shame of the poor boy whose parents had done their best for him.

In my first year at the school I became ill. It was discovered that I had contracted bovine tuberculosis from contaminated milk. There followed a year of being in and out of hospital with excursions on trolleys down long corridors and into operating theatres under domes of white lights until the mask with the sweet smelling chloroform turned them off. Then waking into a nightmare of green vomit.

A year of painful surgery replaced lessons in Latin and French. I had exchanged a classroom for a ward where old men masturbated under the sheets and groaned all night. It was a time of scars and stitches and midnight loneliness; the giddy weakness and pain of the first day out of bed.

A long period of convalescence followed. My father by this time had acquired a Harley Davidson motorbike fitted with a long wooden box. One day, not long after I left hospital, he packed it with food and a few things to wear, and with me tucked into the back he set off for O'Kains Bay on Banks Peninsula. We rented a small cottage adjacent to my Uncle Lewis's homestead, and it was there that I was to enjoy wonderful days of recovery.

That summer was to be the beginning for me of another way of

living that had nothing to do with suburban streets and concrete paths. I set about exploring another world of forest and sea coast. There were remnants of the original bush still growing in the valleys where I found trees so different from the eucalypts and macrocarpas I had known previously. I wandered under the canopy of tall trees, pushing my way through bush lawyer and supple-jack, finding the native fuchsia and eating konini berries, playing with long strips from the lace-bark tree, and my only companions a few bellbirds that had survived the onslaught to their habitat. Being there was to be in nature's cathedral; so quiet, so peaceful that the spirits must rise and be one with all spirits.

There was the sea and the rock pools where I gathered paua and polished the shells in search of their wonderful iridescent colour. And on the days when he wasn't working, there was Uncle Lewis's large clinker boat with the two of us rowing out to the east heads where we set nets for butterfish close into the kelp thronged rocks; then fishing with lines for red cod, ling and silver trumpeter.

There were the cowyards where I leaned on post and rail fences watching the milking, breathing in the strong smell of cow shit and piss. Then afterwards, going on the back of the lorry with the churns to the cheese factory, where men with bare arms were stirring the great vats of curds. There were jokes about the effect of human sweat on the cheese product and about the men who sweated.

Across the road from the factory there was an old wooden store where the farmers gathered after delivering their milk. Here they would yarn the rest of the morning away. The store was owned by two brothers who drove an old Model T Ford each week to pick up stores from the wharf. The goods were shipped from Lyttleton on board the *John Anderson* which was built by an engineering firm of the same name. Each week the old truck would make its way over the narrow cliff road, needing, in one place where the gradient was steeper, to turn around and go in reverse. It seemed that the reverse gear had a lower ratio enabling it to climb the hill.

Like some other aspects of human endeavour, it is necessary at times to stop and go backwards in order to get to a destination.

And very soon I would have to go backwards; back to Christchurch and school. I think that I might have been very fortunate in falling ill, for it meant that I was able to be acquainted with a reality beyond city life. I will ever remain grateful; not to the cows who festered my body but to my great-uncle who showed me another way.

Returning to school was an anti-climax. The adjustment to the regular routine of getting out of bed, cycling to the other end of town, and sitting down to lessons was difficult. I still had a bursary which could have carried me on to university, but there was in me a strong desire to get out into the big world. Having escaped death from my illness by the slightest degree, I was determined to show that I was not a puny sick person. I had vowed when lying in that hospital bed that if I recovered I was going to live life to the full. I had made a promise to whatever gods there might be, I was going to keep that promise.

A great change had taken place in the politics of the country. The Forbes/Coates coalition had been defeated, and Michael Joseph Savage was to introduce his formula for social justice. The gloom was lifting, and across the land the workless and downtrodden were rejoicing in the promise of things to come.

I left school after another year of confusion and doubt. I had lost the will to continue with any academic pursuit. I left that school with no qualification, a fact, I confess, that I have regretted many times since.

Dear Constance,

Thank you for your letter, and the kind words. Yes I will continue to write, if only to bring you up to date with the present as it affects me. I know this has bugger-all to do with your family tree, but good luck with that project.

At home we were still poor although my father's pension had been slightly increased. I found a job as a message boy in a small electrical contracting firm, and altruistically I thought I could supplement the family's meagre budget.

The firm had a small radio workshop operated by a farmer's son from South Canterbury, and it was here that I was able to pick up the rudiments of a trade that was to be one of the means by which I would earn a living over the coming years. I was given all sorts of odd jobs to do, one of which was to paint the roof of the establishment. Although it was a small firm, its roof appeared vast after the first few hours of painting. I thought I could speed up the job by pouring the paint along the ridge and chasing it down with the brush before it reached the guttering. This method seemed to work, because the paint was disappearing fast. I went down the ladder and asked the boss for some more paint. There was something in the look he gave me that told me then that my method was faulty.

He climbed the ladder, and when he reached into the guttering, his fingers found the paint which should have been on the roof. He held out his fingers and looked down at me. He didn't say a word, but went and found some more paint. I finished that roof in the conventional way, but ever since I have avoided any further contact with paint.

World War II had started in Europe and it immediately became an opportunity for many men to enlist and get away from the drab existence of their lives. Once again, men were to be sustained by an imagined freedom. It says a great deal about the society we had, when young men could place their faith in a war machine. What

was denied in peacetime was thought, paradoxically, to be found in militarism. I enlisted in the Territorial Army. I was seventeen years old. The scars and effects of my illness were healed and I passed the medical exam.

For the next three months, I took part in the mindless exercises organised by men who had made a career of army life. They were the officers and sergeants who screamed orders across the desert of the parade ground. I became physically strong; I learned to drink beer with my mates. I was a soldier in uniform for no other reason than that I had no desire to conform to a pattern of civilian life.

I decided to apply to go into the Air Force. The application required parental consent, no doubt to confirm that they had no objection to their son becoming a target for the enemy. It was then that I learned that the woman I had called Mum all those years was in fact my mother's sister. She broke down and cried when she told me. I don't know what my parents had hoped to achieve by concealing the truth from me all that time. Strangely, the revelation came as no surprise to me. It was as if it was merely a confirmation of what I had instinctively known all the time.

However, I didn't get into the Air Force. I didn't have the formal education required. It was to be the first of many regrets that I was to have over the coming years.

Another person I knew at the time didn't get into the force either. but for very different reasons. He was my Bible class leader, an earnest young man several years my senior. His medical examination revealed that he was suffering from tuberculosis. He was ordered to a sanatorium on the Cashmere Hills, but that afternoon he blew his head off in his mother's bathroom with a double-barrelled shot gun.

I don't think that I ever believed in a benevolent and caring God, but I know that my friend did. I suppose he had every right to do for himself that which the enemy may have done in less comfortable surroundings.

Whatever else that episode did for me, it banished for all time my

involvement with a church that had been a part of my life from the beginning. I don't think I was ever whole-heartedly a good Christian. The attendance at Sunday school and church was a dictate from our parents that we dared not disobey. Although I had put Presbyterianism behind me and set off on another course, the influence the church had on me could not be entirely eradicated. I have probably carried some of the edicts of old St. Paul with me ever since.

I set out to face the world very much alone. I changed jobs at will, always hoping that in the next one I would find that intangible quality that I couldn't put form to. I don't know what was missing in all those jobs, but whatever it was, I didn't believe that I would ever find it. What was missing had a great deal to do with freedom, or the lack of it.

Thus began my wandering. The search was on for that intangible substance that lies at the back of all ambition. In my case ambition had nothing to do with the acquisition of wealth and position. I was to become something of a vagabond, an unanchored wanderer. I was still living at home listening to the exhortations of my father to "settle down boy and get a good job".

At about this time a friendship developed with a unique person, who, like myself, was kicking against the pricks. Like myself, he was trying desperately to find somewhere where he could belong. We had met briefly at high school, where he stood out as a very odd person, nearly always offside with the masters, and with few friends among the pupils. I suppose that made two of us in that school, but unlike me he had stayed on and matriculated. He was the only son of a country parson and had grown to rebel against everything his father and the church stood for.

