

# Scars of Prison Camp Appear Healing in Talk With Local Woman

By EVA HAMILTON  
Mail Tribune Staff Writer

"If you really want to do something and try very hard, you can. This I believe. The scars of the young heal rapidly."

These words with an Horatio Alger tinge would not be surprising in a bit of commencement oratory at this season of the year.

Spoken by a little woman whose reddish hair covers a patched up skull—whose able hands were gathering up bits of human bodies at the age when American girls clutch prom corsages—they become astonishingly significant.

For looking at Trudi (Mrs. Donald C.) Bills, one is convinced that the scars have healed. Her deep blue eyes reflect no bitterness. Her radiant skin responds with healthy elasticity to her warm smile when she rings a door bell to say "Avon calling" in typical American style.

**Assigned Tasks**  
There is nothing mildly suggestive of the austerity of prison camp in the personality of this former Estonian girl. But she was there and she was assigned tasks which should never have been performed by human hands of any age.

Now the wife of M. Sgt. Donald C. Bills, U.S. Army, current residence 38 Summit ave., Medford, she is dedicated to being happy. To transferring to her four-year-old daughter, Tamara, the worthwhile things she brings from the old country. For instance an understanding of seven languages, in addition to English (which she describes as "not too good").

Trudi's home was in Kerstinen, Estonia, near the Finnish border. It is now controlled by Russia. Life on a small farm acreage was filled with heavy tasks but colorful traditions.

**Attend Public School**  
She had attended public school from 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., walking many miles to



MRS. TRUDI BILLS  
Reviews Experiences

the school for four years and then had qualified for higher education, even to the inclusion of clothes. For many years she was a student at medical school under this program.

Then one day some one said a citizen of the village had killed a German soldier. Every family was notified that within 24 hours all would be transferred to a civilian prison camp as punishment. In four hours the cattle trucks had arrived. Trudi was 16. Families were allowed to carry with them only the clothes they were wearing. They were ordered to gather up food supplies to last for 24 hours. For four days they traveled.

Their captors, not they, ate the 24-hour food supply. Mrs. Bills related the story. Hard labor became her constant companion on the trip and after they entered the prison camps. She never saw her stepmother, father and sisters and brother, there were five in the family.

She was very small for her age, she said, the "shrimp in the family." Her father was more than six feet tall and so was her mother, a normal height in Estonia. Trudi is now 5 feet, three, and she grew "a head taller after marriage," she explained.

The prison camp was moved from place to place. Pitching hay, milking cows, cleaning up trenches, shelters and rail-

road tracks after bombings became ordinary work for Trudi and the one person from her home town who remained with her.

This girl friend, she recalled, made all things bearable. Her sense of humor transcended the most horrible experiences encountered. Then one night this one contact was removed. The two girls, after working all day in the fields, were ordered to wash the dishes for the owners of the land.

**Events Were Common**  
A duke, or his equivalent in Germany, had given a big party. These events, Mrs. Bills recalls, were common in Germany even after hordes were starving, for followers of Hitler were still shouting that they would win the war and this called for celebration.

Too fatigued to be careful, Trudi dropped a china saucer and broke it. The hostess grabbed a steel plated broom and struck her on the head. Her girl friend came to her defense by attacking the woman and was bayoneted to death by a guard.

When Trudi regained her senses four months later on the straw bed of the prison camp, she learned of her friend's death. After that nothing seemed to matter. She had lost complete contact with her former home. A Polish doctor in the prison camp had operated on her skull and substituted a piece of chicken wire for the damaged bones. After the American troops took over Germany an Army doctor operated again and was amazed at the success of the Polish doctor's work. He put silver plates in the girl's skull and they are still there.

There was kindness in this area, however, the Avon representative remembers. **Taken To Farm**  
Each morning at one encampment the prisoners were called off by numbers. Those who ran fast in response to the call were taken to a farm to work. One particular farm-

er of Polish descent, was kind and employed a number of secret methods by which to give forbidden food to the prisoners. He would hide foods under small mounds. It was sometimes like a treasure hunt. He would order the prisoners into the barn to milk and they would be allowed to drink all the milk they could, a truly rare treat after months of a watery soup and cabbage menu.

There was also "a lady," Trudi mentioned, "who left little signs along the road indicating where bread could be found, and believe me," the Medford woman added, "when one is starving, she learns to look for signs, any sign." This woman was a German but not a Nazi, and she ended her life in blindness. Her eyes were damaged in a bombing, Mrs. Bills said, and she was denied medical care because she was not a Nazi.

One of the most revolting assignments given the prisoners was to go into Vienna to gather up the pregnant women and children, who were designated as "The race of the future," Mrs. Bills said.

The risks were great and they were always taken by the prisoners, according to the Medford narrator. The guards stood back and the women prisoners went forward. En route to Germany the train was bombed broadside, women were not permitted to gather up or bury their dead.

"A strange thing occurred in Dresden," Mrs. Bills commented. "The English bombed

for 48 hours, but the prison area was not touched. Nothing happened. It was as if God's hand was spread in protection over the prisoners. There was so little clothing, heavy wooden shoes and rags. When a prisoner died, her clothes were taken and immediately donned by another.

