

# JOSIE'S JOURNEY

## TRAINS AND TRAVELS

Whenever I hear the word 'train' it evokes a wide range of memories in my mind. Some of these memories are sad, some are happy, some humorous, some adventures and some are just plain scary.

I grew up with the sights and sounds of trains all around me; and they have always fascinated me. The city where I was born is a border town and a railway center. Three countries, Holland, Belgium and Germany, come together near Aachen, a city that was already used by the Romans as a spa because of its natural hot springs. The exact spot where these three countries meet is called "The Three Land Point". Trains come to and stop at Bad Aachen from Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam and many other cities in Europe. The famous "Orient Express" starts in London on its way to Istanbul (formerly Constantinople), making its first stop in Germany at Aachen, after crossing the border between Holland and Germany.

Even as a child the lonely, eerie sound of a train whistle gave me a feeling of longing, a longing to go to far-away places. Where, I wondered as a child, did these trains come from, and where were they going? The foreign writing on some of the trains was more food for my imagination. Little did I know at the time that all this dreaming and wondering about travelling to foreign places would turn into reality sooner than I expected and take me to so many foreign and far-away places.

My first memorable trip by train was sad. It was 1943. The trip itself was uneventful and I don't remember too much about it, except that my father and two older sisters had to stay behind. They were not allowed to leave their jobs. Nobody was allowed to leave a job because it was war time, and labor was scarce. We, my mother, two younger brothers, a younger sister and I were to be evacuated because our city, being a major rail-way center, was bombed almost from the beginning of World War II the train trip took us clear across Germany, close to the eastern border. My family and I ended up in a small town in Silesia.

Life was quiet once again, after living with air-raids for close to four years, getting in and out of bed and into bomb shelters almost every night. At first during the air-raids we went down to our own basement, listening to the whistling sounds of the bombs as they came down, hoping and praying to hear the ensuing sound of the explosion and knowing that this time at least we would be spared. Later on the government built bunkers for the people. These bunkers were made out of steel and concrete and they were several stories high. They could withstand any bomb that was produced at that time. I was in a bunker when it was hit by bombs. The bombs would shake the bunker and the people in it quite vigorously; you might fall out of your bed or off your chair, but otherwise you were safe. To this day these bunkers are still standing as a sad

reminder of a terrible war. Here, however, in this little town with its romantic name (Rosenthal) we needed no bomb shelter. It was almost too quiet for us, and it took some time for us to be able to sleep through the night without waking up in fear of air-raids. The only excitement in this sleepy farm community was an occasional trip by train to a nearby city.

Many people of this friendly town had taken each one's family into their home. Families as we were, who had fled from the constant bombings in the west of Germany. The kindness of these people, to whom we were strangers, was heart-warming. When we left home, we were not sure what fate would await us, because the government had arranged as to where we would stay. I soon felt at home on the farm where my family and I came to live. It didn't take long for me to make new friends. The one room country school, to which my brothers and I went, was a great change from our school in the city. After a little while it seemed as if I had lived in this small town all my life.

However, this quiet, tranquil life did not last very long,. It was January 1945. The Russian army had broken through the eastern border of Germany, and the front was closing in on us fast. Once again we were forced to leave a place; a place where we were beginning to feel at home. We all had made many new friends and it was sad to say good-bye. In the meantime my father and one of my sisters as well as some other members of our family had caught up with us. In fact, most of my family from both sides were now in different parts of Silesia. We, here in Rosenthal, packed our belongings, which had to shrink down to what each member of the family could carry, and went to the railway station.

At the station we found chaos. People and soldiers were waiting for trains. The people to go west and the soldiers to go east. There were no schedules. When a train came, as many people as possible would get on, and the others had to wait for the next train. Nobody was sure whether there would ever be a next train, because we could already hear the sounds of the big guns in the distance. The signs of war close at hand were everywhere, soldiers digging trenches; army trucks, tanks and guns moving into the area. A road block had been set up by the military to make sure that no civilians would go back towards the war zone. Most people wanted to get out of there in a hurry.

My family and I finally boarded a train. To me, a young girl, this trip felt like an adventure at first. I knew we could not go home at this time. Where would we end up? This train trip did not take us very far. We stopped in Gornitz, which is a city in Silesia. There were refugees everywhere, and it was obvious that we could not stay in Gornitz for long. We stayed only long enough to meet with my grandmother, my oldest sister, and my mother's sister and her family. They had all fled to Gornitz the previous fall, when the Allied Forces marched into Germany in the west. But these family members too were getting ready to flee once again.