He had a room in St. Elmo Court, a large block of flats and rooms in the centre of town. I remember calling on him one frosty winter morning and finding him shivering in front of a gas ring, on which was sitting a glowing empty fruit tin. He was stitching together a pair of shoes that he had cut from a sheet of leather. His feet were so large and splayed-out that he had great difficulty in finding shoes to fit. He also made his own coats and trousers, the cut of

which accentuated his tall and angular frame.

I mention him because he was the only friend I had in those days, and because there was a similarity in our personalities. At the time he was working as a night porter at the Working Men's Club, a job that he despised as much as he despised himself for taking it. He suffered it as one might have worn a hair shirt as expiation for some imagined transgression. The influence of his upbringing was not, in spite of his rebellion, far beneath the surface.

We would walk for miles through the park and along the river side. We would lie on the grassy banks and eye, with all the longing of youth, the girls who wandered by.

Strange people seemed to gravitate to my friend during that period. Because he stood out as being distinctly different to the average person, both in appearance and manner, there seemed to be some magnetic quality that attracted an odd assortment of characters to him, and him to them. I know that the assuaging of loneliness in all of us makes us choose strange companions at times.

One such association was to do with an antique dealer who had a shop in the centre of Christchurch. My friend and I would visit the shop, taking pleasure in wandering through the creations of an ancient craft, admiring the beautiful cabinets and breathing in the patina of waxed surfaces and the splendid woods they were made from.

One day the dealer asked me to visit him at his home on the bank of the Avon river, where he lived with his aged mother. When I arrived, I was shown into a lavishly furnished living room. There was something about that room; had I been more worldly than I was, I would have known that the sybaritic atmosphere was a threat in itself. The aged mother left the room and I was alone with the antique dealer. He produced a bottle of gin. A little time later I was being embraced by him. Through the haze of the gin I struggled against him, only to find that he had picked me up and was carrying me to another room which was a bedroom. In spite of the strength of the man, I was able to break away and make a bolt for the front door. In a state of perilous emergency I thought again

with my legs.

I suppose I should have felt sorry for the poor fellow, and in a way I did. After all, he was only attempting to show in his own way how much he cared for me. The result of that episode meant that I never visited that antique shop again. When I told my friend about my experience he laughed and said that he too had been propositioned, but had never been to his house. I cursed him and decided to leave Christchurch.

My brother was living and working in Waiau in North Canterbury. He had a job in Rattray's grocers shop where he served behind the counter. It was an old wooden building and when you entered you were greeted by a rich smell of bacon and cheese and leather and all those things that made up the atmosphere of a country store of its day.

I found a job with the local baker, an easy-going man in his late forties. His wife found a room for me in their house which was alongside the bakery. I didn't mind the early morning rising and going out to mix dough and punch loaves into shape, for the companionship of the baker was congenial, and the heat of the ovens made up for the abandoned warmth of my bed.

When the baking was done we loaded the bread and buns into an old van and delivered them to outlying towns and farms. Then back to the bakery where we drank several glasses of a heady mixture the baker made of whisky and port wine. I think that part of the day was one of the most enjoyable interludes during that period of my life.

On some days we would go down to the river where the baker had a large plot of land that he was planting in native trees and shrubs. This was his main interest; the bakery merely the means to earn a living. All his spare time and money went into that reserve. One day I must go back and see if it is still there. I remember it as a wonderful, peaceful place.

I spent the rest of that summer in a bucolic state of well-being, at peace with my work and surroundings. It was easy to put to one

side the restlessness of spirit that had so bedevilled me for a long time. But beneath this state there emerged at odd times the question of where I was going and how long this state of acceptance would last. But overall, the question didn't have much force. I had found a freedom of sorts and there was no one to gainsay my decisions. There was only my brother, who at times must have wondered what I was about.

One night we wanted to go to a dance at Rotherham, a town about ten miles up country. We had no transport; owning a car or a motorbike was beyond our means. But there was a railway line, and there was a jigger on the side of the track by the station. We lifted it onto the rails and set off, taking turns in operating the lever that turned the wheels. We knew the timetable of the trains that used the line and we knew we were in no danger of being run down by an approaching train. I remember the sense of freedom that ride gave us as we jigged our way through the warm summer night, returning as the new day was breaking over the hills.

As winter approached I decided to leave Waiau and return to Christchurch where I had a girlfriend who had been asking when I was going to come back to her. The bucolic idyll gave way to the call of the flesh.

I found a room in a boarding house close to the Avon river, the river that had been such an important focus for me in the early years of my upbringing. It had flowed through the dark days of the depression years, bringing a freshness with its gentle waters and willow-graced banks.

Most of that time I was repairing radios in the city during the winter months, working for several firms in back room workshops. The landlady was a wonderful liberal person. I had secreted my girl up the stairs into my room, fearful that I would be discovered and ordered to leave. One evening, for some reason that I've forgotten, the landlady came into my room, and found me in bed with my girlfriend. She stood there a moment, than said, "Oh good", and left the room. From then on, all the time I stayed there, there was no need to be secretive.

When the summer came at the end of that long, cold, but sometimes warm winter, I packed a few clothes and books into a bag and set off into the country. Wherever I went, and it was mostly in Canterbury, I would take on whatever job was offering. During those years of recovery from the depression there were plenty of jobs to be had, and one could move from place to place without the fear of unemployment.

I milked cows and drove trucks; I pulled linen flax and made hay; I stooked wheat and drove tractors. I joined a gang of harvesting contractors who moved from farm to farm with their steam traction engine towing the threshing machine, the cookhouse and the sleeping quarters. In the field we would drive up to the wheat stack and unhitch the train. Then the engine would be set up with a great flapping belt from its flywheel onto the threshing machine. The sheaves of corn were tossed down into the belly of the thresher; chaff and dust being chuted out one side and the corn falling into sacks which were stitched by needle and thread when full. I remember the dust and the noise, and the heat of the autumn sun; the badinage of the men as they laboured; the breaks for smoko and the strong taste of well-brewed tea. There were the girls who came and flirted, enjoying their break from housework, and who were never there when they were really needed.

Sadly those days have long gone. That autumn was one of the last to see the traction engine and its train trundling over the paddocks. The combine harvester had been invented.

From all the rough and tumble of those days, I somehow emerged as a reasonably fit and strong person. There were times of rivalry and assertions of authority by men of the land toward the fellow from town who, in spite of his ability to do his share, was never fully accepted as one of them. The distance between them and myself was not to be bridged, and I know now that the impediment to a closer relationship was as much a part of my attitude as it was theirs.

Dear Cousin,

Yes, I suppose there was considerable variety in my life in those days. You are quite right when you say that I was leapfrogging all over the place.

They were the days of soaking up as much as the world could offer. I certainly didn't know where the hell I was headed. I was merely obeying a dictate that came from God knows where, to keep on looking.

Once again I volunteered to go into the army. After months of training at various camps I was ready with my mates to go into battle for king and country. By a stroke of misfortune, or was it sheer bloody luck, I broke my foot just before I was due to embark. After a period at a convalescent depot in Burnham, I was discharged as medically unfit. Later I thought that perhaps some guardian father was caring for me. The unit I was to join had later been almost wiped out in a battle at El Alemain.

There followed a series of events, too numerous to tell you about. There were jobs, girlfriends, movements most of which escape recall, and perhaps it's just as well. The search went on.

I enrolled at Canterbury University and attended evening classes, studying for a degree in electrical engineering. This had been the idea of one of my employers who believed that I had some potential if I applied myself. But my heart was not in it. After an unsatisfactory year, I gave it away.

From my early days at school I had displayed a talent for drawing. It was a talent that I had almost forgotten about during the years of wandering. One day, I thought I would further that ability by attending classes at the School of Fine Arts, also at Canterbury University. I studied under Colin Lovell-Smith, and was able, after three laborious months of drawing in charcoal and chalk, of plaster models of ears, eyes and noses from Greek statuary, to progress on

to drawing a complete head, while somewhere down the line I would be allowed to learn the technique of oil painting. It was a dry, cold experience; as dry and cold as the plaster casts I worked from. That one day I might graduate to painting a nude model was too far away for me. I couldn't wait that long.