"When the American troops came, all the young people were gathered up and turned over to the Red Cross. We were given our choice of going to the Displaced Persons camp or the Red Cross."

"I chose the Red Cross," Mrs. Bills reviewed the day. "The first thing we got was towels. I'll never forget those towels and that beautiful soap. Sweetheart soap. We showered in a circle surrounded with blankets, head and feet showing. It was wonderful. All our rags were taken and burned and we were given Army fatigues and boots, but they were clean. Skirts and blouses later substituted for the fatigues during the day and I got the first anklets I ever wore."

It was in a skirt and blouse that Trudi went to work at Patton Barracks in Heidelberg, where she met her husband. The Red Cross got her the job. Also there she met General Eisenhower and saw Mamie frequently eating lunch. She recalls that Ike was a wonderful fellow who wore an "old sloppy jacket."

Was it no longer like the Heidelberg of Student Prince? she was asked. "Oh yes, still beautiful. The one city that

was not bombed. You see they intended to use it for headquarters. Heidelberg was still beautiful," she beamed. "But Mannheim 15 miles away was bombed."

**Romance Develops**  
Trudi's romance developed in Heidelberg. And even as that of the little heroine in "The Student Prince," it ran into troubles. Trudi had to prove that she had been born. That she was a citizen of Estonia before she could marry a man in the U. S. service.

That proof was not easy to find. It was through this search that her prospective husband relocated her family. "It took us two and a half years to get married," she declared.

They found her father, stepmother, sisters and brother, alive. But her brother had been the victim of a hideous atrocity. All had relocated in Bavaria. After being stateless for five years they spent two additional years becoming Germans. Her sister married a German engineer and is now living in Canada.

A few years ago, Trudi's father (no longer living) came to Canada to visit. She was unable to join him there but they engaged in a telephone conversation "And what do you think," she laughed, "We couldn't seem to get together on our homeland languages." She speaks Finnish, Lapp, Estonian, Russian, German, Polish, Lithuanian. "Finally Dad, who had been in Canada only a year, said 'Let's speak English and we did.'"

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**SHOWMAN**—Billy the North American black bear, one of the residents of the Twin Pines zoo in the Illinois Valley, is noted as a showman. He can drink soda pop as fast as it can be opened for him.



**NEW ADDITION**—One of the operators of the Twin Pines zoo holds a Kinkajou, better known as a honey bear. The zoo has acquired a pair of these animals, members of the cat family.

## Three New Animals in Area Zoo

By KATHERINE SCOTT  
Mail Tribune Correspondent  
Illinois Valley — Mr. and Mrs. A. G. Edwards, new owners of the Twin Pines zoo, located just north of the Oregon-California state line on the Redwood highway, recently returned from a

Portland trip on which they purchased three new animals. As a result of their acquisitions, the zoo now boasts a pair of Kinkajou, better known as honey bears, and a young ocelot.

The Kinkajou actually come from the cat family but are described as timid. Their clear honey color earned them the name of honey bears.

The ocelot also is a member of the cat family. This one, named Ozzie, was at one time a house pet and later was given to the Portland zoo.

Eight of the 15 are monkeys, including a pair of Japanese Macaque, Spider and Java monkeys and individual Weber and Gibbon monkeys.

The other animals are a porcupine, a tame rabbit, Sam the badger and Billy the North American black bear. The pet rabbit was moved to an empty cage next to the spider monkeys in order to make room for the ocelot. Cindy, the female Spider monkey, has decided that the rabbit makes a good pillow, so the two spend their nights together.

Sam the badger and Billy the bear are showmen, particularly Billy, who can drink soda pop as fast as it can be opened for him. Billy was caught as a yearling and was raised in his present home. He will be 19 this summer.

Mr. and Mrs. Edwards and their son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Wallace moved here about three months ago. Edwards is a retired captain with the Santa Ana, Calif., fire department. Wallace was a restaurant owner in Anaheim, Calif.

A nominal admission fee is charged at the zoo.

## Nine Days of Rites For Pope Under Way

Vatican City — (UPI) — Nine days of funeral rites for Pope John XXIII began Friday in the Basilica under which his body lies entombed.

The series of services in St. Peter's, the largest church in Christendom, will last until June 17, two days before the Sacred College of Cardinals meets to choose a successor to Pope John, who died Monday at the age of 81 from a stomach tumor believed to be cancerous.

The Pope's triple coffin was placed in the grottoes below the church Thursday among the tombs of past popes and kings, and was bricked up in a plain niche adorned only with a plaque of the Madonna.

It will be moved later to the Roman Church of St. John or an adjoining palace, as requested in the Pope's will.

## Defective Wiring Blamed in Fatal Fire

Portland — (UPI) — Defective wiring was blamed tentatively Thursday for a house fire that took the lives of three-year-old twins Wednesday.

Patrick and Patricia Yeager were pronounced dead at a hospital after being overcome by smoke. Their mother, Mrs. Theresa Yeager, 38, was in serious condition as a result of smoke inhalation and burns.

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