After a short visit with my family in Gornitz, we went back to the railway station. Things were really chaotic now. More and more refugees arrived at the station from every corner of East

Germany. The biggest worry I had then was to be separated from my family. There were so many people at the station that one had no hope of finding anybody again, once you lost them. Many children were lost and separated from their families at that time. Some, especially the little ones, were never again united with their family; because they did not know their last names or what town they had come from. Many of the people who were fleeing then were never again to see their home town. The part of Silesia where we stayed, belongs to Poland now. Every time a train came into the station, the people shoved and pushed to get on the train. Everybody were afraid of being left behind. There were too many rumors of rape and abduction, connected with the Russian army. People were ready to leave at any cost. Somehow, we managed to get onto a train, which took us to Dresden in Saxony.

I have never seen so many people and their belongings in one place as I did in Dresden. Refugees had come here by trains, cars, horses and wagons and any other means of transportation one could think of. In fact, the place was so crowded, we had no hope of finding a place to stay, not even a floor to sleep. Every inch of the railway station, as well as the streets outside were covered with people and their belongings. Leaning against their bundles, laying on benches or on the floor, some people were sleeping from sheer exhaustion. Children were crying. Men and women trying to find somebody in charge who could tell them what to do, where to go. It was bedlam. My father decided that we should leave Dresden.

We somehow found our way out of Dresden, and ended up about twenty miles away from there, which was lucky for us. That night Dresden was bombed. To this day nobody knows for sure how many people died in that one night, because there were countless refugees, and not only German people. Many of them staying, were also there during that air-raid. I stayed up most of that night watching the ominous fireworks and listening to the booming sounds of bombs exploding a safe distance away. But I kept thinking about all those poor people who were right in the middle of this blazing inferno. I had lost my earlier taste for adventure. Everything seemed so hopeless and sad. I had to say goodbye to friends and relatives not knowing whether I would ever see them again. There was no safe place anywhere for any of us. Where could we go?

We could not go west, there was a war going on; we certainly could not go back east. My parents decided to go south. As far as we knew there was no fighting going on in the south of Germany.

Once again, we boarded an overcrowded train, making sure everybody got on, especially my two younger brothers and my little sister. Trains never went very far in those troubled times. The government always needed the trains for more important transportation, than to bring the people to safety. We would simply be told to get off and wait for another train.

Our next stop was Zwickau, a small city near the Czech border. Here, my father decided, we could stay for a little while and take stock of our situation. We all needed a rest desperately. In

fact I became very ill with some kind of nervous disorder, probably from sheer exhaustion. My parents had given up on the authorities, telling us what to do, or where to go. My father wanted us to go to Bavaria to wait for the end of the war. For all we knew Bavaria was the most peaceful place in Germany at that time. But we were not sure of anything anymore. We heard little official news, and official news we did hear, we soon learned to mistrust. It sounded more like propaganda all the time. By this time, unofficially, we all knew that the war was almost over. The authorities still tried to tell the people that there would be victory for Germany, but nobody was fooled any longer. We could see chaos all around. The signs of a defeated people were everywhere. The war was obviously lost for Germany. By now we could see Hitler for what he was, a raving maniac. People were not sure anymore if a victory for Germany was what they wanted. What they were sure of was the wish to have this terrible war end, so that they might go home. The people were tired and confused, tired of running, tired of not knowing what to do, where to go. Many were ill, everybody was exhausted.

One day in Zwickau, my father came back from one of his daily excursions, to the place we called home for the time being, to tell us that there was some official organizing people to take a train straight to Bavaria. This turned out to be the most frightening train trip I was ever on. The trip lasted five long days and nights and we only covered a distance of about three hundred kilometers. The train headed straight south in to Czechoslovakia. This was the last place German people wanted to go. But our official, who accompanied this trip as our leader, assured us that we were taking a shortcut to Bavaria. We had no choice but to believe him. We had to leave East Germany.

Almost from the start of this trip, the train was attacked by low flying aircraft, shooting at us with machine-guns. Every time the planes came down on us, the train would stop and everybody ran out to take cover as best as they could. Usually there was not too much cover and we ended up in a field or on the banks of the railway tracks. I would lie face down, flat on the ground, covering my head with my arms and hands. Whenever we were attacked, I, like everybody else, was scared to death. I hoped and prayed that we would all get out of this alive. Bullets were flying right and left, mostly hitting the ground, covering everybody with dirt and debris. Somehow, my family and I were not hurt in these encounters.

