

Gosh I'm Good

Memoirs of a Modest Man

by Leo Orsten

Copyright © 2003
by Leo Orsten
All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act or by the author.

Designer: Jason Coleman

If you are interested in purchasing copies of *Gosh I'm Good*, please send an email inquiry to orsten@jasoncoleman.us

Author's Acknowledgements

Whenever I told stories, some of which are recounted in my memoirs, I was told that I "have to write a book." My friend Joe Coulombe urged me to start to write to avoid getting "stale." My cousin Fred urged me to start writing before my memory fades. So, without trying to be funny or sentimental, I want to thank most sincerely all my friends and relatives, here named and unnamed, who kept pushing, encouraging, and urging me on even when I was tempted to give up.

I am especially indebted to those who provided invaluable help. My wife, Hanna, who cleaned up, corrected, and edited my manuscript; Chris Acox who persistently listened, and typed, and typed, and typed, laughed, and typed some more; Rick George and his mother Gloria who were instrumental in pointing me in the right direction by introducing me to Jason Coleman to get this "masterpiece" off the ground.

My heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all.

Leo Orsten

Preface

"Surely, never had a male
Under such like circumstances
So adventurous a tale
As compares with most romances..."
Gilbert & Sullivan's *The Mikado*

Leo Orsten is, now, a 90 year old retired real estate broker. But his real estate career was only the tranquil aftermath of a tale that "compares with most romances."

I know him because during 1963-1989 he made all the real estate deals for Trader Joe's (I retired in 1989, and he kept on working for Trader Joe's for some years after that.) Those leases are a big reason why Trader Joe's got off to such a strong start. His work as a broker was unique because he brought to bear on leasing the mindset of a Middle-European lawyer who had survived both Hitler and Stalin—and the knowledge of human nature thus acquired willingly or no.

But I also know him as a friend, confidant, and incorrigible teller of jokes, some pornographic, some scatological, and all of them oft-repeated.

Along with jokes, however, I heard snippets of what he experienced during his first 45 years—in the Austro-Hungarian empire, in the Woodrow Wilson-created Czechoslovakia, in the German invasion of 1939, and in the Soviet takeover of 1948.

So I urged him to write this book to create a priceless record of what life was like in Czechoslovakia during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. The fact that he was born a Jew adds a special dimension to his personal history.

And anyone who reads this rich, often jokey autobiography will come to understand that humor can be the grease which lets a man squeeze through many tight escapes and endure their memory with grace.

In one of his last movies, a very old Marcello Mastroianni, playing a very old man, said "nostalgia is when you lose your sense of irony."

Leo's autobiography is one of irony, not nostalgia; the work of a young man, not an old one.

Joe Coulombe
Founder, Trader Joe's Markets
October 2003

Chapters

| | | |
|-----|---|----|
| 1. | The Curtain Rises | 13 |
| 2. | Trebic | 14 |
| 3. | The River | 18 |
| 4. | World War I | 19 |
| 5. | The Birth of Czechoslovakia..... | 20 |
| 6. | #9/58 Charles Square..... | 22 |
| 7. | The Learning Years | 23 |
| 8. | The Art of Procreation..... | 24 |
| 9. | Carnegie Hall "Sans Moi" | 25 |
| 10. | The Middle of the Road..... | 26 |
| 11. | Growing Pains, Without Pain..... | 26 |
| 12. | Sex and My Fallen Idol..... | 28 |
| 13. | "The Greats" and "Not So Greats" of the Crossroads Inn | 29 |
| 14. | Tennis Anyone? | 31 |
| 15. | Be Prepared | 32 |
| 16. | Toujours L'Amour..... | 32 |
| 17. | Clouds and More Clouds..... | 34 |
| 18. | The Occupation Has Started..... | 36 |
| 19. | Wishful Thinking and Hard Facts | 38 |
| 20. | Rule Britannia | 41 |
| 21. | From Goldhurst Terrace to Abbey Road | 45 |
| 22. | The Great Man at the Royal Albert Hall .. | 48 |
| 23. | Starvation a la Carte..... | 48 |
| 24. | Charlie Chan..... | 50 |
| 25. | Business Not As Usual..... | 51 |
| 26. | The Huns on the March..... | 52 |
| 27. | The Changed England..... | 54 |

| | |
|---|----|
| 28. Rolling Out the Barrel..... | 55 |
| 29. Getting to the "Bottoms"..... | 56 |
| 30. A Most Unusual Military Unit | 57 |
| 31. The Invasion That Wasn't..... | 58 |
| 32. Murdering the King's English (or How to Communicate in a Foreign Tongue) | 59 |
| 33. The War is Coming Closer..... | 62 |
| 34. Vive la France or "Saving Private Beda .. | 63 |
| 35. It Was Not Rome That Was Burning | 64 |
| 36. Pork, Dumplings, and Sauerkraut | 65 |
| 37. The Retaking of Dunkirk..... | 66 |
| 38. Entering Czechoslovakia..... | 66 |
| 39. We Were Ready But Ignorant..... | 67 |
| 40. "Sun-Bronzed Heroes from the West Presented Themselves to Prague"..... | 68 |
| 41. Velhartice | 69 |
| 42. Heading Home | 70 |
| 43. The Home That Was No Home..... | 70 |
| 44. The Letter | 71 |
| 45. Coming Up for Air..... | 73 |
| 46. The Boar Hunt | 74 |
| 47. Hanna and Her Steinway..... | 75 |
| 48. Traveling Through the Zone of Occupation | 77 |
| 49. New Year's Eve | 79 |
| 50. Meet Benji | 80 |
| 51. Beware of Liberating Comrades | 83 |
| 52. The Plot Thickens | 84 |
| 53. Escape from the Communist "Liberators" .. | 86 |
| 54. Plotting and More Plotting..... | 88 |
| 55. The Transportation Department in Munich . | 90 |
| 56. Our Clandestine Friends..... | 93 |

| | | |
|-----|--|-----|
| 57. | Hanna's Escape | 94 |
| 58. | "Sous Les Toits De Paris" | 96 |
| 59. | Wedding Bells | 97 |
| 60. | The Bride's Arrival in Munich | 99 |
| 61. | The Pilgrimage to the "Land of the Free" | 100 |
| 62. | The Pilgrims From Czechoslovakia | 102 |
| 63. | Hollywood | 103 |
| 64. | More of Rudi | 105 |
| 65. | Our Family Matinee Idol | 108 |
| 66. | The Land of Opportunity | 109 |
| 67. | Where Do I Fit In? | 113 |
| 68. | Why Did I Write This Book? You be the Judge | 115 |

Gosh I'm good, and I don't mind saying so. If you are that good, it is hard to find anybody who would believe it. I finally decided that if I was that good, I did not need anybody to believe it, as long as I believe it...and I still believe it.

1. The Curtain Rises

Let me start with the day I was born. In fact, I was not born on the day I was born, because in spite of the insistence of my parents, that they were not superstitious, they did not want to have their first-born son born on a Friday, therefore they switched me from Friday to Thursday, which turned out to be April 10, 1913.

I was born with flat feet, big ears and a small face (the freckles came later). My mother, Erna, was then nineteen and one of four offspring. My father, Alfred, was then thirty-three and one of fifteen offspring. I was their only child.

My closest cousins, by blood and age, were Fred and his sister Gerty, both children of my father's brother and my mother's sister. In addition to their father being my father's brother and my mother's brother-in-law, their mother was also my mother's sister and their father's sister-in-law.

My father was the uncle of my cousins and also their uncle by marriage while, in turn, their father was my uncle and my uncle by marriage and my mother's sister was my aunt, but also my aunt

LEO ORSTEN

by marriage and my mother was my cousins' aunt and also their aunt by marriage.

The foregoing came about by the fact that two brothers married two sisters, thereby causing my cousins to become my double cousins.

So much for confusion.

2. Trebic

It was Trebic (pronounced "Trshebeach") where it all started, where my father was born, all his siblings were born, where my above-mentioned cousins were born and where I was born. My mother, her siblings and a corresponding number of uncles, aunts and cousins were born in Znojmo (pronounced "Znoimo"). Both Trebic and Znojmo are in Moravia which, together with Bohemia and Silesia, is a part of the Czech Republic, formerly Czechoslovakia which, however, did not exist when I was born because it was then all part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

In July 1914, the Austrian Archduke, Franz Ferdinand (definitely no relation of mine) and his wife (also no relation of mine) were assassinated in Sarajevo. That gave Kaiser Franz Josef, and Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany, an opening to start a war, which later became known as World War I.

When Britain opposed the shindig, the Austrians took to the streets yelling "Gott strafe England" meaning "God punish England." God either did not listen, or did not speak German

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

because, when it was all over, Austria was no longer an Empire and Kaiser Karl, the successor of Kaiser Franz Josef, was no longer "Kaiser." Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Slovakia, after almost 300 years of hibernation, emerged as one independent state called "Czechoslovakia."

It is therefore questionable not only when, but also where I was born. The only not questionable fact is that I was born.

Trebic is in Moravia 64 km from Brno and 160 km from Prague. At that time, it had a population of about 12,000.

It is nestled among hills of plush greenery, in a beautiful valley, separating Bohemia from Moravia. A large and impressive square, in the center of the town, features some beautifully hand decorated buildings which offer a picturesque setting.

Under the stars and full moon, the many alleys and narrow streets exuded romance which invited love and maintained the heartbeat of the young at a healthy rate. The ancient castle, churches and monasteries, surrounded by majestic forests, peaceful ponds and flowing brooks, complete the picture of bliss and contentment.

Trebic became a town in 1348 A.D. by decree of Charles IV, the Holy Roman Emperor and the King of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. It became an industrial town with world-renowned shoe factories and a variety of other industries. The castle, perched on top of a hill overlooking the town, became a tourist attraction and the Count and Countess became "Mister and Mistress" when Czechoslovakia abrogated nobility and family titles.

LEO ORSTEN

The Catholic Church, in the center of town, has a 245 ft. high bell tower, commanding a breathtaking view of the countryside. The ringing of the church bells was heard for miles. As a reward for carrying buckets of coal several hundred steps up to his quarters, the watchman permitted us, then teenagers, to pull the ropes which made the majestic bells ring, the sound of which probably contributed to my present audio deficiency.