In 1942 I caught a ferry at Lyttleton and travelled to Wellington, saying goodbye to Christchurch and all it had meant. Looking back, I felt forces trying tenaciously to hold me to my origins. My father wanted me to settle, telling me that I would never be any good until I did. He told me of all the chances I was missing. The chances in his mind were all the good jobs that could give me an easy living.

In Wellington I lived in a boarding house in Willis St. I shared a room with two other people, one of whom was to become a very good friend. The other I hardly saw, and didn't really know or see, except at night when he came in to sleep. But I do remember the stench of his feet when he removed his shoes.

The person who became a close and dear friend was a few years older than myself. He worked in the warehouse of a refrigeration firm. He was widely read and introduced me to the world of literature. That there was such a world had only vaguely been hinted at in my home in Christchurch. On the wall there had been a long picture of the English poets in a wooden frame, and on a shelf especially designed for them, were the leather-bound copies of the works of Shakespeare, which we were forbidden to touch.

I began to feast on the works of Flaubert and Maupassant, Rabelais and Boccaccio. Through Keith Horrocks, for that was his name, I discovered Thomas Wolfe and Sherwood Anderson. Many a good evening was spent with Keith "laughing and rocking in Rabelais's easy chair" as we read together passages from *Gargantua and Pantagruel.* The time spent with him was to be the opening for me into a whole new world.

Wellington, after Christchurch, was so mild that in that first year, I felt I was in a place of continual summer. The air was bracing and for the first time for a long while I felt wonderfully alive.

The city, rolling down the steep hills to the harbour, refreshed by almost constant winds, became easy to know. It was contained within its hills and had nowhere else to go. Close in were the wharves, and the ships from exotic lands tied almost to the streets themselves.

And to add excitement and colour to the city there were thousands of American servicemen. Wellington had become a recreational and supply depot for the war in the Pacific. The American presence had a profound effect on the social structure. With their high rates of pay and a favourable exchange, they were able to dominate the market in all fields. They could buy the affection of girlfriends and wives of New Zealand serviceman who were serving in other theatres of war. Because of this invasion of hearts, a great deal of animosity was directed toward them. Indiscriminate retribution was sought, and any man in a Yankee uniform was suspect.

This resentment climaxed in several street battles. I found myself inadvertently in the middle of one such battle. It had started in a service club in Manner's street. A mass of fighting bodies; sailors, marines and airmen of several countries spilled out of the wrecked club and into the street. I took refuge in a telephone box.

The real Wellington in 1943, which lay under the veneer of friendly invasion and the influence of war, was very much in the nineteenth century. The architecture and social mores belonged essentially to a colonial period. The effects of the great depression could still be seen in the working class districts. The economic recovery under the Labour government was apparent, however, and the added injection of American capital had vitalised the city. The energy of the country was directed toward the war effort in the belief that where England went we would follow. We had been caught up in what was essentially a European war. Policy dictated that we owed something to the mother country. It was a policy not to be challenged for many years. England still had a mewling infant tied to its skirt.

In the warehouse where Keith worked there was a woman office worker. Her name was Gerda Eichbaum. She was a refugee from Hitler's Europe; a Doctor of Philosophy; a woman fluent in many

languages. I didn't get to know her very well. We would greet each other whenever I called to see Keith but that was all.

There was a great incongruity in that place; a paradox of opposites. Surrounded by pieces of refrigeration machinery; conduits and gaskets and all the nuts and bolts of industry were two people strangely at odds with their surroundings.

Keith as a New Zealander, was no doubt better equipped to cope with the long hours of non-creative work, but Gerda must have found it fairly soul-destroying. How she adapted from an academic career was evidence, in my mind at least, that adaptation equates to survival.

The country had granted asylum to some who had been the victims of that unspeakable horror in Europe, at the same time protecting its prejudices and maintaining an isolationist policy. This attitude was expressed by our failure to recognise the worth and ability of the refugee.

And so a professor from Munich baked bread in his kitchen oven to sell to friends in order to survive in his new country. A doctor of medicine from Heidelberg washed and ironed clothes for rich women in Karori. A violinist from a Berlin Symphony joined a dance band and learned to play boogie-woogie.

However, although it was a time of irony and paradox, the country was awakening from a fretful dream. The last vestiges of a colonial past were slipping away, and people like Gerda Eichbaum were to contribute a great deal to the shape of the future.

To be in Wellington and to feel that change taking place was stimulus enough for one who had emerged from a severely restricted past. I felt that I was beginning to live at last.

I don't know how much this will mean to you, Cousin. I put it all down as I saw it at the time. I have started and I will continue to try and make some sense out of it all. And in so doing, I hope it will mean something to you also.

On fine weekends I would wander over the treeless hills behind Karori and make my way down to a wind-blown coast, where across Cook Strait, I could see the snow-capped ranges of the Kaikouras, and beyond the ranges, somewhere out of my vision lay the place of my birth and upbringing.

Sometimes I would cross the harbour by ferry to Eastbourne and walk through the Butterfly track to the Wainuiomata valley, and wander the road down to the coast picking blackberries along the way. Near the coast was an old homestead on the left-hand side, its front door wide open to reveal a load of shingle half as high as the ceiling, which had been washed down from the hills above. Following a heavy rain the avalanche must have ripped through the house carrying all before it. I wondered what it must have been like for the people who lived there at the time. It had long since been abandoned and blackberry had taken over what remained of the garden.

They were good days full of warm sunshine, and nearly always with a sense of well-being. I always went alone on those journeys, not needing anyone to share the experience. When one travels alone, one is not burdened by the impediment of company that each must adapt to. There could be no conflict in respect of the pace that was set. It was an easy way to go. It has always been better to travel light.

Dear Cousin,

I am interested in what you said in your last letter. You accuse me of a cynical disregard for the more positive aspects of life in this country. All I can say is that I see it as it affects me. And in truth, that is all anyone can say when trying to describe experiences of so long ago. I know that all looks yellow to the jaundiced eye, but I hope my eye is not always so coloured.

Perhaps you should be corresponding with one of those born-again people who see it all through the eyes of the myth makers. They will give you an optimistic view if that is what you want. However, I am not offended by what you say. In fact it rather pleases me to know that in a small way I have stimulated you into questioning my motives.

Be that as it may; today I am more interested in my immediate surroundings. There is wood to cut for the cold days ahead. I must change the oil in my old diesel generator which meets my power needs. When one lives on a remote island there are many adjustments to be made in order to survive. I am as remote from the city and its services as it is possible to be.

After the chores have been done I will spend some time walking through the bush and re-acquaint myself with my friends the birds. I detect a sadness in their winter wings. Or was that sadness in me and I project it to other things. There are fewer birds now than in the summer, in spite of the crumbs I put out for them. The banded rails are fewer and their chicks have dispersed to other territories. Of my friendly thrush there is no sign. I wonder about a large grey cat that skulks on the edge of the bush. He looks too well-fed for a wild winter cat.

Once upon a time there was only natural predation to keep the balance, but then came the cats. Apart from the native rat, brought here by the Polynesians, and a few stray dogs, the cat is the greatest threat to the bird life on the island. The life that has been in some

kind of balance for millions of years is now under threat of extinction. I weep for a dying world.
In the meantime I return to my remembered past. In a way it has become a form of escape for me. I am taken away from the immediate present, and by digging into the past I create a more palpable present for myself.

I was to become caught up in the Manpower Act, a wartime measure the government had introduced to make the most of the labour that was on offer, and direct it to the war effort. By this time I had achieved a fair level of competence in the field of radio technology. I was working at Radio Corporation in Courtney Place, a large factory devoted mainly to producing Colombus and Courtney radios.

The factory had been founded by a Russian immigrant named Marks. It was said that he was a White Russian and as such was not to be confused with Russians of the other colour. Even in those days the red menace was spoken of with vehement distrust.

One day I was directed by the Ministry of Supply, which was responsible for administering the Act, to move to the Todd Motor Company in Petone. There I was to be the inspector of equipment produced by a consortium of radio manufacturers. I was to be the final inspector of a radio/transceiver before it was to be tropically packed for shipment to the Pacific.