When our train was not stopped by the attacking planes, it would be stopped by the officials and put on a sidetrack to let more important trains go first. These were trains loaded with the last reserves Hitler could muster. These reserves were mostly old men and teenage boys. Most of these boys were not much older than I was at that time. I was 13 years old.

Once our train was put on a sidetrack for several hours in Prague. We did not object to this stop; it gave us a chance to walk and see this beautiful city. On day, I would like to go and see Prague again under more peaceful conditions.

After five long nights and days our train stopped in a small city (Pisek) in Czechoslovakia. We hardly slept during those five nights and days. No such luxury as sleeping cars. Our food was supplied from army soup kitchens along the way; or we would buy something if we had a chance, along the way. We were tired and hungry for a decent meal. All that time we had no warm water to wash, not to mention a hot bath.

When the train stopped in Pisek, we thought this would be just another stop-over. All too soon we found out that the train would go no farther. The official, who had travelled with us, told us, "This is the end of the line. Everybody has to get off the train". After telling us this unwelcome news, he quickly disappeared. This was just as well for him, because the people on the train were in an angry mood. No telling what they might have done to him. They felt betrayed. The train was supposed to take us to Bavaria, and here we were in a country where we did not speak the language. Somehow I had the feeling that everybody knew they were not welcome as Germans here in Czechoslovakia. Nobody had any desire to be there at the end of the war. A war we surely knew was lost.

However, there was nothing we could do but obey. Some other German official took over and herded us to an already over-crowded building. I believe it was a school. The condition where was terrible. There were no beds to sleep on. There were no proper facilities where one could wash in privacy. The food was cooked in giant proportions, and tasted accordingly. We were all crowded together in large rooms. There was no place to be alone, in short there was no privacy for anybody. Some children were always crying. Old people were lamenting, they could not understand what was happening to them. Most of the old people who were there, had lived all their lives in some small village in Germany and probably never left it before. Now, suddenly they were in a foreign country, herded together with an untold number of strangers. These old people were afraid to go outside because nobody could understand them out there. My family and I stayed in that inhospitable place for about a week, when my father once again took the initiative and ventured out on his own.

I do not know how, but he found this empty, deserted villa; and he persuaded the authorities to give us permission to move into this house. It was a two-story building with white exterior, whoever build the house had built it very solidly. The big garden, which surrounded the house, was in a state of neglect. At one time this might have been a summer retreat, or even a permanent home for some people. But now, completely devoid of any furniture and decoration of any kind, this house gave me an absolute eerie feeling. Secret passages only heightened this feeling. There was no light in the house, therefore we went to sleep when night came. By this time we were used to sleeping on the floor. At night, the house and the forest behind it came alive with all sorts of strange noises, including gunshots. The rumor that there were partisans in the forest did not help to dispel the feeling of fear and mystery this house gave me. We stayed in this house until the war ended.

As soon as the war ended, Czechoslovakian people, armed with rifles and angry at the German people, came to arrest us. We were first taken to a small country school. Our belongings were searched, then we had to stand with our faces to the wall while these men held their guns in our backs. They searched us for weapons. Of course we had no weapons. I thought, 'this is it, we won't get out of this place alive'. There was a lot of screaming and shouting and crying. We were asked a lot of questions. I was so scared, I could not stop shaking. But nobody came to any bodily harm. After what seemed like an eternity, these men led us outside. Once outside, they put our belongings in some kind of wagon, then we were led for a long distance through the streets of Pisek, a great big fenced in place, which might have been an army training ground. As we were walking through the streets of Pisek, people looked on and I felt like a criminal, except I didn't know what crime I was guilty of. Here, at this fenced in place, they gathered all the Germans who had been in the surrounding area it seemed to me there were thousands of people. There was only one building in the whole place and it was used for administration of the intern camp. We had to camp outside.