The watchman kept an eye on things. Every 15 minutes, between dusk and dawn, he blew a horn to apprise the sleeping burghers that someone was watching over them. He was permitted to blow the horn only in three directions, because the fourth direction faced the general Cemetery and there was concern that the sound could wake up the dead. There was no such restriction affecting the Jewish Cemetery.

Whenever the watchman spotted a fire, smoke, or anything resembling it, he sounded an alarm and pointed a red flag or, at night, a red light in the direction of the flames, smoke, or anything resembling it. Those, who were sufficiently mobile, rushed to where the action was.

Trebic, at that time, had two volunteer Fire Brigades. One was referred to as the "Czech Fire Brigade," whose Commander was President and owner of a printing company, who spoke mostly Czech and who had his own gold-plated helmet. The other one was the "German Fire Brigade," whose Commander was President of his Distillery and mostly spoke German and he, too, had his own gold-plated helmet. Of course, each Brigade had its own horse drawn fire engine and other equipment. They were valiant fire fighters but

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

there was always rivalry between the two fire companies. They knew and respected each other and the fact that they both had the same problems and the same objectives.

To get to the fire and successfully put it out was no easy task. First, the horses and their coachmen had to be found and requisitioned, unhitched from whatever they were hitched to and re-hitched to the Fire Engine. Nighttime made things more difficult, with no horses in the streets and their coachmen scattered all over, either over a beer at a local tavern, or sleeping in their beds.

This took time. Meanwhile, the fire continued to burn. Still, the Coachmen rushed and reached their destination. They then ran with the horses to the Firehouse where they hitched them to the fire truck. The fat men with the golden helmets, were the Fire Chiefs and those with the bugles were the buglers. The others were volunteers who, due to their age and girth, could never have made it to the fire on foot.

Thus, with the bells ringing, the bugles sounding, the whistles blowing and the horses puffing, the rescuers were finally on their way. Mostly, however, the fire did not wait. By the time the Firemen arrived, the flames had accomplished what they set out to do.

The "death knell," was a special bell used to bring to the people's attention that one of their neighbors had departed. The watchman, as I recall it, rang it in few minute-long intervals, to give people time to gather and listen. When enough people were assembled at the foot of the tower, the watchman called out

LEO ORSTEN

the name of the deceased. The sounding of the "death knell" was expensive. The wealthier the deceased, the more frequent the segments. Afterwards, the townspeople dispersed, shaking their heads, looking somber.

On their way home they usually stopped at a tavern to toast the dearly departed.

3. The River

The river divides the town and played an important part in putting out the fires provided, of course, that it was not frozen over or dried up. Its name was Jihlavka. It forms a valley which gives the town the picturesque setting. As far back as I can remember, it also served local swimmers, rowers, lovers, dogs and rats - not necessarily in that order - and carried most sewage produced by the residents, their friends and the local industry.

On the right bank was an area with cabanas, which were segregated by sexes or one cabana could be rented individually on a daily basis, while others were shared. Next to the cabanas were two diving boards of different heights and two floating platforms, neither of which reached the opposite bank which, in turn, required a wet cross-over by those individuals unable to walk on water. The left bank consisted of a huge lawn, which was the sun-bathing area and lent itself to the co-mingling of varying intensity, starting with soccer and volleyball, played barefoot and continuing with more romantic activities where bareness was less confined.

One elderly (nobody knew how elderly) lifeguard served both areas. Rumor had it that he could not swim. At least, to my knowledge, no one ever saw him more than ankle-deep in the water. Even in dire emergencies, where he could have proven that he could swim, there were too many eager young rescuers ready to risk their lives to save the drowning (or non-drowning) damsels.

The frequent rescue of a non-drowning, well endowed redhead comes to mind. The fact that she could swim was unimportant. Her rescues were always accomplished with dignity and total disregard of danger and always ended with her bathing suit lowered to her knees. It became a truly revealing ritual, greatly enjoyed by most people of masculine "denomination" and obviously also by some of the drownees. The gallantry and self-sacrifice of those rescuers was always rewarded by the male on-lookers with resounding applause. For the record, I have to add that I cannot recall a single case of a rescued male. They all must have drowned. Hopefully, they rest in peace.

4. World War I

I was a little over a year old when World War I broke out and, due to my then young age, my recollection of it is rather vague. Except for individual episodes I shall, therefore, only briefly touch on life in that period. Most able-bodied men were called to arms to defend the Kaiser, his honor and possessions. My father who, in his early youth, fell off a bicycle and broke his collarbone, was found

LEO ORSTEN

unfit to carry a rifle and was assigned to conscripting horses. I am not sure to what degree his partial disability affected the outcome of the war.

In the meantime, my mother, in spite of her young age, together with my Aunt Nelly, who was her sister and, as I already mentioned, also her sister-in-law, ran the business. A sign over the store identified it as:

“THE FIRST ELECTRICALLY DRIVEN
COFFEE ROASTING ESTABLISHMENT OF
TREBIC AND DISTRIBUTORS OF GROCERIES
EN GROS AND EN DETAIL”

The electric motor also played a vital part in pumping water from a well into two tanks placed on the roof which supplied both the business and the living quarters with running water.

5. The Birth of Czechoslovakia

I was five when, on October 28, 1918, Czechoslovakia became an independent state and, on November 11th, the war officially ended. I watched through the window of our living room the screaming and flag-waving crowds, kissing and hugging, while tearing down signs in German and generally creating havoc. Such havoc is now reserved by civilized nations for soccer and other major sporting events. Except for my mother's promise that dad would soon be permanently with us, that was my first impression of the dawn of a new era.

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

When euphoria passed, concerns about the future came creeping up. Luckily, in Czechoslovakia, Professor Thomas Garrigue Masaryk, a man of wisdom, compassion and integrity, a widely respected statesman and philosopher, was elected and became the first President of Czechoslovakia. While visiting in America, he met and married Charlotte, an American and adopted her last name as his middle name. He became a role model to his newly liberated countrymen and gave the country direction and dignity. While in America, he also personally met and became friends with President Woodrow Wilson. It was no coincidence that Masaryk declared the independence of Czechoslovakia in the famous Independence Hall in Philadelphia, where the independence of the United States was also declared. During Masaryk's Presidency, many public buildings, parks, etc. in Prague were named after Wilson.

Masaryk showed his respect for justice when he took a firm stand in the rehabilitation of the French Captain Dreyfuss, in whose defense Emil Zola wrote the public letter, titled "J'accuse" - denouncing the lies and false accusations used against the Jewish Captain by the anti-Semitic French Army Command. Masaryk also stood up for Hilsner, a victim of similar persecution by the Austrian Bureaucracy.

The Czechs retained their unique sense of humor developed during the 300 years under the oppressive Austro-Hungarian regime so well depicted in Hasek's hilarious classic about the lovable "Good Soldier Svejk" who started his journey through our hearts when he was thrown in jail for not having prevented the flies from defecating on the photograph of the Kaiser in Svejk's living quarters.

6. #9/58 Charles Square

Our home and business was at #9/58 Charles Square and consisted of several inter-connected buildings. The main structure, facing City Hall, housed the sales areas and offices on the ground floor. The spacious living quarters were upstairs in the front part of the main building.

The other structures were placed U-shape around the yard in the rear and consisted of additional offices, warehouses, the coffee roasting room, stables and garages.

The river flowed slowly along the back of the property and became a real pain during the spring season when it stepped out of bounds.

Most celebrations, fairs, protests, open air concerts, tightrope and trapeze acts, including circus performances, took place at the Square. Naturally, the city had two marching bands which were not very good but very loud and sometimes even had a guest conductor.

Our office telephone was in a sound-proof cubicle and, in order to make a call, one had to enter it, crank the telephone handle and start yelling into the mouthpiece. Another private phone was upstairs in the living quarters. I do not recall how many telephone numbers Trebic had but ours was #8.

We had about 15 employees, mostly old-timers, and 4 or 5 horses which were eventually replaced by motor cars and trucks. Our big watchdog did little watching and usually killed time mostly chasing cats or its own tail.

I can see myself on my four-wheel, hand-propelled cycle called "Hollander", racing down the sidewalks, with barking dogs in pursuit while I tried, with limited success, to avoid swearing pedestrians.

7. The Learning Years

The years passed, I was six and it was time for me to go to school.

The day had come when our class bully chose me for his victim. He was older, bigger and stronger than anybody else in our class because he had flunked classes. With a shiner on each eye and a bleeding nose, I reported the humiliation to my teacher and my mother. Mother was not pleased because she disapproved of my squealing and I am not sure whether the teacher really cared.

I was prepared and ready for the next attack by the bully. Having surveyed the situation, I realized that I most likely was not the only one whom he beat up. I sought out and recruited his previous victims, got some rope from our warehouse and then, together, we ambushed the bully, tied him up and gave him a licking he was not likely to forget. Naturally we were punished and kept after school but we succeeded. The bully left us in peace and my self-confidence was restored.

8. *The Art of Procreation*

Sex education in schools was unheard of in Trebic. When my friend Max, who lived a few doors from us and was one year my senior, reached "that certain age", his family decided that the time had come for him to learn the facts of life. His father delegated that task to my cousin Rudi Lederer, who was the son of my father's divorced sister Rosa, who lived with our grandmother. Rudi lived most of the year in Prague, where he studied medicine at the Charles University but spent most of his vacations with his mother, my Aunt Rosa, in Trebic. Because of his medical education and alleged experience with the ladies, he was considered to have the necessary qualifications.

Rudi took Max for a walk along the river and dutifully explained to him what needed to be explained. When they returned, Max's father rewarded Rudi with two pairs of socks and a red bow tie all fresh from the variety store which Max's father owned.

Today, I can attest to the fact that Rudi must have done a good job because Max (still my very good friend) is a doting grandfather. He lives in New York but neither his daughter nor his granddaughter ever found out how much they both owed to two pairs of socks and a bow tie.

After the war Max and his wife, Mimi, met Rudi and, while reminiscing, Rudi brought up the story. Mimi allegedly asked Rudi why he had stopped with the instruction so soon. This, of course, is just a rumor.

9. *Carnegie Hall – “Sans Moi”*

To my parents, education which included music, was more important than the birds and the bees. The violin became the chosen instrument of my forthcoming trials and tribulations. When proudly I told them that, while the class was playing, I simply moved the bow above the strings without touching them, my parents were horrified. They were now sure that the music school could not do justice to my well hidden talents.