I made periodic visits to the factories to check on the supply of various components that made up the final product. I was able to witness how government contracts operated. The contractual arrangements were on a cost plus ten percent basis. This meant that the greater the cost of producing the item, the greater was the profit to the maker. Patriotism was well rewarded.

At the Todd factory an area had been allocated to a group of tradesman who were making wooden replicas of aircraft propellers. The carefully laminated and glued timbers ware skilfully shaped and finished. The final product would be shipped to a theatre of operations as replacements for damaged ones. Of all the activities that took place in that factory the making of those propellers was

the only creative one.

I don't know exactly how long I continued to travel each day from Wellington by train. I do remember that after a few months, boredom was setting in because of the routine, and I was ready to move on. For a long time Keith Horrocks and I had planned to go to Auckland. But being held by the Manpower Act I couldn't go anywhere without very good reason. The penalty was imprisonment. The only way to get out was to go quietly and hope that the authorities couldn't catch up. And that is what I did.

When I looked squarely at the whole situation I was in, I couldn't regard myself as too much of a criminal when all about me were the signs of corruption. No doubt, I rationalised the motive behind my departure. To this day I have not been apprehended for my dereliction of duty.

Before I left Wellington Gerda Eichbaum gave me the address of a German refugee who was living in Auckland. His name was Karl Wolfskehl.

That was over fifty years ago, and a great deal of that period has disappeared beyond recall. At times it seems that I am trying to obtain a vision through a window that looks out onto an indistinct haze. I can vaguely remember the tram ride up Mt. Eden Rd. on my first visit to him. He was living in St. Andrews Rd. in a back room of a large bungalow.

When he came to the door I was greeted by the large bulk of a man dressed in dark clothes. He seemed to tower above my slender six foot frame, his magnificent head looked down at me through thick, highly magnifying lenses that seemed to frame his marble-like features that had been carved in another world. I had met the person who was to open for me so many doors into the world that had made him.

I consider that I was greatly privileged in knowing him and being accepted as a friend. Through him I was able to find an alternative to the kind of isolation that had bedevilled me for so long.

I suppose it's true that I had been born with a fair amount of romantic stupidity. I had found myself in, what appeared to me to be, a harsh world, where the pricks themselves had taken on a life of their own. I didn't know where I belonged, nor did I know where I was going. I only hoped that out there somewhere I would find a spiritual answer to fill the gap that had been created when I abandoned the church.

Karl Wolfskehl, by his presence alone, had passed on to me some of the wisdom of the Jewish race. I began to think that somewhere in the dark past, some forbear of mine had carried the same blood. At least, if that had been so, it would have been explanation enough for my unsettled state.

His vast knowledge of literature and the arts was shared with me. His interest in many fields beyond his immediate work (he was writing a great deal at the time) was never cursory. Everything he saw and touched had significance for him.

I sometimes wonder at the incongruities of the human condition, and those meaningless dictates of history that add cruelty to lives already overburdened with trying to stay alive. It was such a dictate of history that placed Karl Wolfskehl at the far end of the earth. The small suburban world of Mt. Eden was a far alien call from Darmstadt and Munich, Stefan George and Hofmannsthal.

In this world of his exile he often remarked on the incongruous symbols that reminded him of his European past; the fig tree growing on the lawn outside his window; a cypress trimmed to fit between a wall and a fence; the Bavarian pines standing as exotic intruders in the indigenous green of the New Zealand forest.

He used these symbols of exile and transplantation in many of the poems he wrote during his last ten years. He would read them to me in German and together we would translate them into English. The theme of isolation almost entirely dominated his work. It was only his strength of spirit that sustained him, and allowed him to spend the last ten years of his life far removed from the madness that had almost destroyed Europe, and paradoxically, far removed from the salons of Munich where he had held sway.

I visited him mainly in the evenings. I can't describe those visits, nor can I recall in any detail what we spoke about. I only remember that the hours passed very quickly, and I left him with the strong sense that I was no longer alone. Perhaps the novelist and poet Hans Carossa has expressed it better when he said, "whoever has spent one hour with Karl Wolfskehl will admit that he went from him in a noble way disquieted, and that he learned through him a new mode of discrimination and took on his way a longing such as one feels for the depths of the universe."

I am not a scholar, nor am I fluent in German. Others have written about his volume of work. My involvement in his life was one of friendship, and as such that friendship was of greater importance than any academic approach to the man. I can only speak of him with a love that is above any form of outright expression.

The war years dragged on and I marked time with them. I can't remember discussing the war with him, nor did we talk of politics. The horror that had engulfed Europe was for a time forgotten and he was able to live briefly in the splendid shadow of what he had left behind in Munich. Looking back, I suppose, I was able to add a new dimension to his life, thus blotting out for a short time any bitterness he may have felt. That this was so, is in some measure true. In his letters, recently published, he makes mention of our friendship and what it meant to him.

He must have been astute enough to realise where the political machine in Germany was heading. In 1933 he left for Italy where he lived until 1938. Realising that the Fascists would no longer tolerate his presence in the country, he took out a map to find the country furthest from Europe where he might find refuge. In his numerous correspondence to friends abroad he spoke with gratitude of the country of his exile.

Before he left Germany he had purchased a large vineyard and mansion at Kischlinsbergen, where he left his Dutch born wife, knowing that she at least would be safe from persecution. Accompanying him from Germany to Italy and subsequently to New Zealand, was Margot Ruben. She remained his faithful and devoted companion until his death in 1948. Perhaps not enough has been

made of her role during those years of exile. Without her, his life would have been very difficult indeed. The income that Karl had received from the sale of his library was exhausted. Margot's income from teaching was able to keep them both, although at a very frugal level.

Memory has been modified by the years. Therefore I cannot claim any great accuracy of detail in my recall of those days which now are passing like shadows across my vision. But emerging from those shadows there are sharply delineated moments that have never left me. And those moments speak to me of a togetherness that I have seldom found since.

He knew from the history of his people, what the human animal was capable of. He saw what had happened to the world as a catharsis in an evil play.

The last ten years of his life were spent in virtual isolation, although he maintained contact through letters to friends in all parts of the world. Apart from a few people in Auckland he was alone and unrecognised. In Munich he had been king in his circle; here he was just another "bloody foreigner".

One of my last memories is of a small room in Coronation Road. He had moved there after some argument with his previous landlady. Outside his window was tethered a race horse, an investment of his new landlady. In the small cramped room were some of the relics of his past. It was a hot summer afternoon and a heaviness hung over everything. He was looking for a book to give me. His near blindness, coupled with a natural clumsiness made his presence in that hopeless room akin to that of a trapped animal. The price he paid for finding that book was a smashed lamp stand and a broken teapot.

How he worked and produced his poetry under such conditions might be a lesson to those who aspire to be writers but who demand flats in Bloomsbury, or safe houses in Menton or at our universities.

Well, Cousin, there it is. A piece of my life fifty years ago. I was a young man of twenty then, just off the tussocks so to speak. You

might understand what it was like for me to have been in the presence of such a person. As Hans Carossa said, I went from him in a noble way disquieted.

Dear Cousin,

The war with the Axis was over. The Americans had obliterated two Japanese cities with atom bombs. V.J. Day came in a sea of booze and broken glass. The centre of Auckland overflowed with singing and dancing people. The pubs burst with a free-for-all frenzy. The broken glass was crushed into smaller pieces under the feet of the milling crowd. For some hours a madness had taken hold of the people.

There was a belief in most of the people I knew, that now the war was over, life would be so different. They believed this with their hearts. not realising that the euphoric dream would need to have an awakening. The hangover was not long in coming.

I had vowed that when war ceased I would travel. Those plans were thwarted because I had no money. My vagabondage had been paid for by the non-accumulation of capital. I had ambitions, but not the means to pay for them.

A recruiting drive had begun to form an occupation force for Japan. I volunteered and was accepted. Why I wanted to go back into the army still puzzles me. I had established friendships with several people, especially Karl Wolfskehl, and was accepted for what I was. I had established a niche of sorts in Auckland, and yet it was not enough.