We made ourselves a makeshift tent from blankets as best we could. Lucky for us it was May. The weather was getting warmer. At least in the day time we were not cold. We didn't get wet too often. Food was really scarce. Once in twenty four hours we got some kind of 'soup' with a piece of bread. Since they had only one kitchen for so many people, we were forever lining up for food. Sometimes we got our one daily ration at twelve o'clock noon, then we might not get anything 'till the next day at midnight. Therefore, we would sometimes not get anything to eat for 36 hours. We were always hungry, but not starving yet. Sanitary conditions left a lot to be desired. Fortunately, there was a river and at least we could wash ourselves and our clothes there. It was at this river where the American and the Russian armies met at the end of the war. Unfortunately, we were on the side where the Russians were. We had spent four months running from them and it was all in vain. They had caught up with us in the end. They had the power. They were the authorities now. It was clear to me even at that time, when I was just a young girl, that the Czech people had traded one master for another. The Czech people had taken us prisoners, but we were just as much, or more so prisoners of the Russians. We had tried desperately to get over to where we hoped the western allied forces would be, because somehow we knew that the Americans were more humane in the treatment of the people they conquered.

We lived in constant fear at this camp. We had no idea what would happen to us. There was nobody that we could turn to for help. Suddenly, through no fault of our own, we were outcasts. Nobody was allowed to leave the camp, even if one needed medical attention. When we were at this camp, I cut my finger right through the tendon on a piece of glass. My parents tried to get me to a doctor or asked them at least to bring a doctor into the camp. The request was denied. There was not even so much as a bandage available for us. It took a year for my finger to heal.

For some of us, this ordeal at the camp did not last more than two weeks. It seemed the Czech people were as anxious to be rid of us as we were to leave. This was not as easy as it sounds. The war had left everything everywhere in a hopeless state of disorder, disrepair, and chaos. Besides that, there was not much fuel for transportation. Especially not for us. No trains were running anywhere in that part of Europe at that time. All other vehicles had long since been confiscated for the war effort. The authorities, therefore, decided that the people who were well enough should start walking back to Germany.

This decision caused a tragic separation in our family, separation that lasted for nine months. Nine months when we children did not know what was happening to our parents and our parents had no idea where all but one of their children were during all that time we had no way of communicating with them. My parents and my youngest sister had to stay behind because neither of them were able to go on any long march. The reason why they could not walk for such a long way was that my mother, who was already frail at the beginning of our ordeal, was now ailing. My father had a lame leg from a childhood injury, and my youngest sister was only six years old at the time. One of my sisters, my two brothers and I as well as two of my father's sisters joined a group of about two hundred other Germans and started to march north. For some unknown reason we were not allowed to go west towards Germany, which was only seventy kilometers away from where we started. The way north was almost three times as far and kept us, in what was then a hostile country for so much longer.

In retrospect it is easy for me to understand the hostility the Czech people showed towards us. They had suffered much at the hands of the Germans. Sad to say, it has always been this way. You do something to us and we will get back at you. Because of the experience during my stay in Czechoslovakia, and my encounter with the Russian soldiers, I have learned that there must be an end to war and hate. There will always be somebody with grievances. But we have to learn to sit down and discuss our differences in a peaceful manner, especially today, when we have such terrible weapons. Besides all this, I have come to the conclusion that hate is a self-destructive emotion. For my own sake I had to come to terms with the hate and the hurt I felt after I came back home. At the time when I was (just a young girl of 14 years old), it was hard for me to understand why people would treat me and others poorly when we, personally, had done nothing to them. I have since come to the conclusion that war and its violence makes ordinary people do things they would not normally do. The capability to do good or evil is in all of humans. We can never, with a clear conscience, say 'I would not do such a thing' until we have been placed in a similar circumstance.

The march out of Czechoslovakia was like a nightmare. We walked through the part which was Russian occupied. When we started out, we carried as much of our belongings as we could in a knapsack. Every day we were forced to march from morning 'till night, about twenty miles a day. Every day we threw a little more of our gear by the wayside. After a long march even the lightest object seems to weigh a ton and it becomes almost unbearable to carry something,

especially when you are weak from hunger. Any valuables we may have had were taken away from us. Each day we had different armed guards. They would march us to the end of their territory and hand us over to the next set of guards. We were searched constantly and threatened with death if we tried to hide anything of value. At night we slept in open fields or in barns, never in a place of our own choosing. When we slept in the open, it was sometimes very cold. We had no blankets to cover ourselves. When we slept in a barn it was terrifying. We young girls hid ourselves under the straw, and the older people would lay on top of us, so that the Russian soldiers would not find us. They would come into the barn searching for their victims, and because it was dark in there, they would light a match or a lighter. In most cases they were so drunk which would make them careless with fire. One was not sure which was the worst fear one went through, the fear of choking, the fear of fire and being burned alive, or the fear of being found by a Russian soldier. For days we did not get anything to eat. Not once during this march through Czechoslovakia did we get any kind of meal. Once in a while we found a kind soul who would give, at least to the children, a piece of bread. But people were scared to do this, because they might be considered to be collaborators.