Private teachers were retained. Soon, bored stiff, with my Do-Re-Mi, while my buddies were playing soccer, I looked for an avenue of escape, so I blamed my eyesight. Concerned, my mother took me to a famous eye specialist in Vienna. After a three-hour train ride and a four-hour eye exam, his recommendation was to find someone who could teach me how to read music instead of wasting money on eyeglasses.

When the number of my violin teachers reached seven, without having made a dent in my musical incompetence, I was sure that my musical career had come to an end.

Not so, in the opinion of my parents. In their relentless and unwavering pursuit of my still undiscovered talents, they decided that piano might be the answer. A female piano teacher, allegedly a virgin by persuasion, was chosen to awaken in me the dormant musical genius. After six months of trying, my piano teacher decided to trade both her virginity and her teaching for marital bliss and motherhood.

That is why Carnegie Hall had to reach its fame without me.

10. The Middle of the Road

My parents were always supportive in all my endeavors and activities which included all kinds of sports, such as soccer, ice hockey, tennis, skiing and swimming, probably because I was such a wiry kid and they wanted me to grow up smart, strong and handsome. I missed on all three counts. My accomplishments were on an average level and I was definitely a middle of the road guy and I was good at it.

Gosh, was I good!

From the age of six through ten, I attended Elementary School, followed by eight years of "Gymnasium" (high school). Except for two hours a week of Physical Education, a Gymnasium in Europe had nothing to do with gymnastics. After the Gymnasium, I attended six years of Law School at the Masaryk University in Brno where, in spite of my above described limitations, I graduated in 1938 as Doctor of Jurisprudence.

11. Growing Pains, Without Pain

At Christmas time, the entire countryside in Trebic was usually covered with snow and the Christians, Jews, Atheists, Agnostics, and other believing or non-believing creatures were playing their parts. At our house, to satisfy everybody, we had a "Menorah" at the entrance to the living quarters and a Christmas tree in the living room. On such nights, all restaurants, bars, theaters and Cat Houses were closed. Streets were empty, except for an occasional stray dog or cat.

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

As in most European countries, gifts were distributed and opened right after dinner on Christmas Eve. Provided there was snow, the youngsters were excused and ended up skiing down the sloping streets in search of excitement and fun.

The town's electric power was not very dependable. Each electric doorbell, therefore, had next to it a pulley which activated a back-up doorbell for emergencies. On a quiet Christmas Eve, the local pranksters (which at those times occasionally included "yours truly") tied a bone, left over from Christmas dinner, to the pulley. Then, all we had to do was to hide and wait for some stray dogs to come by and start jumping for the bone and tugging at it. Every tug on the bone activated the pulley, which rang the bell and brought the occupant to the window, or running out into the street. At the same time, the sound of the bell scared the dogs away and by the time the occupant came out all was quiet with not a living soul in sight and the serenity of Christmas continued.

Minutes later, the scene repeated itself until, finally, the already suspicious and by then furious occupant noticed the hanging bone. With the belief in miracles thus shaken he, or she, filled the silent night with a not so silent stream of expletives. Eventually the occupant retreated and soon thereafter the white snowflakes wrapped the slumbering town into a dream of Christmas enchantment.

12. Sex and My Fallen Idol

Except where unusual aspects of a given situation justify it, I have intentionally omitted to mention any of my romantic encounters. That should not be interpreted as an expression of contempt for the other sex. "Au contraire". I mostly enjoyed the intimacy and the pleasure, of such moments, but I still consider them private and confidential. In this instance I feel, however, that I should not deprive the reader of sharing the experience of my initial entry into the kingdom of lust and pleasure.

As I already indicated, sex education was not a part of our school's curriculum and for the parents to discuss it with their children was unheard of. All I knew then about sex was, what I learned from my friend John who, as I will show, also knew nothing. Nevertheless, he was always ready to impress us with stories of his alleged adventures. I hung on to his every word and he became my idol and role model. With such a shaky background on the subject, neither of us had any idea what we were talking about, but we would not admit it.

One day, I figured out how to approach a lady, a few years my senior but, in matters of romance, experienced beyond her years. She was known by those who knew her, as well as by those who yearned to know her, as "open-ended Mary". My initial lesson took place on a moonlit night, on a moist, grassy, slope behind the Jewish Cemetery. The problem was that Mary was not very articulate in describing the basic approach and, consequently, her instructions, which preceded the final plunge, lacked accuracy.

Therefore, my unprofessional uphill attempt caused me to slide downhill and to my unfulfilled expectations.

Enlightenment came the next day from cousin Rudi who explained to me graphically where to find what and warned me that any further uphill attempt could only lead downhill, which, he assumed, was not what I was aiming for.

Flustered I, once again, approached "open-ended Mary" and asked for another chance. She then showed true greatness and, as a result, I was able to tell Rudi in the words of Julius Caesar that "I came, I saw, I conquered". This time the act was performed without a slip-up and Rudi remained my role model and mentor.

The story, however, doesn't end there. What I learned I did not share with John, because I assumed that John knew all that from way back. I was also not prepared to show my ignorance. It therefore came to me as a surprise when he later told me that he had just "done it" with "open-ended Mary", but was confused by the strange way she "was doing it" - namely with her legs wide apart. In a split second, my idol, John, became a fallen idol.

13. "The Greats" and "Not So Greats" of the Crossroads Inn

During vacation, on most Sundays and holiday mornings, or on any balmy evening, the local beauties, such as they were, could be seen promenading up and down the sidewalk of Charles

LEO ORSTEN

Square. I was then one of the "not so greats" who regularly congregated in front of the "Crossroads Inn", to observe and discuss things that preoccupied our impressionable teenage minds. We referred to ourselves as "The Forum of the Great Brains", while the local newspaper, obviously disagreed when referring to us as "a bunch of monkeys" who should be swinging from trees in the jungle rather than hanging around the Crossroads Inn.

We had two classes of membership in the Forum, "Regular Membership" and a "Distinguished one". It was not easy to become a Distinguished Member and to illustrate, here is an example of how difficult it was. Two of our friends were identical twins, both internationally known outstanding athletes. One, held the Czechoslovak record for an 800-meter run and, the other, for a 1500-meter run, which qualified them to be counted among Europe's outstanding athletes but was not enough to qualify them to become Distinguished Members of the local forum of "The Great Brains". Not until later, when it was established beyond a reasonable doubt that, on several occasions, when one of the twins heavily performed with a lady behind the bushes and managed to switch places with his twin brother, without the lady noticing the switch, did they qualify for Distinguished Membership and earned the great respect of the lady in question.

14. Tennis Anyone?

He was a law student, tall, elegant and played good tennis. She was pretty, petite, the daughter of a prominent family and also played a good game of tennis. The night was warm and inviting, the grass was soft and the trees in the forest whispered those unintelligible words of love. In such a setting, things just do happen. This was obviously not a night to play mixed doubles. Motels were still unknown and hotels were hardly places where well-bred young ladies should be seen without parental escort. Suddenly, something went wrong. Their togetherness in the forest extended well beyond the heat of passion. Their inability to separate was caused by a sudden spasm by the young lady, which changed the ecstasy into agony, resulting in a closer togetherness than planned. Their calls for help were finally heard by other nature lovers in nearby bushes. Still locked in an embrace, they were covered by a blanket and helped onto a two-wheel buggy pulled by a horse and followed by the escort of concerned helpers, from behind the other bushes, until they reached the county hospital. They were seen later leaving the hospital, fully separated.

The following Sunday morning the incident was discussed by "The Great Brains". The important question remained - what could those lovers have done? In the end, it was unanimously agreed that, had they done it doggy fashion, they could have walked to the hospital together under their own power without all that commotion.

15. Be Prepared

Jaro was almost seventeen, handsome, vain, and inexperienced in the fine points of romance. He told us that he was on his way to meet his first "real" date. He thought that with a condom in his pocket, like a boy scout, he was prepared. The "Great Brains" disagreed. They suggested that the condom should not be in his pocket but should be installed beforehand. After all, things can happen at breakneck speed and "be prepared" should be observed at all times. The group then proceeded to the Men's Room of the Inn to witness the installation.

Really prepared, Jaro departed for his date. Two hours later, he was back and reported that the lady never showed up. Everybody was shocked and it was suggested that at least the condom should not be wasted. Jaro, with the full entourage, proceeded to the Men's Room and emerged a few minutes later with the condom wrapped in his handkerchief. Under the nearby pump, located over a well, in the middle of the square and with one man pumping and the rest cheering him on, Jaro thoroughly washed the unused implement, re-wrapped it in the handkerchief and took it home to dry.

No information is available on its subsequent use.

16. Toujours L'Amour

Trebic did not have therapists however, there were two houses, one had a red light over its

entrance, offering the needed "therapies" to tired breadwinners. The other more discreet in offering the same. Here, I would be remiss if I failed to quote the delicate manner in which the regular customers were notified of the solemnness of the occasion on the day they came to view the body of the Madam who had just departed. The sign read: "Because of today's viewing there won't be any screwing". (Roughly translated from the Czech: "*Za pricinou umrti se dnes nevrtili*".)

In the second house, private relief was also being administered to breadwinners by the voluptuous wife of one of the greengrocers. She was known as "Fabulous Fanny" and charged 100 crowns per session. One night, Mr. Green, a highly respected merchant, in the heat of passion, instead of the customary 100 crown note, gave her a 1,000 crown note. When he realized his mistake, he demanded the return of the extra 900. She refused to part with it. She would not compromise. Mr. Green then proclaimed, "to hell with my reputation, to hell with a scandal, to hell with bad publicity, 900 crowns is 900 crowns of honestly earned money" and he took Fabulous Fanny to court.

Mr. Green presented his case with clarity and determination. The judge listened carefully and then turned to "Fabulous Fanny". With tears in her eye obviously reliving the moments of passion and, looking towards Heaven, as if seeking help from the supreme power, she delivered her plea which was brief and memorable. "Your honor" she pleaded, "It was dark when he laid me, it was dark when he paid me" (roughly translated from the Czech: "*Po tme dala, po tme vzala*"). The judge was truly moved and dismissed the case.

Justice was done and both Mr. Green's financial loss and any dishonor were eventually forgotten.

