

I had seen the gas chamber, entered it, stood where countless wretches, Jews, dissident Catholics, gypsies and God knows who else, had been done to death. I had seen the ovens and the trenches, dug to carry away the blood of victims when the ground on which they stood to be shot became too saturated to absorb more.

Yes, I had been to Dachau, had seen it and thought I could never know, never comprehend why the Holocaust had happened.

"I was there," Hans said.

At first I didn't know what he meant. There as a tourist or what?

"There as a prisoner," he said, quietly. If he wanted my undivided attention, he had it. In fact, I will never, ever forget that evening and every word that he said or the way in which he said it.

"In 1935," Hans continued, "I was 18. I had a lover. He was so beautiful, so very beautiful."

I cannot forget the terrible sadness and longing in his watery blue eyes as he spoke about the young man he called Frederick and the way his fingers caressed the beer stein as if its smooth surface were his lover's skin. He went on, "In the days before the Nazis, there was much life for us, for homosexuals, in Germany. It was open. There were many bars and other places. No one enforced the law." As Hans told it, he and Frederick were students together at the University of Munich. They met that way, in class, had fallen in love and determined to live together.

When Hitler and the Nazis came to power in January, 1933, the effort to exterminate homosexuals began almost at once.

"We were the first," Hans said. "Did you know that?"

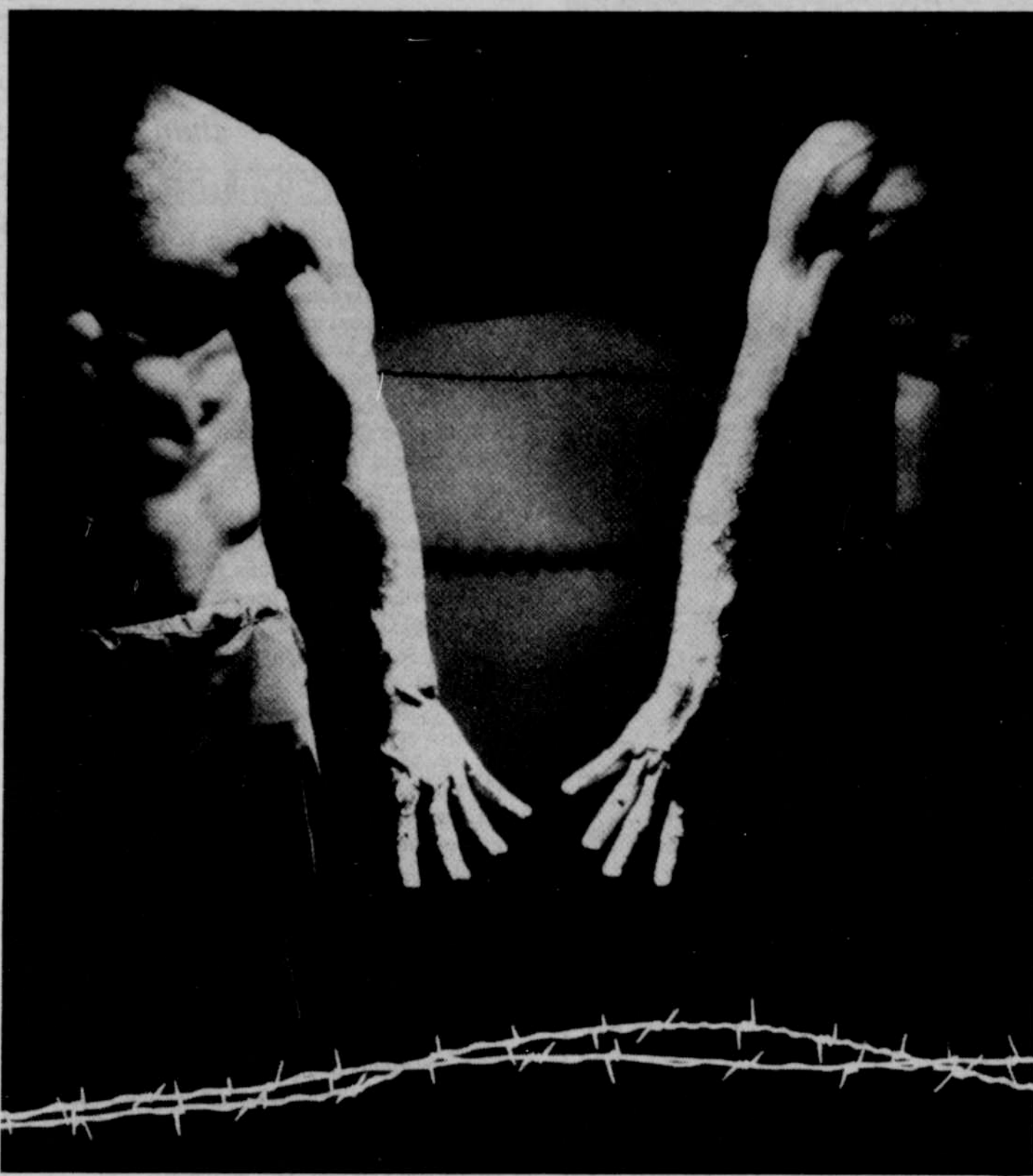
Hans and Frederick were discreet, discreet as it was possible to be, he said. But, always there were informers, many of them homosexuals, who were trying to deflect attention from themselves, he believed. Hans and Frederick were arrested by the Gestapo, taken out of class, in 1935.