Weak, sick and constantly in fear of our lives, we marched on. Another fear we had was to be taken to Siberia. There were rumors going around that the Russians would take, young, able people of either sex and put them in forced labor camps somewhere in Siberia. Some of the young men in our group were taken away by Russian soldiers and we never saw them again. Of course, these men may have been German soldiers and not civilians as they claimed to be. All German soldiers were taken prisoners after the war by any of the allied forces.

Somewhere along this march I turned fourteen years old. It was a most memorable birthday. In my fourteen years I had seen too much and learned too much. What I had seen and learned are not the things one learns in any school. I had seen people getting robbed, raped, shot at and murdered. I had seen people getting robbed of all their human dignity and being put on a level with the animals. It was not an education a mother would choose for her young daughter.

After, I do not remember how many long days and nights we finally reached the German border. Here we were not guarded any longer. The large group of people broke up into smaller groups. From here on it was only my family that traveled together. I thought things would be better in Germany. Soon, I found out that this was an illusion. The Germany we came back to was also Russian occupied. There was no rest for the weary. It seemed nobody wanted us around. We had to keep on moving. The food situation was not much better here than it had been in Czechoslovakia. All the supplies were used up, and most of what had been left was confiscated by the occupying army. The people who lived in the area had barely enough to eat themselves, let alone for all these wandering refugees. Thousands of people were wandering through Germany in 1945. Some, like us, were trying to get back home. Others, who had no chance of ever getting back to their own home again, tried to find a new place where they might be allowed to stay. But, like us they too had to keep on going. In fact, the Russian army



would not give us permission to stay anywhere, any longer than we had too, for any reason. Soon we found out that they really meant business, and they would not bend the rules.

One day as we were walking through a city in Saxony, (a province of East Germany) we suddenly realized that my younger brother, who was eleven years old at the time was not with us anymore. Like any young child, he had just wandered away. We all know how easy it is for a child to wander away without looking as to where they are going. But we were in a strange city and being constantly on the move, we had no base where he might find us again. Under normal circumstances, if one loses a child, one would simply go to the police for help. But nothing was simple or normal anymore. There were no German police. The German civil government had completely broken down. The only authority we could go to was the Russian commandant, to whom we went. He said that there was nothing he could do. When we asked him whether we could stay for a few days and try and find my brother ourselves, he would not give us permission to do so. We all felt very helpless and sad and guilty as well. In fact we were devastated. Why had we not watched him closely? What would happen to him? Would we ever see him again? What would we tell our parents, if and when we ever saw them again? How could an eleven year old boy, already weak and sick from hunger, survive in such a chaotic world? It was a hopeless situation. We were powerless. We had to leave the city without him.

By this time we were all sick and weak from starvation. We depended on the kindness of the people along the way to share the little food they had for themselves. We barely ate enough to survive. I do not know how we managed to stay on our feet. It became an effort just to get up in the morning, let alone to start marching every day. A lethargy sets in, and you feel like you just want to give up. We all suffered from dysentery. Every day we travelled a little less. Some seemed a million miles away. We had thrown away all the clothes that we first carried with us, because we were too weak to carry anything. Therefore, we had to wear the clothes we had on our backs, day and night. Our shoes were worn out. We had blisters and sores on our feet. The only thing that kept us alive was the hope to get back home and the hope to get back to some kind of normal living condition again. Home was also the only place where we might be united with our parents and our other family once more.

We finally left what was then called the Russian zone and entered the American zone. Things were not much better there. But, at last we did not have to worry anymore about being taken away to Siberia. Here too, the signs of destruction were everywhere. There was no more food here than in the Russian zone. Most of Germany had been a war area from the fall of 1944 on, and therefore the harvest of that year was lost in most places. It was simply a case of too many people on the move and next to nothing to feed them with.

The only difference in the American zone, which was to our advantage, was that there were some coal trains running. Once in a while we had a chance to ride on such a train. This was of great help to get us back home, because walking became harder with every step. But for these

train rides, we might not have made it home at all. The only way to ride on these trains was on top of the coal, there were no empty cars for us to ride in. There was nothing to hang onto on top of a heap of coal and we had to lie flat down in order not to be blown off the train. It was a scary and most uncomfortable ride. The wind would blow around our ears and the coal dust had ingrained itself in our skin. We were almost as black as the coal. But at this point we did not care anymore what we looked like. Anything was better than walking.