17. Clouds and More Clouds

Menacing clouds were gathering over the horizon until they engulfed Europe in total darkness of hate and violence. Still, both England and France kept their eyes closed and feigned ignorance.

There was little Czechoslovakia, a country of 14 million people, with forty fully trained and equipped divisions and seemingly impenetrable fortifications, consisting of self-contained bunkers, each with 360 degree firing power, with an air force ready for action, but now paralyzed by the treachery of its own allies.

Abandoned by all, left only with its hope for a miracle from the legendary sleeping "Knights" who, according to an ancient legend, lay inside the mountain called "Blanik" near Prague, were waiting for the call which would summon them.

Unfortunately, the "Knights" either forgot to put in their hearing aids or failed to recognize the call. They did not wake up when Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, they did not wake up when he repudiated the Treaty of Versailles, nor when he withdrew from membership in the League of Nations. They continued to sleep while Mussolini joined Hitler, while the Nazis occupied the Saar Region and remilitarized the Rhineland, they slept through the Anschluss of Austria and last, but not least, through the

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

shameful dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in Munich.

Returning from Munich, to England, waving his umbrella in front of No. 10 Downing Street, Chamberlain shouted at the top of his lungs for the whole world to hear, his now infamous, "Peace in our Time." The date was September 29, 1938. The "Peace in our Time" lasted less than six months when the Nazis paraded their makeshift tanks (which were all they had at that time) through mutilated Czechoslovakia, which was given to them by those who did not own it. The Czechs, now abandoned by their own allies, surrendered without a shot, what was left of their country.

Rumors became a steady diet and war was foremost on everyone's mind. We could not believe that the German army was capable to mount an effective attack on Czechoslovakia and its allies. So far we heard their soldiers yelling "Sieg Heil" and march on non-resisting armies but they still had not demonstrated proficiency in combat. It was an on-going suspense.

Shortly after Chamberlain told the House of Commons that the English had no reason "to fight for a small, far-away, country and for people about whom they knew nothing", there was thunder reverberating through the Chambers, the booming voice of Winston Churchill when, referring to the Munich surrender, he said "we had a choice between war and dishonor - we have chosen dishonor and we shall have war".

What we saw coming, but refused to believe, became reality on March 15, 1939, when the Nazis marched into Prague and occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia.

That night, the Czech population was glued to its radios, with eyes closed, hearts pounding, visualizing the Nazi savages taking away what was left of its superb armaments and modern factories which they had built for their own defense and survival.

This was the end of Act I for which none of the great composers wrote a heroic aria.

18. The Occupation Has Started

In June, 1938, I graduated from Law School and, after my deferral for studies, on March 1, 1939, I reported in Vranov nad Toplou, Slovakia, for compulsory military service in the Czech Army. There was still a semblance of a State within the territory which was once Czechoslovakia.

From my regiment in Slovakia I was sent to the Officers' School in Jihlava which was closer to my home town. On the train, I felt feverish, perspired heavily and broke out in a rash. When the train stopped in Brno, which was the home of my Alma Mater, I got off and dragged myself to the military hospital where I was diagnosed with chicken pox and was immediately quarantined. It was during my hospital stay that Czechoslovakia was invaded.

The country was in turmoil. Overnight, among many other things, the Nazis changed the driving rules, including the streetcars, from the left side to the right side of the road which resulted in a myriad of accidents. The Nazis did not care about those. While I was

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

quarantined and thus cut off from the outside, I could only hear through the closed door the staccato of the German occupiers. I heard them say "Varicella? dass ist doch ansteckend" ("Chicken pox? But that's contagious!!") I therefore owe it to the "chicken pox" that the Nazis never entered my room.

My friend Eva (a Veronica Lake look-alike) who was gentile and looked it, ignored my chicken pox and her personal safety, visited me daily in the hospital and kept me in touch with my parents and friends. She was my only contact with the outside world.

When released from the hospital, I reported to the Officers' School in Jihlava and was immediately discharged and sent home. This, as it turned out, interrupted but did not finish my Military Career.

My homecoming was very emotional. Our family business taken over by a Nazi Administrator. The building and all other assets were confiscated, including jewelry and silverware. We were allowed to remain in the living quarters for the time being, but were not permitted to enter the business area, or to talk to any of our former employees.

The Jews feared the worst, but nothing close to what the Nazi savages eventually came up with. Concentration camps were practically unknown and gas chambers only existed in the perverted minds of the occupiers. Because the older Jews did not believe that the Nazis would consider them a threat to their power, they did not realize that they were actually watching a dress rehearsal of the Holocaust.

They focused on getting the young people out of the country, hoping that they would adapt quicker to a new country and open the door for their parents and others to join them later.

19. Wishful Thinking and Hard Facts

It was the wishful thinking of some that, after the occupation of the Saar Region and Rhineland, the Anschluss of Austria and seizing of Czechoslovakia, Hitler might stop and enjoy the spoils of his "conquests."

His hold on Czechoslovakia was not yet solidified and his plan for the extermination of Jews not quite ready. We were still able to walk around without yellow stars, while we already felt the tightening of the jaws of the ugly beast. More and more we realized the urgency of making a move.

Our escape became the first priority. England, France, Yugoslavia and Palestine were our targets.

We did not consider America because it was too far removed from the action and there was some doubt whether Roosevelt would allow the U.S. to get involved at all. The fact that he kept the Nazi loving Joseph Kennedy in London, as the U.S. Ambassador and several other Nazi sympathizers in his government, was not very encouraging.

One night, in a secluded booth of a popular Prague night club, I purchased a forged Greek

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

Orthodox Baptismal certificate. I spent the rest of that night trying to give the freshly printed Certificate an aged look. By 5:00 a.m., with the help of smoke from burning candles and some delicate rubbing, the document acquired the desired vintage look. That gave me a document which the Czech Court agreed to notarize. My hope was that such notarized document would get me to Yugoslavia. As it turned out, I never had to use it.

Prague was full of Intelligence agents and impostors pretending to have diplomatic status with friendly governments. I succeeded to avoid the lurking informers but the harassment by the Gestapo never stopped.

My inquisitor was an Austrian SS Officer. During the first questioning, he ordered me to leave the country and I assured him that I was eager to do so but did not have an Exit Permit. He referred me to the Gestapo in Brno, unaware that I had just come from there and knew that it did not have the authority to issue such a Permit.

My cousin Fred encountered similar problems. Then and there, it dawned on me that there were communication gaps between the Gestapo inquisitors in the various locations. It was the first weak link in their network which I was able to detect, and use to my advantage while answering my inquisitor's questions.

One day, standing in front of him while he was playing with his pistol, which he occasionally aimed at me, my mind must have snapped when I told him that I was fully aware that he was in control and that he could shoot me should he so

LEO ORSTEN

chose. I suddenly realized what I had said. The minutes that followed felt like an eternity. He looked at his pistol and then at me and very slowly, without a word, put his weapon in the drawer of his desk.

I was born again. For a moment, I had an unmistakable feeling that my inquisitor did not dislike me as much as he was supposed to.

The search for new escape routes intensified. Fred and I spent much time traveling between Prague, Brno and Trebic. Needless to say, as Jews we no longer owned cars but managed to hitch rides. We met with friends in small coffee houses, restaurants, night clubs, private homes, or in dark alleys. We spent hours in line at Foreign Embassies in the quest of finding answers to our situation.

In August 1939, Fred's sister Gerty, who was already in London, accomplished a miracle. She not only found someone to vouch for us there, but also a friend who loaned us money for the deposit required by the British Government. This opened the doors to freedom and probably saved our lives.

Parting with parents is too difficult to put into words. When I was ready to leave, they were more concerned about my survival in a foreign country, than about their own fate. Their reasoning that their advanced age would protect them made sense. It was also logical that it would be better for them as well as for me to be a free man, in a free country, rather than a prisoner in Hitler's jail.

Often I visualized myself returning to Prague in

a victory parade as in fact I did, riding on top of an armored car. Unfortunately, it was too late to save them. Like many of my friends and relatives, who did not manage to leave Czechoslovakia, they had perished in Nazi Gas chambers.

20. Rule Britannia

The rules were changing hourly. When Hitler and Stalin signed their Non-Aggression Pact and when, out of the blue, the Nazis temporarily issued Exit Permits to those who had visas in their Passports, Fred was one of the few lucky ones. He met all requirements. I was one of the almost lucky ones because I needed only one additional document. The new regulations could change and it would have been, therefore, too risky for Fred to lose time waiting for me. We pressured him to leave immediately and he did so the next day. I followed him a week later when I got the document.

Aunt Annie and Uncle Emil, who were Steve's and Diti's parents had, by that time, moved from Znojmo to Prague. Aunt Annie, who did not look Jewish, turned out to be my only relative who stood a reasonable chance of making it to the railroad station without raising suspicion. She brought me a few sandwiches, wished me good luck and easily blended into the crowd. As it turned out, that train was the last to cross the German/Dutch Border before war broke out.

From the window, I saw German armored columns moving towards the border and observed men

LEO ORSTEN

digging trenches and rushing around in a manner which was indicative of what was coming. Most of the passengers on the train were refugees, but there was no panic, no hysteria, only a feeling of apprehension wrapped in oppressive silence. The train moved in spurts. When sudden shrieks of joy broke the silence, followed by tears, hugs and kisses, I knew that we had crossed the border. We were in Holland. Euphoria pushed back fear of the unknown. Anxious to return to dignity and get away from the oppressors I tried, with misty eyes, to penetrate the enveloping fog, until I spotted the White Cliffs of Dover.

The crossing of the English Channel was uneventful. I had the telephone number of my cousins in London. There was Fred, Gerty and Diti. (Steve stayed with a family with whom he lived during his prior sojourn in England). When I called them from Dover they could not believe that I was on English soil and told me that this is no time for jokes. Stunned for a moment, they quickly recovered and told me how to get by Underground to the Highland Park Station, where they would meet me. When the last scheduled train arrived there, I was not on it. They waited a while and when they were about to give up and go home, worrying where I had gotten lost, the Ticket Clerk called them back and explained to them that a special train had been added that night and was due to arrive any minute.

So, there I was, close to Midnight on August 30, 1939, emerging from the Highland Park Underground and from the black hole of oppression.

