



“... after all, I’m used to disappointments in life ...”

Erwin Widschwenter, born in Hall, Tirol, on 28 April 1908, a member of the Wehrmacht, was arrested on the grounds of his sexual orientation and for being “asocial” (a social misfit). He was put in a military prison and later transferred to Stein Prison, where he survived the bloody massacre of April 1945.

My bitter experience during the Nazi period: For a trivial offence against § 175 StGB [Criminal Code] I was sentenced by the Vienna branch of the Central Military Court of Berlin Charlottenburg to five years imprisonment and dishonourable discharge from the army (effective 11 May 1944). I was sent to Stein Prison. During my imprisonment I had to endure painful humiliations, such as having my head shaved, cleaning the toilets and the like, and being called a filthy pig!

In prison I served my sentence until Stein’s “bloody Friday”, when I escaped certain death by the skin of my teeth thanks to the help of a prison ward who was kindly disposed towards me. In this massacre, which took place on 6 April 1945, a large number of the prisoners was shot by the SA [storm troopers].

The survivors, including myself, were first taken up the Danube to Stadelheim, then to Strasbourg and finally to Bernau on Lake Chiem, where I was discharged on 11 May 1946.

After my discharge in Bernau I went to Munich, where I worked on building sites and received ration cards. Physically, I was seriously weakened and weighed only 48 kg. In July 1946, I was repatriated and was able to return to my home territory near Wörgl and meet my dear foster mother again. My joy was more than words can express! Katharina Schiessing was kindness itself and always stood by me even in the darkest times!

However, I was badly hit by the social consequences of my conviction. After my release from prison I tried in vain to get re-instated in my job in the finance department, although my previous conviction had already been officially wiped from the records by the Wehrmacht amnesty. Before mobilisation I had been a tax inspector in the Gmunden Finance Office. I was dismissed without notice. I met with very little understanding. No-one could

help me. At that point I recalled a quotation from my Latin textbook, which read: "Donec eris felix, multos numerabis amicos; tempura si fuerint nubila, solus eris!"¹

I finally found a job as an office worker, but the remuneration was rather modest, so I had quite a struggle to get through till my retirement. Note that after my release I didn't return to Gmunden, as I assumed that my elderly landlady was unlikely to be still alive and the room would long since have been let to someone else and that my belongings that I left behind there, like clothes, linen, books and so on, would have been cleared out. I went back to Linz and looked for a place to stay. Due to bomb damage and accommodation difficulties it was impossible to get a room; so I had to be content with a room in a camp, where I eked out a living in indescribably wretched conditions. It was only months later that I succeeded in finding a home where I could live in reasonable comfort until my retirement.

Despite impaired mobility due to operations on both hips and other age-related complaints,

I'm glad to be alive and enjoy the little pleasures that daily life brings. I'm thinking, for example, of the helpfulness of so many people I meet in the street, which make life more bearable for me. In conclusion, I should like to ask all those concerned about me, as far as possible to judge my unfortunate situation in a benevolent manner. Whatever their attitude, I shan't bear a grudge against anyone. After all, I'm used to disappointments in life.

Finally, I should like to thank the National Fund for the kindness they have never ceased to show and particularly for their generous and helpful financial support.

It will not now be long before the day comes when I shall take my leave from the world.

My warmest thanks for your letter of February of this year. This shows that the National Fund has not forgotten me.

¹As long as you are happy, you will count many friends; when times become dark, you will be alone. (Freely adapted from Ovid)