

it was common knowledge that there were camps more terrible than Dachau. These were death camps, (Totenlager), as opposed to Dachau, which was a work camp (Arbeitslager). At least at Dachau, he thought he would have some kind of a chance. In a Totenlager, he believed, he would have none.

Nevertheless, the humiliations were terrible. No gay had a name. Instead, he was given a number and when called, was forced to answer to "Queer 4962," for example. In the barracks where the Pink Triangles were, no one was allowed to sleep with his hands under the cover, not even in the coldest weather. The Nazis thought that if gays were allowed to do that, they would masturbate which, it was believed, only gays did. "Masturbation," Hans said, "was said to be a sign of the homosexual disease."

If you were caught trying to keep your hands warm, the punishment was immediate and hideous. The guards seized one man and forced him to stand naked in the snow while buckets of cold water were thrown over him. In another case, a man was hung up by his wrists while his testicles were dipped alternately into ice water and hot water. His screams echoed throughout the camp. Another time, a man was hung by his testicles and beaten. He was left to hang there until he died.

The Nazis, Hans said, thought all gays were sex-crazed, that if gays in the barracks and outside in the camp were not watched constantly, there would be orgies. But, there were none. "You lose all desire under such privations as existed." There was love, however. Many gays paired off. In fact, Hans thought that most did, seeking comfort and some little human dignity in a loving look, a quiet, stolen smile.

These pairs never survived very long, having the highest mortality rate. They could not hide what they meant to each other and always there was someone, a Capo, a prisoner, to inform.

Capos, Hans explained, were camp inmates placed over others by the SS. They got good food—"Do you know how easily you would sell yourself for food?" he asked, holding up a brown, crusty roll.

He nodded, acknowledging, I suppose, my ignorance as he turned the bread slowly in his

gnarled hands, looking at it as if, in that loaf, were all the demons that haunted him. Then he put it back on the plate.

Capos who were in charge of Pink Triangles were always straight, not like Gunter and others who had little dolls, but homophobic straights who were, if that were possible, he said, worse than the SS themselves. In the end, a Capo was always killed. The SS never trusted anyone very long.

The guards took special delight in finding out about lovers from the Capos. Then they could torture and rape one while the other watched and kill them both before each other's eyes. Some broke, Hans said. One lover would denounce the other or even participate in his torment out of promises for an easier life. These promises were never kept.

However, most did not yield. "You see," Hans said, in words I will never forget, "even in Dachau, even in Germany in those years, it was possible to choose right. I did not. Many did. I can never forget them."

I asked him if he ever prayed. He said, "No, not a least in any formal way." His family had been religious, but he had early given it up. Besides, he did not think praying would do any good.

And your family? "I have never seen them again," he replied. Afterward, he did not want to find them.

Sometime toward noon, Hans had to leave, to keep an appointment. I asked him if he would be at the bar that evening. He said he would not, that he rarely went and that last night had been an exception. However, if I wanted, he would give me an address where I could write to him if I wished. Then, as if fleeing, he left.

In Chapter 3, the search for the reality of the Pink Triangle begins. Hans, I knew even then, had told only a small part of the story. There was so much more I had to find out about the holocaust of the gays.

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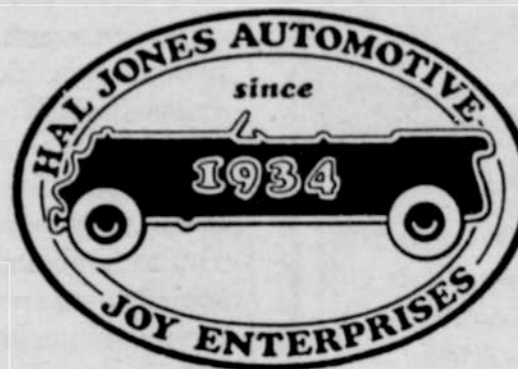
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