We walked to Gerty's flat, at 188 Goldhurst

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

Terrace. I was looking forward to a hot meal, little realizing that my cousins were hungrier than I. Their eyes lit up when they noticed the three sandwiches, peeking out at them from my traveling case. They were left over from those which aunt Annie handed me at the Prague station.

At Goldhurst Terrace, Gerty and Diti occupied a one-bedroom flat. Gerty, the only breadwinner, slept in the bed, Diti on the sofa, while Fred and I camped out on the kitchen floor. I had never felt more comfortable, nor had I slept better in any bed. It was a night to remember, a night without Gestapo lurking around the corner and, after a long time, my first night in a free country.

The next day we reported to the local Town Hall where we were issued free gas masks. They came in metal containers, slightly larger than a can of three tennis balls, with a simple string to be slung over the shoulder. The war was clearly coming closer.

The first thing I could think of was to telephone the former Czechoslovak Ambassador in London, Jan Masaryk, the son of Thomas G. Masaryk, the first President of Czechoslovakia. The same Jan Masaryk who became Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Government in Exile and later of the post-war republic, until he was found dead, under his bedroom window, in the courtyard of the Czech Foreign Ministry in Prague.

When we first called him in London, neither Fred nor I knew Masaryk personally but we knew that both in England and America he was close to our cousin Francis Lederer (Rudi's brother) the well-known international movie star and Matinee

LEO ORSTEN

Idol. When we identified ourselves as Francis' cousins, he made time to see us the next day. Our visit to his residence turned out to be pleasant, relaxing and informative. He exuded charm, compassion and intelligence. He explained to us the prevailing military and political situation and responded to our apprehension about the lack of resolve demonstrated by the British. He assured us that we would see a change after the first bombs fell on Westminster. He certainly was right. We did not forget those words, especially because we were there when the first bombs actually landed on Westminster.

Masaryk then gave us a letter of recommendation addressed to the Military Attaché of the newly formed Czechoslovak Government in London. We offered our services, wherever they might be needed, including in the new Czech Army which was then being formed and trained in Southern France.

On September 3, 1939, when Germany invaded Poland and when England and France responded by giving Hitler an ultimatum, we heard (but did not understand) Chamberlain tell the nation and the world over the BBC, that Great Britain was at war with Germany. The air raid sirens almost drowned out his voice. It was a false alarm, but the sound of the sirens soon became a nightly wake-up call for the Londoners.

Chamberlain lost the peace and was about to start losing the war. He was on his way to obscurity when the Nazis commenced to substitute their war toys with the modern weaponry of the disbanded Czechoslovak Army and with the other equipment manufactured at the munitions factories bequeathed to them in "Munich" by our "Generous allies."

21. *From Goldhurst Terrace to Abbey Road*

A few days after I arrived, we moved from Goldhurst Terrace to a flat at 128 Abbey Road. For that move, we borrowed a wooden two-wheel pushcart. It was Sunday morning and the solemn looking Londoners were returning from Services, watching the four well-dressed refugees, speaking an unknown language, pushing a noisy, antiquated pushcart, containing all their belongings through the quiet street of northwest London. Our new flat consisted of two bedrooms, one bath and a small kitchen.

Our new Landlord, John McKenna, was a well-known opera tenor, a stocky, jovial bachelor, with a colorful personality and a great sense of humor. He occupied the lower level and we could hear him practicing all day long his "me-me-me-mee" and more "me-me-me-meets."

We had no money but enough good clothes which our parents managed to ship to Gerty from Czechoslovakia before the Nazis could confiscate them. We were starving in elegance.

We could not afford a telephone but our Landlord let us use his number which was "Maida Vale 3547." When our Czech friends called and asked, in their broken English, whether that was "Maida Vale 3547," he answered, "no, no, this Chinese Embassy, this 'Mayfair 3547,'" which managed to confuse our friends even more because "Mayfair" was the highly prestigious prefix of London's Embassy Row.

Fred and I should have each qualified for a monetary sustenance from the Czechoslovak Refugee Trust Fund in London. However, some over-zealous bureaucrat at the office decided

LEO ORSTEN

that, because we had the same last name and shared a room, we should be classified as a "married couple." They reduced our weekly allowance to roughly half of the regular amount. They did not recognize that with our sexual orientation, procreational inaptitude, culinary inefficiency and domestic clumsiness, among other things, we could never be classified as a married couple. We were unable to find a bureaucrat who could restore the regular rate for us.

We did not cook because we did not know how. We did not take a bath more than twice a week because it was too difficult to take out of the bathtub and put back in, our socks, shirts and underwear which were soaking there, hoping that one day they would miraculously become clean. It did not happen, regardless of how much vinegar or salt we added to reinforce the cleaning solvent.

The bathing situation had to be resolved and our soaking undergarments had to be saved.

Gerty already had been subsidizing us from her own meager pay. She hated to do even her own washing, so we could not ask her to do ours. We did not trust Diti, considering her lack of expertise in the field of laundering. In the meantime, the British Army came up with a new war song which began with the words "We're going to hang out the washing on the Siegfried Line, is there any dirty washing mother dear?"... but we were not yet on the Siegfried Line either.

The answer was to find a kindhearted soul with at least a basic aptitude and willingness to do our laundry free of charge. Where could we find such a gem and how? We decided on the cinema.

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

The Kilburn State Cinema was within walking distance and tickets were "sixpence" per person. That was all we could afford to gamble, but one sixpence would admit only one. We tossed a coin and I lost. I had to go to the Cinema and return with just such an "Angel" willing to do our laundry.

Standing near the ticket window, clutching the sixpence in my perspiring palm, I tried to look as helpless as I could. I must have looked like a complete idiot.

Finally, I spotted her. She was alone, pretty and had that certain look of kindness and compassion. Her name was Rowena. With my pulse exceeding 100, I saw her noticing me and my look of desperation. She turned to me and asked if she could help. With a mixture of signs and sounds I managed to convey to her that I intended to buy a ticket to the Cinema. She took my sixpence, bought a ticket and we sat next to each other. I do not recall the name of the picture but during each Intermission Richard Tauber, the World Renowned Tenor and, at that time, also a refugee from Germany, gave a thirty minute fabulous Recital.

Mission accomplished, the next day Rowena came to the house and solved our problem. The socks, shirts and underwear were saved from disintegration.

Rowena dear, wherever you are, I am dedicating this chapter to you with my sincere gratitude.

22. The Great Man at the Royal Albert Hall

Our Landlord (whom we by now called "Mackie") was giving a recital at the Royal Albert Hall and got us complimentary tickets in the front row. When we asked him how we could find him he said "during the first Intermission, ask an usher to take you to the "Great Man Himself." Dressed in our tailor-made tuxedos, which is proper attire for the front row seats at the Albert Hall, but not exactly for the upper deck of bus #52, we arrived in time for the Concert. During the Intermission, we did as we were told and were properly escorted to his Dressing Room.

Mackie was a great success. After the performance, there were no limits to his generosity which called for drinks. Under his guidance and at his expense, we visited several pubs and later, stumbling noisily through the London blackout, we almost ended up in "Old Bailey." Even though the bus conductor did not yield to Mackie's demand to take us to his house, we somehow woke up the next morning in our own beds.

23. Starvation a'la Carte

Most restaurants in London were beyond our means and few conformed to our taste. Beer was warm and to us tasted like tea, tea like weak coffee, coffee like dishwater and cocoa like some strange consommé. Water was used to dilute perfectly good scotch. Otherwise the English still maintained their superb table manners which were difficult to duplicate by those who

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

did not grow up mastering the art of balancing six peas on an inverted fork. Most of our meals consisted of transparent sandwiches. Eggs, butter, meat and some other food items were rationed.

Those vittles alone could barely sustain our bodies in a condition, fit to save the British Empire, destroy Hitler, resurrect Czechoslovakia and salvage whatever might be left of the rest of the world.

Still, we managed to survive but, whenever Fred passed me a cigarette, he would say "smoke it - don't eat it."

One day we discovered liver. It looked like a mass of red chewing gum. Somebody, probably the butcher, suggested that if we put it in a pan, over a flame, it would change color and become edible. Unfortunately, we did not own a pan, but we found a big cast iron pot left on the stove by previous occupants of the flat. Lo and behold, the red mass turned brown. When we tasted it, we found that it was edible. Quickly, we telephoned John and Otto, two brothers who lived close by, and who had been our friends back in Prague, to share our discovery. Within minutes, they were on our doorstep, as always elegantly attired, with Eaton hats and umbrellas, but broke and hungry.

They pushed their way into our kitchen and stared in amazement at the brown masterpiece. This made us realize how Einstein must have felt when he split the atom.

For lack of chairs, the lunch was consumed in an upright position. It was delicious.

24. *Charlie Chan*

In front of the Czech Trust Fund, at Mecklenburg Square in London, we ran into a gentleman who used to own big shoe factories in Trebic. He and my parents knew each other well. Although he was German, he did not like Nazis. He refused to live under Hitler and became a refugee - but a refugee with money. In London he stayed at the Cumberland Hotel on Marble Arch and invited us to have lunch with him there the following day. The delicious food came as a welcome response to our growling stomachs. After lunch, while thanking him, he ignored our token resistance and made us accept a sealed envelope. When we subsequently opened it, we discovered that our zero assets had increased by £10.

After the delicious meal however, we were no longer hungry and to assure ourselves of our newly acquired wealth, we felt compelled to spend some of it. We came up with a less than brilliant solution - we stepped into a Penny Arcade and blew 4 shillings on the slot machines.

Next day, we decided to eat out. We chose a Chinese Restaurant on Shaftsbury Avenue. The menu they brought us had more than 300 items listed. With our lousy English and non-existent Chinese, we ordered something that was cheap. When the waiter brought it, it turned out to be a soup. Next, for the same reason, we chose another item, which also turned out to be a soup. When the third item ended up to be a soup, we decided to do something about it.

By means of signs and accompanying noises, we

conveyed our predicament to the waiter. We really did not want three soups each. Something must have given us away because the waiter's face lit up. He quickly left our table and came back with another Chinese waiter who, by some miracle, spoke Czech. He must have been the only Chinese waiter in England, who spoke Czech.

Happily, we ended up with a good Chinese lunch and some money left over.