I donned khaki again and after a brief period of training was on a troopship heading for Japan. The ship had been converted from a cargo boat to a troopship early in the war. Its holds had been made over to sleeping quarters. Hundreds of hammocks had been slung, each almost touching the other. At some time in its history it had been carrying copra, for everywhere there was the stench of coconut and layers of fine dust covered every beam and truss. I think there must have been some cynicism in the planning of its conversion. I suppose that when all was said and done, cargo was only cargo and there wasn't much distinction between copra and

soldiers. The holds had been filled.

I stood at the stern and watched the land disappear into a grey mist. After a few days, as the weather warmed, a few of us abandoned the stifling atmosphere below, and slept on deck. There was sensual pleasure in breathing the warm tropical air, and feeling the easy motion of the ship beneath us. The early morning arrival of the sun, and the silver flash of flying fish landing at our feet seemed to welcome us to the exotic world that lay ahead. Expectancy of the unknown beckoned us like a mysterious beautiful whore.

A few days before our arrival at Kure, I broke my collar bone in an act of bravado. A young medico made a crude attempt at strapping me back into place. It must have been his first attempt at mending bones. Instead of travelling on to Chofu with my unit, I was sent across the water to the island of Miyajima, where there was a military hospital.

The arrival in Kure showed us for the first time in most of our lives just what war was all about. Half sunken ships with funnels and masts poking through the dark oily waters, rusting bombed-out buildings and twisted metalwork along a shattered wharf where we docked, was our introduction to a defeated land.

In contrast to Kure, Miyajima appeared untouched, and was as it had been for centuries. Somehow it had been spared the ravages of war. Perhaps there had been some discrimination in the bombing raids that had devastated Kure.

The hospital where I was to spend the next few weeks was on the outskirts of a small village by the sea. There I was cared for by an attentive medical staff. One nursing sister I remember well, who gave me more attention than her duties demanded, took me on long walks through the village and down to the sea. My introduction to life in an occupation force was somewhat idyllic indeed.

I can still see the magnificent arched gateway to the Shinto shrine that stood out from the edge of the bay, rising as if floating on a mirror sea. I wonder who designed its simple elegance. Could it have been created by the fathers of those men who drove their war

machine so ruthlessly through the Pacific?

My stay in Miyajima was all too short and it wasn't long before I was travelling by jeep to join my unit. On the way to Chofu I decided that I was going to divert from the main road and look at what remained of Hiroshima, the city whose destruction had altered the concept of war for all time, and which had established the extent to which political decisions could go. The ultimate in the means of achieving surrender had been gained by those who had given the order.

We approached the place through burnt and shattered trees on the outskirts, and entered the scene of the most instantaneous and complete destruction caused by man in the entire history of his endeavours. The city had dissolved in one hideous flash. For miles around the epicentre (the Municipal Dome, a mere shell) there was a spread of white greyish dust with crooked pieces of steel jutting from the ground. Even the river had been burnt, reduced to a slow dark trickle, the only tear left in a horror landscape.

In the distance, toward the outskirts on the other side, we saw figures moving about. We approached men and women removing rubble from a small clearing. We saw an old man with a hoe turning over the charred soil. Others were piling up sheets of iron and stones to make some kind of shelter. We were witnessing the determination of a people to survive. We were seeing the beginning of the rebuilding of the city. Its foundations were the atomised remains of seventy-eight thousand people.

I don't know how much we were exposed to radiation as we moved over that ghastly scene. There had been no warning given of the likely effects of wandering through an atomic desert. Whatever monitoring had been done would have been of a cursory nature, the results kept secret and certainly not passed on to those who would have been exposed. The full implication of what had been done to that city was yet to be fully absorbed into the consciousness of those who had pushed the button.

The barracks at Chofu had been a naval training base. The two-storied wooden buildings with balconies around the upper floor

were divided into rooms housing eight men. We were living where the youth of the Japanese navy had begun their careers before setting sail into the far reaches of the Pacific. Only their ghosts remained to bear witness to the new tenants.

Thinking back to that period, what emerges most strongly is the atmosphere I was surrounded by. I sense the warmth of summer, the rains of the monsoon season, the strange land smell of the village people, and the stench of the benjo carts as they lumbered down the streets carrying the shit of the village out onto the rice paddies. There were the smells of exotic cooking coming from hidden kitchens, and above all other sounds the croaking of a million frogs in the nearby rice fields.

And somewhere in the dark corners of the village were the shy girls who offered accommodation in exchange for cakes of chocolate. For many of the young soldiers it was their introduction to pleasures that had no prerequisites. Back home their ardour would have been rewarded with aching balls.

I developed a taste for sake, the rice wine, that was easy to obtain in the village. Because I was something of an acrobat, it was my job to climb the wall after dark and go into the village where I would buy a couple of flagons to bring back to the barracks. Several times I had to fling myself off the road into a rice paddy when military police approached. Covered in Japanese shit I would make it back over the wall, and the party would begin. The Japanese drank their sake warm in thimble sized cups. We, like barbarians, drank it cold in pint enamel mugs.

Friendships were established with the local people in spite of the non-fraternisation orders. We were supposed to be ambassadors of a conquering race, and any intimacy with the enemy would undermine our superiority. We regarded this as army bullshit, and such orders did not fit the reality of our situation. We were not in contact with those who had been a part of the military machine. We were with elderly men and women, children and girls who had had little or nothing to do with a war. They were the people who had the photographic shop, the place where they sold curios and the merchants who sold beer and sake.

Mistresses were kept by gifts of baked beans and chocolate. The supply and acceptance of gifts was a mutually agreeable way of life. For the lad from the tussocks back home it meant an experience that he was unlikely to repeat ever again. For the girl it was a chance to supplement a meagre diet for herself and her family.

Those of us who had expertise in electronics were given greater freedom than most. It was as if we, being possessors of an esoteric learning, commanded a respect not given to others. I think we were generally regarded as odd-balls, and as such we were immune from the regular disciplines the others endured.

I think this suited my nature very well. I was able to do what I had to do in the workshop, and then I was free to go most places without hindrance.

After about three months in Chofu I was sent to Yamaguchi, a spa town, much larger than Chofu, where I was to maintain a radio link with headquarters. Again I was housed in a two-storied building which had been part of a barrack complex for the Japanese army. The ground floor was occupied by the radio system and workshop, and above were my living quarters. I was surprised and rather pleased when I arrived to find, that apart from two young Japanese students who were to help in the workshop, I also had been assigned a young woman who was to care for my domestic needs. It was the first and last time in my life that I was to have servants at my disposal.

I had also been given the use of a B.S.A. motorcycle, and it was this item that was to be more important in my life than my servants. The house girl was no great beauty and we were able to keep our distance from each other. Besides, I had interests elsewhere. I preferred to get astride the machine and roar off into the country. Wherever I went I found half-hidden mysteries: because of the exotic nature of the countryside and the little fishing villages I visited, I was ever faced with something unresolved, only half understood. I look back on its magic and sense that something is missing in my life now.

During that period I thought very little of the world of literature

that had so absorbed me back in Auckland. I continued to correspond with Karl Wolfskehl and a few other people. I was soaking up the subtleties and nuances of another world. A rude seizing of new experiences dominated my life. My only contribution approaching a literary statement was a short talk I gave for N.Z. Radio. Somewhere in a dusty archive it may still exist.

I can find no understanding for the collective galvanising force that commits a people to obey a maniacal leadership, and to perform atrocities against another people. Being a member of the conquering force, and being with the conquered, I could find no logic to what had happened. Is war the ultimate pursuit of man? Is there an inherent desire somewhere in his genetic make-up that makes man want to achieve his ultimate satisfaction in warfare?

I have no answer to these questions. There I was, part of an army of occupation, fraternising with a people who had been the enemy, and whose political system had failed them. It was a huge, sad paradox, so utterly human in its dimensions. I found a bewilderment and resignation in the people I met. Their lot was the aftermath of some hideous dream. Their lot was the true epitaph.

