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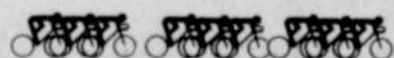
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A time of death

The Origin of the Pink Triangle

BY TERRY BOUGHNER, PH.D.

Hans, a gay survivor of Dachau, relates how his lover, Frederick was tortured, raped and had his throat torn out . . . how helpless and filled with pain Hans will always feel.

He agreed to meet the next day with Terry Boughner, who was filled with "a million questions" and praying that Hans would be willing to answer them.



THE STORY OF HANS

Part II:

*Hans survives as thousands of gays
butchered by Nazi fanatics*

Hans was as good as his word, showing up the next morning at the Cafe St. Peter which sat to one side of Munich's Marienplatz, arriving precisely at the appointed hour of 10 am. I had slept little the night before, thinking about what he had said at the bar, unable to get Frederick out of my mind. This man was a survivor, one of my own, and I needed to find out all I could about his experiences at Dachau. But how do you ask questions of the kind I wanted to ask? As it turned out, Hans made it easy, treating me indulgently like an uncle would an eager young nephew.

"It was not easy to survive," he said, answering my first question unasked.

"At first, you know, I did not even want to do that. I wanted to die. But life is strange. Even in a place like Dachau you want to keep going, to live. I made that choice. But, at first, there was the guilt, terrible guilt. That has never left me. Why, I asked then and have asked ever since, was it Frederick and not me? And guilt because I did not commit suicide to be with him. I still think about that sometimes," he admitted.

"But I decided to try and live. It was perhaps an act of rebellion, the only thing I could do. You see, I could keep Frederick alive that way. I told myself that . . . and that is why I am talking to you, why I will relive those years, to keep Frederick alive."

Hans, along with the other Pink Triangles had been segregated away from the "normals" in the rest of the camp. "Remember," he explained, "we were thought to be carriers of disease. The Nazis and others who believed them, thought that just a touch would be

enough to become infected with our perversion."

"It made no sense. Nothing did in those years. They said we were sick with contagious disease but they could rape us, have sex with us, to prove their masculinity, to prove they weren't homosexuals, weren't sick like they said we were." This applied not only to the SS, but to many of the straight prisoners as well. Anything . . . whatever was done to Pink Triangles, anything at all, was alright.

"You," he told me, "live in a different world. You can not imagine how they hate—hated us and how they used us."

I remember how he looked nervously about the square. It was a lovely warm, sunny day with crowds enjoying themselves while waiting for the glockenspiel, high in the tower of the Rathaus, or old city hall, to play.

"It has not been long since the law against us was removed," he explained. "The same law, 175, that the Nazis used to kill us."

"You are young," he told me. "You don't have to fear. But that fear, that dread, will never leave me, never leave any of us as old as I. I think yet that someone will come for me, to take me again, to punish me for being homosexual. I live with that."

"I have tried to explain to myself many times the people who did these things," he said, "but I cannot. The people who allowed them to happen were just people who were told they were doing the right thing. We were a danger to the state, to society. Then it was the Jews and all the others, but we were first, the very first."

He paused and then said, "There were others, of course, sick ones, haters by nature, true Nazis. I think they exist everywhere. The Party allowed them to bring out all the worst thoughts, the ones that shame hell, that we all have, and gave them the chance to act on them."

One of the favorite "sports" at Dachau was to use Pink Triangles for target practice, forcing them to line up and then run back and forth in front of the bullseyes which had been set up for the purpose.

"Many beautiful young men died that way and many other ways as well. Like Frederick, my poor Frederick, they were killed horribly, terribly, in ways beyond belief."

He had read a book, Hans said, on the Holocaust where the author had devoted one sentence to gays and then only to write that Pink Triangles had the best chance of survival. That, he maintained, was not true. Oh, there were a few priests, a minister or two, who were kind, but, for the most part, gays were fair game. Gays were the lowest of the low, filth of filth. "We were not even animals. Not even as good as rats." Older gays and gays who were not good looking had little chance for any kind of survival. They died of starvation and overwork or from beatings or from being used for medical experiments, he said. But Hans was young, handsome, boyish even, and, as he said, "with a good body." He could survive, at least for awhile, by becoming a kept boy, a "piepel", a little doll, the property of an SS man.

Pink Triangles were the last to be fed, having to line up to get whatever slop was left after the others, "the real men," had eaten.

There was an SS guard standing beside one of the pots of "soup" watching the prisoners go by. He spotted Hans and ordered him out of the line. "Come, assfucker, filthy queer."

"I had no choice," Hans said. "I went. He turned my head this way and that, examining me," he said, placing his fingers on his chin to demonstrate. "Like an animal, like some horse he was going to buy. Then he ordered me to get out of my uniform, the stripped cotton thing all prisoners had to wear, no matter what the weather. I was to be naked right there. You have to understand. There was no choice and so, no shame. I wasn't human—only homosexual."

"The first time I sucked him was the worst. There was Frederick. I thought of Frederick, oh so much. Please believe that. No one had touched me since Frederick."

But the SS man, Gunter, was young, not too bad looking and, as Hans said, being what the guard wanted, when he wanted, was a way—the only way he knew—to survive. "I knew if once I stopped thinking of survival, I would die." He convinced himself that Frederick would understand.

Gunter kept Hans with him, saw that he got decent food, warm clothing and a soft job in the camp. There was no shame for the guard in keeping Hans. Gunter was not gay. He had a wife, children somewhere. Certainly, as Hans said, he was not the only piepel in Dachau. Many SS guards had them. Straight prisoners, criminals, murderers, "Greens," as Hans called them after the color of their badge, had little dolls. There was no shame attached to a "normal" who used a gay for physical release. None. It was the gay who bore all the disgrace. He was nothing but a perverted straight.

Gunter was transferred out of Dachau. Hans never learned where and never saw him again. But, he was sad to see the SS man go. "It was more than only a question of survival. I had become attached to him, and I think he was to me—a little bit." Even after all these years, Hans said, he sometimes thought of Gunter and wondered about him. He was, he admitted, grateful to him.

After Gunter, there were others. He was passed on from one man to another, fortunate that he was able to keep his looks. That's how he survived, by being a whore.

How many Pink Triangles were in the camp? Hans shook his head. He did not know. Hundreds, thousands, it varied from time to time. But every week, then every day new transports would be brought in—more filthy queers to be stripped of their clothes, their hair, their names, everything that had meant anything to them. "In the outside, these were respected people, good and decent people, doctors, teachers, sons of fine families. But in Dachau, they were nothing—worse than nothing."

He told me, it had to be remembered that Dachau, though the first camp, was hardly the last. Others, dozens of others were set up to hold gays, Jews and all the others who the Nazi Reich had determined to extinguish from the face of the earth. Many times, transports loaded with Pink Triangles left Dachau. A selection would be held, prisoners picked to go. At those times, he was more afraid than at any other, for it was common knowledge that there were