25. Business Not as Usual

While we waited to be called by the Czech Army, we had to make some money. There were no jobs available to us because we were expected to be called for military service. To start a business, with no money and no English, we simply had to find something special.

We decided to explore the buying power of the Czech, German, Austrian and Hungarian refugees. All had their clubs, they had some money, they had special needs and they had complaints. One of the foremost complaints was the quality of the British condoms which felt like rough leather rather than the fine and delicate fabric to which the European lovers were accustomed. The second complaint was the texture of the ladies' silk stockings which kept the ladies warm, but their partners cool.

When we heard about a seized contraband of condoms, this was our big chance but we needed money. Another friend named Otto, originally from Brno, loaned it to us at no interest. It

LEO ORSTEN

was a stroke of luck which led us to this highly rewarding transaction. That day, at 7 o'clock in the morning, we were at the Customs Office to pick up our first shipment. To our great surprise, we were also able to pick up a supply of silk stockings.

Waiters in the refugee clubs became our main distributors but home deliveries often included some unexpected tea and sympathy. Both the condom and stocking business turned out to be superb. I never knew that I needed a law degree to peddle intimate items. But, because nothing lasts forever, our supplies dried up and so did our dreams of riches.

As for me, I unknowingly established my first personal credit rating because, years later when Otto visited us in Hollywood, he told my wife, whom he then first met, the story of our "condom venture" and assured her that I could call on him any time should I need a loan. Luckily, we managed without it, but it gave us a feeling of security.

26. The Huns on the March

In London, the Czechoslovak "Government in Exile" was barely formed and the new army command was not ready to handle the influx of volunteers.

Finally, Fred and I got the long awaited call from the Czech Mission to join the Czech Unit in France. On June 22nd, we were sitting on buses, in front of the Czechoslovak Embassy on Grosvenor Square waiting to be moved to the

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

docks where ships were ready to take us to France. This was to be the second Czechoslovak transport of volunteers from England. The first one left England just a few days earlier.

Minutes and hours went by, but the buses did not move. Then came the bombshell. Officials of the Mission emerged looking despondent and informed us that France had just capitulated. The "impregnable" Maginot Line, together with all of Belgium, and the Netherlands had caved in to the Nazi onslaught. Unbeknownst to us at that time, a makeshift Armada of civilian vessels evacuated from Dunkirk about 350,000 members of the allied forces trapped there.

For the English, it was the time of which Churchill said, "If the British Empire and its Commonwealth lasts for 1,000 years, men will still say this was their finest hour."

To us it was evident that England would be the next target but, like the entire British Nation, we remained calm and ready for whatever might happen next. Little did I know that five years later I would be a member of a unit which accepted the surrender of Dunkirk from the Nazis.

We had no choice but to return to what, until that morning, were our homes in London, or to find somebody who would put us up.

Again, Fred and I were lucky. Mackie welcomed us back with open arms. We remained his tenants until September when we joined our new Contingent which had by then arrived from France and was putting up tents for a camp in Cholmondeley Park near Liverpool.

27. *The Changed England*

Fred and I were then reunited with Steve, who had gone to France with our first transport and who now came back looking disheveled, but none the worse for wear, considering the time he spent on a coal freighter.

England had by then changed from the timid nation which we encountered when we first landed there in 1939 and when Chamberlain asked the House of Commons why England should fight for "a small, far away country about whom it knew nothing." It also changed from the days Churchill admonished the House when he told it that "we had a choice between war and dishonor—we have chosen dishonor, but we shall have war."

Now it was Churchill's England—the England with courage and determination—and with London which continued to repel one Nazi bomber attack after another, the England which was resolved to fight to a final victory. For us, what followed was a time of training and of getting ready for action. Still, the majority of allied forces was unprepared for combat.

The naval passages from the continent were protected by mines, guns, and the Royal Navy. The air approaches were guarded by balloons, guns, and the Royal Air Force which, while consisting mainly of young recruits, put up a brilliant defense during the Battle of Britain. Hitler's planned invasion never materialized and England became a formidable fortress.

Clearly, the Nazis missed their chance by not taking advantage of Britain's unpreparedness.

When Churchill offered the British people nothing but "blood, sweat, toil, and tears," they had no inkling of how unprepared their country really was. Under heavy German bombardment, they started digging "Andersen" Shelters in their backyards, while those living closer to the center of London spent nights sleeping in the Underground Stations.

28. Rolling Out the Barrel

To keep up the spirit and good humor of the passengers, the British posted on trains, buses and stations, slogans of "Billy Brown of London Town," such as: "Do your good deed for the day, tell them the stations on their way" or "Let's all move along, says Billy, to crowd the entrance up is silly."

To discourage people from tearing or peeling off those translucent decals from train and bus windows, "Billy" told the passengers "I trust you'll pardon my correction, that stuff is here for your protection" which, in one place, elicited a scribbled reply "I thank you for the explanation, I want to see the bloody station." Still every morning, most people rushed to work ready to do their part.

The unity and the response of a whole nation, exhibited during the Battle of Britain, was another miracle.

In the meantime, the Czech Brigade became part of the British armed forces and had to learn all about the British and their life-style.

By coincidence, they selected "Roll Out the Barrel," with music by the Czech composer Jaromir Vejvoda, to become their war song.

29. Getting to the "Bottoms"

It was in Cholmondeley Park, pronounced ("Chomley") where I got my first taste of wartime military life. It started with digging latrines. Then and there I learned how to conquer feelings of apprehension and inferiority.

On one of my first attempts to use the latrine I noticed next to me a Colonel, in uniform, balancing his body over the same gaping excavation while his bare bottom had merged with a long row of other bare bottoms of lower military rank. Seeking relief in that precarious position the Colonel, regardless of his decorations, looked neither formidable nor dignified.

The moral of this story is that, whenever you are in awe or in fear, simply visualize the other person's bare ass in a row of other bare asses balancing over the edge of a latrine.

Fred later told me that he experienced a similar awakening while trying to find relief at the other end of that latrine.

30. A Most Unusual Military Unit

At this point, I feel that I should describe, what soon became the Czechoslovak Independent Armored Brigade Group which, in my opinion, was the most unusual military unit ever assembled in the history of warfare.

It was small and composed of men, who lost their home and country, integrated into the British Army but still isolated from it by a language barrier. Those who served in the Czechoslovak Army at home, before the German occupation, were mostly restored to their ranks.

Due to the fact that the average refugees generally had a higher education and intelligence, our unit gradually became top-heavy with Officers and other trained military personnel. It also showed a higher percentage of Jews than the pre-war population of the Country.

Soon, after having landed in England from France, the unit was augmented by other Czech Refugees, including troops from the Middle East. From the Czech Contingent a number of men left to join temporarily some British units mainly for training purposes and officers were transferred to Russia to reinforce our Contingent there. It was, therefore, not unusual that the same individuals stayed together for several years.

We now had a unit of over-qualified and underpaid Officers and Cadets who were performing duties normally handled by the rank and file. As a result of such togetherness and very often prior personal friendships, the relationship between Officers, N.C.O.s and other

ranks, became a bit informal. It was not unusual for enlisted men to approach their superiors for help with their personal English correspondence and other private matters. Until we became a part of the liberating 21st army group, any promotions within our Brigade were more in name than in fact.

31. The Invasion That Wasn't

Some of our men arrived from France in uniforms which looked like costumes from a local production of War and Peace. Our convoy consisted of vehicles which certainly did not look menacing and their drivers had barely learned how to drive them. The tractors soon replaced the horses and the 25-pounder guns with rubber tires replaced the steel-rimmed antiques with 15mm guns from WWI. We certainly did not look much like invaders.

At Leamington Spa, we got a lukewarm reception from the residents. We could not blame them because, after all, we encroached on their idyllic setting where people came to retire and where our sheer numbers forced them to "queue up" for tickets to the "Cinema," as well as for tables in restaurants, etc.

The break came on November 14, 1940, when the German Luftwaffe bombed Coventry which is close to Leamington Spa. With the British Forces, Police, Firemen and Home Guard, we worked hard to rescue casualties and salvage whatever was salvageable.

From that time on, camaraderie between the

British and Czechs prevailed throughout the rest of the war and beyond.

32. Murdering the King's English (or How to Communicate in a Foreign Tongue)

I shall describe a few incidents as I recall them, to demonstrate the problems our men encountered.

a) How to Make a Date: He did not speak much English and she did not know any Czech. The day was Friday and they wanted to see each other again the following Tuesday at 7 o'clock. Looking at her, while raising one finger, he said "tamoro NO," raising the second finger, he repeated "tamoro NO," raising the third finger, "tamoro NO" but, raising his fourth finger, he said "tamoro YES" - and added "7 CLOCK - here." He later assured us that she was there on Tuesday at 7:00 p.m. sharp.

b) How to Handle an Official Visit: Two British Officers arrived at our Camp gate in Morten Hall where our Sentry politely asked: "Please?" They replied: "Visit Official." The Sentry asked again: "Please?" The two repeated "Visit Official." Not getting anywhere, the Sentry telephoned the Guard Room for the "Sergeant Guard." When he arrived, his exchange with the British did not get them any further. The Sergeant therefore called for the "Officer of the Day" and when he arrived there was another "Please?" and "Visit Official" exchanged. Suddenly, our Officer's eyes lit up. He called back the Guard House and minutes later two armed soldiers marched a handcuffed man to the gate. His

LEO ORSTEN

name was Otto Fischl. They just pulled him out of the klink where he was spending time for having been AWOL. "This is O. Fischl," the Czech Officer proudly announced. Luckily, Otto Fischl ("O. Fischl") spoke English and was able to help resolve the situation.

c) How to Stop an Intruder: From the British Command came the order for our Sentries to use English when challenging approaching strangers. They had to memorize "Halt, who goes there?" instead of the Czech "stuj kdo tam?" The sentry on duty that day was observed walking back and forth repeating to himself "haltwhogoesthere, haltwhogoesthere, haltwhogoesthere." He was a professional wrestler with an abundance of muscle but not much else.