Summer had turned to winter and the first snows were falling on the hills above Yamaguchi. Soon it would cover the whole land down to the Inland Sea. Hiroshima would have a soft white blanket to cover its hideous scars. And in contradiction it would soon be Christmas.

Remaining with me to this day are warm memories of that year; the excursions into the countryside; the ordered pattern of the rice fields; the oxen pulling the ploughs and carts; the women stooping low in the knee-deep sludge planting the new seasons grain; the beach beyond Shimonoseki where we swam with girls from the nearby village; the mineral springs of sybaritic pleasures, alternating between hot and icy cold; the evenings spent with lovers sipping sake, pretending that we weren't so barbaric after all.

Yes, Cousin, you may say that I have been indulging in nostalgia; that it is an old man who is looking back on an imagined past. And you may be right in some respects, but if you haven't been where I have been you cannot know.

My last trip in Japan was to Atami on the Izu Peninsular just south of Tokyo. I stayed with other soldiers at the Kawatana hotel, an immense gothic-like structure built by the Germans for European tourists before the war. On the Japanese landscape it was an anachronism, an ugly transplant on the hillside above the water. I spent some days wandering around Tokyo, joining crowds in the Ginza market place, seeing the bombed-out railway station, the Ernie Pyle Theatre, the plaque at the water's edge in Yokohama Bay commemorating the place where Commander Perry pointed his guns, forcing Japan into the twentieth century.

And there, westwards, above all the human confusion rose the magnificent snow-capped peak of Fujiyama. Could it have been a real mountain? Surely it was a picture of one painted by a consummate artist on that blue and green, rather hazy background. It was too perfect, rising there in the distance; a stylised concept of what a mountain might look like in an idyllic landscape. It towered above war and its aftermath as a reminder perhaps that nature will eventually maintain sovereignty over man's folly .

I left Japan with a gift of an emerald ring and six uri berries wrapped in a silk handkerchief, a parting gesture with tears from my girl of an Eastern Limberlost.

Great Barrier Island

Dear Cousin,

It has been some time since I last wrote to you. The reason is that the machine I have been using to write this broke down and refused to obey my instruction. It would appear that I am wedded to this miracle of technology, regarding it as I would a faithful servant. Our correspondence will continue.

We have passed the longest night of the year again, but winter is still with us. There is a slight lifting of the spirits when I realise that imperceptibly, the sun is rising a little earlier each day. I reach the nadir of my being during these grey wet days when all my senses cry out for warmth and the signs of new life. Somewhere in my blood, buried in a genetic memory, must lie the shadows of those North European winters of dark ages ago.

We take it for granted that because our world and the universe of which it is a part, has behaved in a predictable way over the millennia, it will continue to do so. Of the few things we can be sure of, this continuance is perhaps the most certain. I am grateful for this certainty. I could almost believe that there could be some divine engineer behind it all.

The promise that there is another summer to come, and that I may live to welcome it and breathe its air is sustenance enough for my spirits. You see, I do have faith in something after all.

I returned home from Japan, leaving behind a part of me that had found an identity with another way of being. I had been seduced by an eastern magic that had emerged from the ravages of militarism. The people and their way of living had survived.

After a brief stay with my parents in Christchurch, where I found that nothing had essentially changed since I had left, I was at a loss to know what I was going to do in the future. I had stepped out of one world that I had adapted to, and was face to face with the old one that I knew all too well. Again the old question of where to

belong was ever persistent. Communication once again centred around the old questions that had been so often repeated in the past. "When are you going to settle down? What about your future? Why don't you do what so and so has done? He's making good money now. Isn't it time you were married?" And so it went on. It was a sad period for me, not knowing what the hell to do, and at the same time trying to find the wisdom in what my parents were saying. I knew it was sad for them also.

I returned to Auckland and tried to pick up on what I had left behind. While I had been away Keith Horrocks had married and come up to Auckland where he and his wife had a flat in a house on Narrow Neck beach. It was like old times again. With them I found no pressure on me to conform. We passed good hours together talking about books we were reading, giving each other good reason for being what we were; strangely at odds with our surroundings.

My visits to Karl Wolfskehl continued. I had brought back with me some presents of small carved wooden boxes which I gave to him. His delight was almost childlike as he fondled them, tracing the carvings with his fingers as if trying to make contact with the world they had come from. He had aged a great deal, and was far from well. As I sat with him I knew that some of his previous strength had gone. He told me he was still writing, but was finding it difficult to get enough done each day. Margot Ruben had gone to live elsewhere, and he was more alone than ever in the land of his exile.

When I told him I had booked a passage to England he was silent for a long time. When he looked up there were tears in his eyes. Then quite suddenly he stood up and paced backwards and forwards. He stopped and turned and smiled and said. "That is wonderful. For you that is the right thing." Later that afternoon I took my leave of him, not knowing that I had seen him for the last time

Japan had done little to assuage the restlessness that had bedevilled me for so long. If anything, the experience had merely fuelled the desire to keep moving, to know and to understand; to keep searching. There was no escape from the song of the Lorelei. Was I

doomed like those sailors on that ancient river?
The journey to England on a cargo boat with accommodation for a dozen or so passengers took four weeks through the Panama Canal. Apart from a few typically ship-board type friendships - one with the wife of an Australian actor named Kerr - there was little to remember of the journey until we reached the Canal. We dined with the officers, and in the saloon was a well-stocked bar where I became acquainted with a wide selection of exotic wines and liquors. Tropical nights were spent in a moonlit haze. Passing through the Canal I was in awe of the engineering skills that went into the building of the locks and how they operated. How it was all achieved in that festering heat shows something of the determination and ruthlessness of the human spirit.

The ship stopped at Curacao for refuelling. It was early morning when we went through the swinging boom at Willemstad, and tied up in the harbour of Schotegat. From the refinery along the waterfront the stench of oil hung heavily on the tropical air. There was no escape from it; not even the early morning breeze coming in from the sea could disperse it.

I left the ship and wandered through the town, past its little blue and white cottages, finding my way down back to the waterfront. I was striding it out, aimlessly exercising from the long confines of the ship, when suddenly I was confronted by a uniformed black man with a revolver in his hand. He wrenched the pipe I was smoking from my mouth and threw it onto the ground. "You fucking white bastard", he said, poking me in the ribs with his gun. I don't know how long we would have stood there, I, transfixed by the revolver pointing at my guts, he, perhaps unsure what he should do next. Then the boat whistle sounded. I pointed to the ship in the distance, and he slowly removed the revolver from where it was pointing and put it back where it rightly belonged. In broken English he explained that I was on refinery property and was trespassing, and that smoking therein could be punished by death.

Looking back on that episode I realise that I was in fact courting death. The guard would have been within his rights to have shot me, and the Dutch oil refinery for which he worked would have supported his action. I imagined that I might have been responsible

for the entire refinery at Willemstad going up in flames. In my imagination I heard the explosions as the storage tanks erupted. The sound of the holocaust followed me as I walked up the gang-plank onto the ship. It had been my first experience with a para-military organisation which was merely protecting an investment. I can still feel the vulnerability in being caught in such a situation.

Paramilitarism exists to protect an investment from being threatened and, as such, a confrontational situation is the natural corollary. I am not suggesting that an idiot, such as I was at the time, should not have been apprehended. But it does seem that such forces are not a far remove from the jack-booted men who were the protectors of another kind of investment.

My journey continued and somewhere in the mid Atlantic I threw overboard the pipe that had nearly got me killed. I found that I could no longer smoke it without getting visions of disaster. Besides, my tobacco seemed to have an over-powering flavour of refinery oil.

The ship docked at Tilbury in the late afternoon. Up the river toward London, the great orange ball of the sun was falling into a brown yellow haze. I had arrived, and somewhere ahead was the great city where I was to invest my hopes. In the train that sped me through the East End, I studied a map of the city trying to read into it some sign to guide me through the maze of streets. I was alone with no direction to follow. That train journey along the Thames was to be the beginning of a process that would gradually remove from me the last vestiges of romanticism.