At last, sick, weak, dirty and full of lice, we reached our home town, Aachen. It was June 1945. We had left Silesia, which is no more than 700 kilometers away from Aachen, (the city where I was born), in January of that same year ?????.

The short intervals, we had been on the road for five months. The city we came back to was mostly in ruins. What the bombs did not destroy, was hit by artillery and other guns. We soon found out that our home, where we lived with our parents, had been destroyed in our absence. There was not one thing we could call our own, except our lives. It was a sad homecoming, and yet considering what we had gone through, we were happy to be alive.

Luckily, some of our relatives had already come back home before we did, and they were more fortunate in finding their homes intact. In fact, one of my aunts had managed to evade the German Gestapo, when they evacuated everybody by force, just before the Allied troops reached Aachen. It was punishable by death if anyone tried to stay behind and surrender to the Allies. They could be shot as traitors.

Since none of my relatives had enough room to take in three extra people, (my sister, my brother and I) it was decided that the relatives who could take someone, would each take one of us. It was obviously only a temporary solution. Nobody knew whether my parents would ever come home again. And, therefore, we had to think of a more permanent answer as to how we could take care of ourselves. The relatives who took us in had their own children to worry about, and food was as scarce as ever. My uncles had not come home from the war yet, and it was hard for my aunts to cope with an extra child.

After consulting with the whole family, my sister and I, therefore, decided to set up a household of our own. We were raised to be independent people and it was really stressed by our parents not to rely on charity and help ourselves whenever possible. It was not too hard to find a flat, since many people were still away from Aachen at that time. Some kind of squatter's right was in use. If a place was empty one could just occupy the same.

We found a small flat and moved in. My sister as the older (being 17 years old) at that time, was chosen to be the head of the household and to look after things at home. I managed to find a job and look after the finances for all of us. All industry was closed down and the stores had not much to sell. The only job available was to work as a maid. Besides, I had no training

for any other job, having gone to school for 8 years only. However, my job as a maid worked out well, because I would get my food where I worked and that would leave my pay to keep our household going. The people I worked for were well off and they had more food than most. They shared generously what they had with me, and sometimes I could even take some food home to my family. This was of more value to them than the money earned at the time. There were not many things money could buy. We had to line up for food constantly. Other goods were almost non-existent, except on the black market. Food and other products were scarce in Germany until 1948, when the 'Reich Mark' was completely devalued and the 'Deutsche Mark' was put into circulation.

When we had been home for about a month, my eleven year old brother, whom we had lost in the Russian zone, suddenly walked in as casually as if he had just come home from an afternoon walk. We had almost given up hope of ever seeing him alive again. Not only was he very much alive, but he was well, and, which was a rare thing at the time, he was also well fed. His clothes were clean and in good order and he had good shoes on his feet. He was happy and carefree. He could not understand why we had all worried about him. Being only one child, and alone on the road, he had looked for and found kindly people who would give him odd jobs in exchange for food and shelter as well as clothing. This way he had worked his way slowly homewards, travelling just short stretches each day.

It took a big load of guilt off our shoulders to see him safe and sound at home. Now, if only our parents and our little sister would come home we could be a complete family once again.

My parents finally did come home. It took about nine months for that to happen. During this time, my sister and I looked after my two brothers and ourselves as best we could, without much outside help. When my parents came home, my mother was very ill. The worry about her children, not knowing where they were for nine months or whether they were still alive, plus the poor conditions they had lived and travelled under were too much for her. My mother did not get well again. She died in less than a year after coming home, at the age of forty-one. My mother was not killed by bullets or bombs, but she was the same victim of a terrible war.

### **THE TRAIN AND TRAVELS ENDS**

**By Josie Brandt**

**Typed by Ann Hucke March 17, 2016 from Josie's manuscript**

July 2016-07-11

Conclusion.

As for myself I believe I have learned quite a lot from my experience in 1945.

When I first came back to Aachen I was a very confused young girl. I had nobody to talk

to, because my parents were not home yet and as for my aunts and sister some things

were just taboo to bring up in conversation. So I struggled with hate and hurt but soon I

came to the conclusion that to hate people is a self-destructing emotion. It does not hurt

the people you hate, but it hurts yourself the most. I realised then that we have a choice

in life. We can go on hating and become a bitter person or we change the other way and

become a tolerant and caring person.

I chose the better way and it helped me throughout my life.