There was only one English speaking person likely to come by. He was the civilian in charge of the Canteen who always wore a white jacket. When, at dusk, he walked toward him, our sentry aimed his rifle at him as required but was so flustered that he could not remember the English command. The "figure in white" kept coming closer and closer when the sentry finally blurted out "How do you do?" with a "How do you do old chap?" and with a friendly pat on his shoulder, the man in white continued on his way.

d) How to get more Company than desired: On the occasion when Lord and Lady Willoughby DeBrooke gave a party for the Czech Officers, Captain Moran arrived with his entire Company. When questioned, he presented his invitation which read: "Lord Lieutenant of Warwickshire and Lady Willoughby DeBrooke request the pleasure of the company of Captain Moran." Graciously, the hosts asked the entire "company" to join the party.

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

e) Its the "Second door to the right":

Lieutenant Novy had been told that it was not proper to ask the host or hostess "where is the lavatory?" but rather to ask "where may I have a wash please?" Following a garden party, as the guests moved inside, Sir Renwick asked Lt. Novy whether he would like to have a wash, to which Novy replied: "no, senk you verry much, I just had one outside against the tree."

f) Toujours L'Amour: Joseph boasted that in Czechoslovakia he used to be a smuggler, and a pimp and we all believed it.

I do not know how I earned the privilege to become his favorite "communicator of love" but that is what I became. To answer letters from his lady friend, I called for help from my fellow Cadets and together we enjoyed our task. It was arduous but quite educational.

In her letters, the lady described in full detail everything that took place the night before using the most endearing terms for each part of their respective anatomies. To put it simply, her letters were pornographic. In our replies, we tried to adhere to the lady's style.

Even though Joseph did not know enough English and could not read the letters, he commented that my letters must have been terrific, because the amount of the enclosed checks reflected the degree of her feelings.

When later I became an Officer and one of my duties involved censoring mail, I had to inform him that the time had come for him to find somebody else to replace me. He was visibly disappointed and later confessed to me that my successor's letters did not attain the level of

my eloquence, as the denominations of the enclosures never approached the amounts he had grown accustomed to.

One day, when I asked Joseph, who was not exactly a matinee idol, nor an Einstein, what he thought the lady saw in him, he told me that she was married but that her husband did it only once every six months and sometimes he forgot.

33. The War is Coming Closer

Our Officer School in England was housed in wooden barracks. The instructors were high-ranking career Officers who had escaped from Czechoslovakia. Cousin Fred, acted as the Adjutant to the Commander. Our antiquated armament was now replaced by new field guns, modern tanks, half-trucks, Bren Gun carriers, jeeps, motorcycles and other implements of war.

When we moved to Chard, near Yeoville, we stayed under canvas for weeks of continuous rain at a place appropriately called "Wind Whistle." From there, we criss-crossed England and Scotland, were stationed in Huntington, Beccles, then Lowstoft, where Steve found his bride, Peggie. Then, it was on to Walton on the Naze, where we were getting frequent, unwelcome visits from Nazi dive bombers. Then came Kelso in Scotland; followed by the West Indian Docks at London, which became our Port of Embarkation for the Continent.

34. *Vive La France or "Saving Private Beda"*

We were not in the front-line of the historic D-Day assault on the Beaches which would have easily wiped out our 4,000 men unit before it could be put to its intended use at a later date within Czechoslovakia. Still, even those plans were nullified at Yalta where the allied leaders left the liberation of Czechoslovakia to Stalin, while the rest of the allied forces, including our unit, were ordered to stop and wait so that the Communists could reap, at least for the history books, the glory of liberating Prague.

When we landed in France we did not see any Germans. All we found was general destruction and dead horses. That night, hardly anyone slept. Physically and mentally exhausted, after having reached the first step of our ultimate goal, the men flaked out.

At daybreak, I noticed one of our men pointing his sten gun, ready to fire at something non distinguishable approaching us through the morning fog. I stopped him from firing when, out of the fog, emerged our Private Beda carrying two heavy suitcases filled with French perfumes which he acquired in exchange for a carton of American Cigarettes from a destroyed Barber Shop. For me, the embarrassing part was that I did not save his life from enemy fire, but from one of his overly zealous buddies.

Soon, the news about the French perfume spread. The thought of sweet embraces made our men forget the war and their fatigue. They came running from every direction to get their hands on some of this unexpected find.

Needless to say, Beda's entire stock sold out within minutes. He was the wealthiest man on that beach. His natural business acumen and his instincts helped him find more such profitable supplies.

35. It Was Not Rome That Was Burning

It was a solitary Nazi shell to the rear of our gun position which set fire to one of our tents—It was not just any tent—it was Beda's tent and warehouse, now filled with new supplies. Luckily, none of the regular occupants was inside when the shell hit. With no water close by, we tried to extinguish the fire by throwing the contents of the nearby latrine on the flames. Amidst the smoke, stench and commotion one could hear, during the general shelling, bursts and pops of the perfume bottles. Our Colonel came by, curious to see what was happening. He stopped, sniffed the air and said "strange aroma." Forward stepped Beda, and exclaimed "for my money sir, for my money" alluding to the scent. That was too much for the Colonel. Bewildered, he did not wait for any further explanation and hastily retreated.

Soon, all was quiet on the Dunkirk front.

I would be remiss if I did not mention one group of "entrepreneurs" which demonstrated great imagination. Off the beach, they discovered a sunken barge, loaded with sacks of flour. The barge disappeared during high tide, and reappeared during low tide. They figured out that the flour closest to the outside of each

sack would get wet, later solidify and form a crust, which would protect the flour inside. When the barge surfaced, they unloaded the sacks, broke through the crust with chisels and indeed found the flour inside in perfect condition.

I understand that the sales were brisk and rewarding.

36. Pork, Dumplings, and Sauerkraut

Not all of Beda's ventures were successful. For the 28th of October, 1944, our Command decided that, to celebrate the 26th Anniversary of the birth of Czechoslovakia, we should have a special treat of pork chops, dumplings and sauerkraut, which is a Czech National Dish. That required the purchase of pigs from civilian sources. Beda was given the use of a 3-ton lorry and two men to help him accomplish that task. Somewhere behind the lines they bought three pigs in exchange for cigarettes. At the same time they bought, for their own side business, a large quantity of apples which they dumped, together with the pigs, in the back of the truck.

By the time they returned to Camp, the pigs had consumed the apples and started acting strangely. Their demise was a matter of hours and consequently the planned celebration was over before it ever began.

37. The Retaking of Dunkirk

Dunkirk was protected by thousands of German land mines, by their naval guns and by the feared German 88mm field guns, all of which were now aimed at our positions. For us, the war resembled the trench war of World War I, with frequent artillery exchanges and raids from both sides.

When the Germans finally surrendered to us, we were ordered to move quickly across Germany to catch up with the bulk of the advancing allies before they reached Czechoslovakia. We moved through devastated lands, where we found Nazi soldiers waiting eagerly for a chance to surrender to us rather than be captured by the Red Army.

38. Entering Czechoslovakia

As I mentioned earlier, the agreement at Yalta was to let Stalin "liberate" Prague. Therefore, when our unit reached Plzen, we were ordered by our Command not to proceed further. There is little doubt that we could have liberated Prague practically without a single shot, but that is how history is made.

We had to wait for that farce to run its course. Thus, the Russians became the "liberators" of Czechoslovakia and they quickly replaced the Czech officers at all strategic locations and substituted them with their comrades.

39. We Were Ready, But Ignorant

Like the rest of the world, we were kept ignorant of most of the atrocities being committed by the Nazis in our Homeland. We heard rumors about Concentration Camps, but had no knowledge of the Gas Chambers and Death Camps.

The International Press, which always seemed to be able to find their way to the most closely guarded secrets, remained silent about the Nazi brutalities and murders and their people preferred the safety of coffee houses, bars and restaurants of Switzerland, and other neutral countries.

The International Red Cross, which had been permitted to inspect Concentration Camps, chose to ignore most horrors which they saw. It was a shameful performance by that Organization.

Only when our armies from the West reached and liberated the first Extermination Camps, did the world hear the horrible truth.

Part of our Contingent had been trained for sabotage and undercover activities to be used mainly when we reached Czechoslovak Territory. That was a group whose members were parachuted into Czechoslovakia in 1942, where they succeeded in assassinating Heydrich, the notorious "Butcher of Prague" and Architect of the Holocaust.

Our Brigade's primary mission remained reserved for Czechoslovakia where, due to its familiarity with the land and language of its people, our services were expected to be of immeasurable value to our advancing armies, but the

Communists made sure that our Unit did not become the nucleus of the new Czechoslovak Army as I mentioned earlier.

40. "Sun-Bronzed Heroes from the West Presented Themselves to Prague"

In spite of the Communists' manipulations, when we finally marched through Prague, we received a truly enthusiastic and heartwarming welcome. The people's preference finally to see us, rather than the Russian "Liberators," was obvious. The above, and similar headlines, appeared the next morning in most of the Czechoslovak newspapers.

I was riding in the parade, on an armed half truck, when I first spotted a friend who was the owner of a sporting goods store in the YMCA Building, standing on the sidewalk and frantically waving and screaming. When we recognized each other we started shouting unintelligible words of joy. He was one of the identical twins, from my hometown, whom I mentioned in Episode 13. I said that I "recognized him," I really did not know which twin he was but I did not care as they both were my friends.

The greatest moment awaited me when the parade was over and we stopped at the top of a hill outside Prague. A couple of jeeps, from our Russian unit, suddenly screeched to a halt right next to the vehicle on which I was riding. I could not believe my eyes when, out of one of the jeeps, jumped my cousin Fred, by then a

Major. It was the first time we saw each other since he left England for Russia and we each found out the other was alive and well.

More jeeps stopped by and there were a lot of reunions, a lot of hugging and kissing. It was a great day but still, the uncertainty as to how and whom we would find, or not find, at home was heavily weighing on our minds.

41. Velhartice

I was now the Commanding Officer of Battery 4, which was billeted at Velhartice, a small place near Plzen where we replaced a previously formed Czech Citizens' Committee, consisting of local neo-Communists who tried to run Velhartice by Communist rules. With the war officially over, it was not easy to keep a unit together, where most members, after years of absence, finally found themselves close to their homes and loved ones. I shared their desire but I was also responsible for maintaining the Unit functional. I therefore started a system of "leave rotation" which gave most of the men a firm date for home leave. To set an example, I had to wait for the last group before I, too, could visit my home town.

We were able to reinstate law and order in Velhartice, but not Communist law, at least for a while.