Expectancy was high, however, and would sustain me for many months to come. After wandering for hours on that first evening I found myself in the Bayswater Road. On a notice board outside a dairy was an advertisement offering a room in Princess Square. I took the room and settled in with my few belongings and waited on the promise of tomorrow. I was in London at last and had assumed an identity by having a place to sleep. The fact that I didn't know a soul in that vast city did not concern me, nor did I feel lonely. All about me was more than enough to fascinate and absorb me.

I registered with the local authority and obtained my ration cards. It was 1947 and the country was still on war-time rationing of essential food. The allowance, although meagre, was sufficient to live on, and if one could afford it, some restaurants could offer a great deal more, particularly in the way of meat which had been obtained through a thriving black market. I wonder how much of it came from retired race horses.

I became acquainted with 'wide boys' and spivs. They could be recognised by their somewhat flamboyant dress, lounging about the market places and street corners, living only a few steps above the law. From one of them I was persuaded to buy a tin of Walter Rayleigh tobacco, and when I opened it later in my room I found it contained ground-up cigarette butts. The opportunists were everywhere. I recall now, that this is where our history had begun. This was the home of that arch-opportunist Edward Wakefield, who no doubt was more sophisticated in his dealings than the vendor of that tobacco, but who had the same intention in mind. The making of capital has some strange disparate conspirators, but their aim has a common touch.

Along the Bayswater Road were women selling an age-old product. From girls scarcely out of school to aged harridans, they plied their trade watched over from a distance by their touts and protectors. It was all a far remove from what I remembered of the streets of New Zealand.

This was the time of the collapse of what remained of the British Empire, and a new colour from India and Pakistan and Africa swept into the streets and market places. Tall men from the West Indies strode magnificently, head and shoulders above the grey people of the streets. The empire was gone and those who could came flooding in from previous colonies to receive succour from the mother who had abandoned them.

I visited Westminster, that marvellous edifice, where the structure of New Zealand was born in the eighteenth century. Within those walls decisions were made by frock-coated men from the English counties which had sealed for all time the direction that New Zealand was to take. I often wonder how much we need to admire

Captain Cook and what came later.
I spent several weeks wandering about the city, breathing in the air of a thousand years of history that was etched into the buildings and streets. In some areas it was grey with the dust of war, and over all there hung a yellow smog from a million chimneys. Even the oases of the parks seemed oppressed under the blanket of haze. The sunlight that filtered through was of a colour I had never seen before. I wondered if it was the same sun that I had known. And yet, I felt alive and was in high spirits. The money I had saved in Japan was still holding and allowed me to live, although somewhat frugally, for several months, without the need to find a job.

I decided to follow up on a talent that I had possessed, and enrolled in the St. Martin's School of Art as a full-time student. Much to my disappointment, I found that the teaching method was along the same lines as Lovell-Smith's in Canterbury. After several weeks of frustration I left, leaving behind me not one iota of evidence that I had ever been there. I continued my visits to the galleries which offered greater stimulus and pleasure, however vicarious, than anything I could find at St. Martin's.

Before I left Auckland, Karl Wolfskehl had given me the name and address of an old friend of his, with strict instructions that I call on her. Her name was Grete Pohl-Collin. I finally visited her one afternoon. Number 6 Acol Rd.,where she lived, was an old two-storied house that once might have been the residence of a well-to-do middle-class merchant, but had long since been converted to a rooming house. Its days of affluence were long gone.

Karl had told me something of her background, and it was no surprise to me, when she opened her door to my knock, to see before me an elderly, fine-featured woman who carried with her an aura from another world. She was Jewish, and a refugee from Germany. She had been the wife of Albert Weisgerber, the painter who was killed in World War I. She had been in the centre of the artistic world before Hitler.

The room that she shared with her present husband, Ernst Collin, was large, with a basic kitchen area in one corner. A large bed occupied the centre space, and against the walls were stacked

travelling trunks and battered suitcases. There was an air of transience about that room that suggested that its occupants were merely in transit; they had halted on a journey that had taken them from the nightmare that had engulfed the world they once knew. They had found sanctuary in an alien city, and were to remain there until they died.

Grete had been expecting me, for Karl had written to her saying I was on my way. I was able to give her news of him, and to describe his circumstances in Auckland. We talked for a long time on that first visit, and I left her toward evening, knowing that I had found a friend who, through her contacts in Europe and the world she had come from, had opened another door, which was to lead into domains hitherto unknown to me. That friendship was to remain long after I left England.

I didn't meet Ernst Collin until some weeks later. It appeared that Grete was reluctant to share me with him, and that she wished no intrusion into the rapport that had grown between us. When I finally met him, I found him to be very humble, almost contrite as if he had long ago given up any struggle to assert himself. Grete certainly was the dominant one in that partnership. He was the gentle one.

He was working as a messenger for the Bank of England, a job normally assigned to diligent half-wits. His humility allowed him to accept it and be grateful. We used to spend many hours together, but seldom at Acol Rd. in the presence of Grete. We walked for miles through the city, stopping at the market places which seemed to hold a fascination for him, and then sitting in cafes talking until it was time to go home. He taught me to speak German, and he would read to me from Rilke and Wedekind and other poets and playwrights.

Like many Jewish people I met during that time, Ernst Collin had been educated in Germany, and had several degrees to his name. The failure to recognise worth and ability was no different in England than it was in New Zealand. It was ironical that through its neglect, the Bank of England had a highly qualified messenger.

I had moved to another room in Paddington where the rent was much lower. The last of my money had been remitted from home, and soon I would need to find work. I had befriended a woman who lived in the same house. After several excursions to her room upstairs, and many cups of tea, she offered me a job managing a small repertory company she owned in Letchworth, a town about a hundred miles north of London. I was glad to accept her offer.

Letchworth was a town populated by a mainly middle-class people and it manifested the reserve one would associate with a retirement watering hole. The theatre was an old wooden building in the heart of town, and the cast, permanently employed by our benefactor, were professional actors. Each week a different play was produced, and that meant playing three nights a week, rehearsing the next week's play, and reading the one after that. Such was the demand made on the group, that a great number of very hammy performances were given, and much use was made of ad lib dialogue when lines were forgotten. The audiences at these performances were very small and the takings at the box office indicated that the theatre didn't have long to live.

However, it was to last another six months, during which time I was able to offer jobs to several actors from lNew Zealand which started them on careers in the British theatre. One young man I remember, a tall good-looking fellow who beseechingly confessed to me that he was in some turmoil as to where his sexual predilections lay. Overtures were being made to him from both sexes, and he was in a constant state of confusion. The last I heard of him, he was on an Egyptian yacht bound for the Mediterranean.

Others who stood out in that strange mixture of cast, included a young woman of considerable elegance and beauty who seemed not at all interested in men, except the leading man who was undoubtedly homosexual. I was fascinated to watch them at parties, and observe how they manipulated feelings. She would rouse some poor dupe into believing he was onto something, and then she would hand him over to the leading man. I was learning a great deal about human behaviour. I suppose nothing much had changed in that respect since the days of Nero and Tiberius. In many way the town of Letchworth was well named.

I don't think that my management skills or lack of them had very much to do with the eventual folding of the company. Playing to audiences of only a few dozen for weeks on end could not continue. Besides, there was an amateur company performing across the road which was supported by and large by a conservative retired population.

Dear Constance,

With what little money I had left from the Letchworth experience I decided to go to Paris. It had been my wish for some time to visit people whom Karl had spoken of before I left Auckland. They were people who were friends of Grete also, and she had given me their addresses. I boarded a boat train to Calais via Dover. I left the train at Calais and wandered up the waterfront.

In my pocket I had a five pound note and my passport. I stopped at a small cafe and ordered a glass of red wine, wishing to change my sterling into francs. I received my glass of wine, but was rather nonplussed when I received no change from my note. I remembered the woman who served me as a full busted woman of middle age whose thin arms were spread on the counter as she eyed me. Then she reached into the till and counted out a pile of notes which she held above her head, at the same time pointing to the stairway behind the bar. I forget what she would have said to me, but I thanked her and reached for my change. Needless to say, I didn't order another glass of wine.