They were taken first to Gestapo headquarters, "a terrible, terrible place," Hans said. "All those uniforms, heavy faces, like stone. We were so scared, so frightened. I felt like a child."

Frederick too, so delicate, so beautiful, was frightened. He looked like "a little bird, driven to earth by some dark storm." They had no chance, no chance at all. They were accused of being "filthy queers" and "assfuckers." It was enough. "They hated us so very much. We were a disease to them, a threat, you know." In some cases, gays received a prison sentence before being transported to the camps. For Hans and Frederick, perhaps because Dachau was so close, it was immediate "Schutzhaft," protective custody.

They were taken to the camp in a truck which was divided into cells, each containing, according to Hans, 5-6 prisoners. He and Frederick were put into the same cell. At first, this gave them comfort in the hope that they would not be separated. There were three others there, "criminals of some kind. They knew we were queers, homosexuals. And Frederick was so handsome. They took him and laughed as they forced him to suck them and they hit him and hit him. His poor broken face. There was nothing, nothing I could do. Don't you see?" he pleaded. "I could do nothing, not then, not later. I could do nothing."

When they arrived in Dachau, the prisoners were assembled on the parade ground, surrounded by the SS. "There were many," Hans said. "Not all of us pink triangles." But



the assfuckers were singled out for special treatment.

He, Frederick and the other gays (My word. Hans never used the word gay.) were forced to strip. Afterwards, in front of the SS guards and other prisoners, they were shaved. "Not a hair was left. I prayed they would let us go then, give us clothes, send us to the barracks, but they did not."

Instead, the guards seized Frederick and dragged him to the front. "They knew we were lovers," Hans said, but he did not know how they knew. Two guards held Frederick while a third took a pink triangle and stitched it to his bare chest, right over his heart.

"I could hear him cry as the needle went in and out of his flesh. Oh, his beautiful flesh! They did it slowly and I could hear him. I can still hear him. I will always hear him."

Then the guards took riding crops and while two held him, others whipped him savagely. Hans, his voice shaking, told of the other prisoners, laughing and calling out obscene names, urging the SS on.

"They raped him, raped him right there. I saw it. One after the other, they raped him. I don't know how many. I don't know. I had to watch. They forced me to see it," Hans said over and over again. Over and over again he repeated, "I could do nothing. I could do nothing."

"There was a man there, a prisoner, a murderer, a great hulking man. They called him 'The Lithuanian' and he took a stick, a great stick and raped Frederick with that. They forced him on to his hands and knees, facing me. He looked at me. I can still see his eyes, his beautiful eyes, full of so much agony, so much pain, as the stick was rammed into him again and again. Then the man, the hulk, fell on him, raped him and tore his throat out with his teeth. Frederick's blood, my lover's blood, like a fountain, covered that man and drenched

the ground."

Hans grabbed my shoulders, his gnarled fingers digging in, "My God! My God! I can still see it. See him. My God! I can still hear him scream!"

I held him then, this old man, and thought how that day I had been there, stood on the very parade ground where all this had happened. I thought of Sajid and of others I had loved. For the first time, the Holocaust about which I had read came home to me like a searing, white-hot iron. This was no abstract thing that had happened to others, to members of groups of which I was not a part. This had happened to me! I was gay. It could have been me!

I wanted to run. I wanted to get drunker than I had ever done before in my life, but I did neither. Instead, I held Hans until the bartender came over and said Hans would have to "straighten up or leave." He was causing a disturbance, bothering others. I guess the guy saw my outraged look, for he leaned across the bar and said, "Don't worry about him. These old ones live the war too much."

Hans did recover after a bit and ordered another beer. He apologized for upsetting me and said nothing more about Dachau or Frederick that evening. Before he left, I asked him if he would have coffee with me the next morning. He agreed and we made an appointment to meet at the Cafe St. Peter on the Marienplatz in Old Town Munich. Then he was gone, leaving me with a million questions and praying that Hans would be willing to answer them.

(To be continued)

Copyright 1988 by Novo Graphics, Ltd. All rights are reserved. Reproduction in any form is prohibited without prior written permission.)



Psychological  
Services  
for  
Women, Men,  
and Couples

Kristine L. Falco, Psy.D.

Licensed Clinical Psychologist

3903 SW Kelly, Suite 210  
Portland, OR 97201  
223-8071



Gail Witte, G.R.I., Sales Associate

**Your Central Oregon  
Real Estate Connection**

Bend • Sunriver • Sisters  
Farms • Acreage • Residential

Call Toll Free 800-874-3549

**WitMar  
REALTORS®**  
INCORPORATED

Member of  
**OUR  
CONNECTION**  
In Oregon  
503-388-0100

354 N.E. Greenwood • Suite 100 • Bend, Oregon 97701

**ATTENTION  
WOMEN  
ON THE  
MOVE**

Moving across town?  
Across the country?

**Call OUR  
CONNECTION**

Connect with real estate professionals who feel like old friends...

- ▼ to help you sell your property.
- ▼ to help you buy your new home.
- ▼ to help you connect with your new community.

**NATIONWIDE  
NETWORKING,  
NO OBLIGATION.  
CALL NOW!**

**800-447-1649**

OR IN OREGON  
**503-385-8105**

P.O. Box 5593 • Bend, OR 97708

**Professional  
inquiries invited.**

**OUR CONNECTION**  
A Relocation Network for Women on the Move.