Soon I was in the open country glad to be on my way. I passed through Ypres where my father had served in the Great War. As I walked through, I recalled the stories he told us as children. I looked out over that landscape and saw the scars that still remained as memorials of that dreadful war. The winter mud of the Somme was now well-tended fields with farmers raising cattle and growing corn. The remains of stone buildings, roofless, windowless and forlorn, were reminders of the senseless destruction that had taken place so long ago.

There was very little traffic on the road. I got a few lifts from farmers in old trucks who were going on to the next village. I was met several times by policemen on bicycles who had ridden out to see who the red haired stranger was, walking their road all alone. I assumed that word had gone on ahead to investigate why. I guessed that walking a country road was not the norm for that part of

France, and that I was doubly suspect when I said I was going to Paris. The police were polite enough, and after examining my passport, allowed me to continue.

Sometime later in the day I was picked up by a British Air Force truck and taken some miles toward Abbeville. It appeared they were part of a unit based, and still operating on French soil. They stopped for the night at a small roadside cafe, and although I was a little apprehensive about how much it might cost me, I was glad of the food and the rest. We ate with the widowed owner and her teenage daughter. It was a splendid meal; the best I had eaten in a long time. The Air Force men were well known to the lady and her daughter. I went to sleep later in a small attic room with sloping white-washed beams. In the morning the truck had gone. Before the men left they had paid for my meal and accommodation. I never saw them again, but their kindness remains with me still.

I went to say goodbye to the lady and her daughter, and was greeted by the girl handing me a parcel and telling me it was for my journey. There were tears in their eyes as they waved me down the road. They were beautiful people. I was a stranger in their country, and they loved me because I was going to Paris. I never saw them again; their kindness will always be with me.

Later when I opened the parcel I found wonderful farm cheese and meats and crisp wholemeal bread and a small bottle of wine. Their goodness sustained me on my journey to Paris and far beyond in terms of memory.

I eventually reached Paris, travelling the last part by train. It was dark when I arrived, but somehow I managed to find my way to the Latin Quarter. I booked into the Terminus Hotel on the Boulevard Mt. Parnasse, convinced that I would be able to find work within a few days. I was down to my last two pounds.

It was wonderful to be in the champagne city, wandering down its streets, breathing in another atmosphere. I don't think that I could have been fully awake during that first week. If I had been awake I would have realised long before I left England that I was sustained by a dream. In Paris during that week I was blinded to any

awareness that there was such a condition as harsh reality.

I applied for several jobs on English language newspapers, but without success. I learned later that there was a law preventing foreigners from working in France. The law, no doubt, was to protect French citizens during a period of reconstruction after the war. However, I still believed that there was a small niche for me somewhere in that vast city, and I kept looking.

I finally visited a friend of Grete Pohl-Collin. Her name was Lotte Schwartz and she lived at No.5 Rue Rollin. I was able to give her news of Grete and Karl. Lotte had offered her house as a home for refugee Jewish boys. The French pogrom had begun in 1942 when the Vichy police, under orders from Pierre Laval, started rounding up Jews from all parts of the country. Men and women and children were crammed like cattle into box-cars and deported. Their papers were destroyed and any evidence that they had existed was erased; their destination, Auschwitz. Some, in particular children, were hidden and cared for by French people.

The house in Rue Rollin had become such a haven. Boys from all over Europe who no longer had family, found refuge there. I sometimes wonder where those pale, frightened and indrawn boys are now. Perhaps one or two of them may remember the stranger who came amongst them and shared their food, and tried to talk to them in spite of the barrier of language difference.

That house, although a sanctuary, stays in my memory as one of shadows; shadows that were cast from a monstrous evil, as if the very spirit of those who had perpetrated that evil was ever present to haunt the lives of those who had survived.

There was a resigned silence about the gathering that took place at meal times. It was as if the assembly was one of strangers who had been forced to be together against their will. Whenever I went there and ate with them, I felt that I didn't belong with them. I felt that I was an intruder into their pain, and that no matter how long I lived I would never know what they had known.

The food we ate at Lotte's was mainly potato and cabbage salad. It

was cheap sustaining food, but it played havoc with my guts. One evening, after I had eaten there, I was overcome with savage gripes while walking back to my hotel. I desperately needed to shit. I knew I couldn't make it to the hotel in time. On a corner was a church and a burial plot at the rear. I know that in the eyes of the church I had committed sacrilege by dropping my trousers where I did, but I tend to think that in the eyes of God there would have been some understanding. And I am sure the dead beneath those stones would forgive me. After all, a part of me had been buried too, although superficially.

Lotte had a beautiful daughter, Anouita, who was studying medicine at the Sorbonne. She was a few years younger than me, but much older in her understanding of the world around her.She showed me places in Paris that I wouldn't have seen without her. I remember the walks we took through the Luxembourg Gardens, those wonderful spring evenings. Forgotten for a time were the other realities that would return when I was alone in a room that I couldn't pay for, and which would tell me I was living like a romantic fool.

I called on another of Grete's friends of long ago. She was Loulou Lazard. She lived in a studio on the Boulavarde Raspail. I climbed the stairs and knew that I had found her when I saw the large painting of Rainer Maria Rilke in the passage outside her door. When she opened the door I was studying the painting. "I knew him", she said, without asking me who I was. When I told her I brought news of Grete, she asked me to come in. It was a large studio, the likes of which I had never seen before. It was spacious, with a high ceiling and a huge north-facing glass window. In one corner behind a screen were a bed and a few pieces of furniture. Around the walls of the studio were stacked paintings of various sizes. I remember her as a rather heavily made up woman in her sixties, very energetic as she introduced me to some of her paintings. We talked and drank wine together for some hours, and again I was glad to have been invited into a world so different from the one in which I had been brought up. I was far removed from the tussock land of South Canterbury.

I was in Paris and I was penniless. I had spent my last few francs on

a cup of coffee and a croissant. I sat at a table outside the cafe and watched the people pass by, trying to visualise my future. The hotel where I was staying seemed to have accepted me as a guest whose credit was good. Fortunately they couldn't see into my pockets.

Later on that day, I decided to go to the British Embassy to see if they could help me find work of some kind. I wanted very much to stay in Paris with the new friends I had found, especially Anouita.

At the embassy I was met by a very British Englishman, very tall and angular, who seemed to have trouble focusing his eyes on me. He told me that there was no work for me, and that I would be breaking the law if I should find any. There I was, in a very British kind of office, being regarded as some kind of irresponsible waif. When I told him where I was staying he shook his head in disbelief. The fact that I was from New Zealand didn't impress him one bit. I think that it only served to convince him that anyone from the colonies was suspect.

He stressed that I must return to England, and then suggested that I also return to the place I had come from. After some time of putting my case and arguing my right to pursue my own destiny, I realised that greater forces than any I could muster were against me. The embassy man arranged to pay my hotel bill, and I was given a handful of British Occupation Forces currency which I could only spend in an army canteen. I was sent to a place in the Rue d'Lion where I was given a room so vastly different to the one I had vacated. To reach it I had to climb about thirteen flights of stairs, and then enter the minimum space designed for a bed. A window gave me a view of a brick wall, covered by centuries of moss and decay.

Maybe there was something symbolic about that room and the condition I found myself in. My passport had been confiscated by the embassy and I felt that I was no longer a free spirit. My dream of staying in Paris had been shattered, and I was faced with what it was like to be in the real world. I sold my overcoat to a second-hand dealer, and said goodbye to Lotte and Anouita. I spent the last few days wandering around the city that had promised so much. I was more than a little depressed. The prospect of returning to

England had no attraction for me after the pleasure I had known in Paris. It was as if I had been given a glimpse of another kind of future, to have it all taken harshly from me. I know that I was in most respects the engineer of the circumstances I found myself in. I had obeyed an impulse and was to pay for it. I didn't realise then how long it would be before I saw my passport again. I was considerably in debt to the British government, and that debt was to be paid in full before I would be free to move again.

So, perhaps you can see, Cousin, that I was in the shit up to my eyebrows. However, all was not lost, as you will find out in my next letter to you.