42. Heading Home

There were not many visible traces of bombing or shelling as the train moved through the ecologically dead countryside. As an Officer, I traveled first class which was as shabby as the rest of the train. Frankly, I did not care. Memories of the past were racing through my mind.

As the train moved on between the dead tree stumps it summoned visions of peaceful forests, which must have offered shade and freshness only nature can provide. For a moment, I closed my eyes to enjoy the non-existing beauty and aroma of the countryside. For a while I was not sure whether I wished for the train to move faster and bring me to the finality of the past horrors, humiliation and death of my loved ones, or to slow down and let me keep for a while longer that elusive feeling of hope.

43. The Home That Was No Home

Too soon did I face the facts which, in their hideousness, exceeded by far the apprehension and premonitions which my mind had conjured up.

It was Trebic, the same as I had left it, only bigger and dirtier. It was like a rainbow without colors. Some people I knew well, while others looked familiar, some appeared happy to see me, while others tried to hide their disappointment that I returned which meant that they might have to return what they had stolen from us. Some of them even told me how unwise

my parents had been not to have left all of their possessions with them which they could have now returned to me but when, a few days later, I unexpectedly dropped by their home I was shocked to recognize furniture and numerous other objects which had belonged to us. I did not try to reclaim them. I immediately left without saying "good-bye" or closing the door behind me. Those people made me feel sick to my stomach.

Truly heart-warming and emotional was the reception I got from most of our former employees, especially from Josef, our former chauffeur and his wife, Marie, our former cook. Their joy was genuine and so were their tears. They insisted on returning to me everything they were able to salvage including a big crate containing a complete set of Rosenthal China, which they had buried in the garden of their relative in the country. I let them keep everything because I knew that they deserved much more than I could have given them. Still, they were reluctant in their acceptance. I did not own anything else, because the local Communists refused to return property which the Nazis had originally taken from us and which they illegally acquired from the Germans.

44. The Letter

Marie then handed me the envelope, which she held in her hand during our entire conversation and quickly ran out of the room. When I opened it, I understood her hesitation and the reason why she ran out. It was a letter from my parents.

LEO ORSTEN

I spent a sleepless night, pacing up and down, reading over and over again their words of love and courage. It was a tough night for me, probably the worst night of my life.

I was not sure whether to include the letter here because it is so very private but, in the end, I decided to share it with the reader because it demonstrates love and courage, encompassed in total ugliness and despair.

The following is its translation:

May 17, 1942

My beloved, best darling boy!

In two days we are leaving for the unknown. If fate has meant for us never to return and to perish nameless, in a foreign land, we at least want to let you know that all our thoughts are with you and that even the slightest spark of hope that we might see you again, gives us the courage to continue to live because, at the time I am writing this, it takes more courage to live than to die. We are leaving behind many friends, but we cannot name them here - maybe one day they will contact you and tell you about us. We are praying for a friendly fate to protect you from tragedy and enable you to become a good and happy man.

You have always been a good son. May God repay you for your love.

Aunt Nelly, Uncle Carl and also Aunt Anny (although of the latter I cannot say with certainty) are at the present time in

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

Poland. Poor Uncle Emil died on November 13, 1941, in Lizmannstadt (Lodz) of Bronchitis, due most likely to enormous stress. To all who were good to you, while you have been away, our sincere thank you. To our nieces and nephews, we send heartfelt regards.

To you, the best imaginable everything that parents can ask for, for their only, dearly beloved child. I cannot go on. May God protect you.

Countless kisses, your Mother

Hopefully, it will be granted us to see you again dearest Leo. Heartfelt kisses.

Your Father

45. Coming Up For Air

Fred, in the meantime, had joined the military unit of the Czech UNRRA in Hamburg. When they needed a Liaison Officer with a legal background, who was fluent in English, he suggested that they contact me. They did and I readily accepted.

In my new position, I was working closely with the United States and British Military and other allied organizations in Frankfurt, Munich, and Rotterdam. I discussed with them most matters on their level and in a relaxed manner, often in Officer's Clubs, rather than at a Conference table. That made things easier for all

LEO ORSTEN

concerned. In addition, I was put in charge of a Czech Contingent in Cleve, on the Dutch Border, which provided military guards for trains, carrying UNRRA supplies to Czechoslovakia, from being pilfered by gangs roaming through the German countryside.

In Cleve, I lived at the Officers' Club of the British Military Government, under the Command of Colonel P.C.H. Grant of the Scots Guards until 1947 when I returned to Prague.

46. The Boar Hunt

Before leaving, Colonel Grant and his Officers gave me a farewell party. The Colonel had also arranged a Boar Hunt in my honor. My enthusiasm was somehow dampened by my lack of intimacy with charging Boars as I had never before participated in a Boar Hunt. When I was asked to bring my own helper to back me up should the charging beast "take a liking to me," I selected Sergeant Ryska from my former unit to become my "Guardian Angel." I chose him because I liked him, but definitely not because of his experience with charging Boars. When I asked him if he knew what to do should the Boar charge, he replied "I don't know what you are planning to do sir, but I'm going to run like hell and climb up the nearest tree." That was the assurance that I really needed.

At this point of my narrative, I feel that I should tell the reader what I knew about a Boar Hunt. The Boar is assumed to be hiding somewhere in the underbrush. To get it out from its hideout, the forest is entered on one side

by a crew of men called "The Beaters" who, together with a pack of barking dogs, try to make enough noise to drive the boar out of the underbrush and make it run toward clearances where the hunters are waiting. Soon, the yelling, beating and barking became louder.

I admit that the only reason I did not start praying was because I felt that God might consider it "chutzpah" on my part to involve Him in a Boar Hunt in my honor and I wanted to remain in His good Graces should other more urgent matters arise later in my life.

The sound of the Beaters and barking dogs kept coming closer. Suddenly, we heard a single gun shot. I felt sure the Boar had come out of the underbrush. I never saw it alive because it came out where the Colonel, who was an excellent marksman, was waiting and the single shot was all, he needed to send the Boar to meet its Maker.

We all ran to congratulate the Colonel. I, personally, felt great relief that the Boar did not come out where I was waiting but I, nevertheless, "gracefully" accepted the Colonel's apology that the Boar had not chosen my end of the clearance to make its appearance.

The Boar Hunt was a complete success.

47. Hanna and Her "Steinway"

Early in 1947, when I returned to Prague to start my civilian life, I joined the Legal Department of the Czech UNRRA, which was the

LEO ORSTEN

liaison office between the International UNRRA Mission and the Czech Government. After almost six years in the army, I had to try to carry on without a tank, without a jeep and with having to pay for my own meals and lodgings. Still, had it not been for the loss of my family and friends, life really was not bad. The material losses seemed unimportant. I had to get accustomed to living like a civilian, so the first thing I had to do was to rent a room in an apartment of an elderly couple who made me feel as comfortable as they could.

It was later in 1947 when I got a telephone call which eventually changed my life. The call was from Hanna, a young lady who hailed from Prague, survived the war in England and had just returned to her hometown as a member of the International "UNRRA" Mission.

Hanna, like I, had lost her entire family in Nazi Concentration Camps. She called me at my office on the recommendation of mutual friends, because she had located a "Steinway" and another Concert Grand Piano, both formerly owned by her father, who was a professor of music, a conductor and an internationally known voice teacher. She asked for my help to get those pianos back.

I had never met her in person but I heard that she was not only extremely attractive but also bright. That was enough for me to "lend her my ear." My legal work, at that time, was mainly focused on international shipments and trade and I explained to her that, while I would love to be of assistance, pianos were definitely not my field of expertise but I added "I know that Steinways are worth a lot of money and you will be loaded. Will you marry me?" Back came an emphatic "No."

Shortly thereafter, the Head of our Legal Department was named Ambassador to Turkey, and I was assigned to his former position.

Now I kept running into Hanna, either intentionally or unintentionally, at business meetings and on other occasions. To her embarrassment, at the end of one of those meetings, our UNRRA Representative from Washington, who happened to be present and whom we both knew personally, yelled to me for everybody present to hear "Hey, Leo, why don't you marry this girl." I promised that I would try. But more about that later.

As far as the Steinway was concerned, she never got it back but, we remained in touch—to say the least.

48. Traveling Through the Zone of Occupation

A few months later, Hanna wanted to pay a visit to a beloved family friend in Berlin whom, since childhood, she called "aunt." She was an opera singer in Berlin and regularly visited Prague to study with Hanna's father, Hanna found out she was sending food parcels to Terezin and tried to help her parents whenever she could.

For a civilian to visit Berlin, through the Soviet Occupation Zone of Germany, a Permit from the Soviet authorities was required. Hanna asked if I could help her with it, having heard that I had connections.

LEO ORSTEN

The truth of the matter was that I was in no position to do anything for her, at that time. I had never negotiated directly with the Soviet Embassy, nor did I personally know any of its members. It was my buddy, Alik, who had helped me in the past. While a member of our Russian Contingent, he almost single handedly held off a German onslaught until help arrived. Subsequently he received, from the Soviets, their highest decoration for valor and got preferential treatment from the Soviets. When needed, I could always call on him. He would then put on his uniform, complete with decorations, go to see the Soviet Officials and return the next day with the desired results and a big hangover. On this occasion I was asking for his help in securing the Permit for Hanna. Unfortunately, at the time when Hanna needed help, the man behind my past successes was in Trieste on an assignment. I confessed my secret to Hanna and advised her to go to the Soviets herself and use her charm. It turned out to be, what I modestly considered, the most competent legal advice she could have obtained in that situation.

Her British boss, the Acting Director of UNRRA, expressed concern about her safety when she told him what I had suggested and decided to go with her and wait outside the Embassy in the car. When she emerged, waving the needed paper, he almost fainted.

She left for Berlin on a sealed train wearing her UNRRA uniform. Except for the fact that she had to drink "Rakia," out of a 5-gallon bottle, with some Yugoslav workers, and share with them their garlicky sausages, the trip to Berlin was smooth and uneventful. After a few days of

reminiscing with her "aunt" and, after leaving with her most of her civilian clothing she took with her, Hanna returned to Prague, safe and sound, on December 31, 1947.

49. New Year's Eve

On that day, Titi and I attended a festive luncheon celebrating a milestone in the shipment of UNRRA supplies into Czechoslovakia. Slightly inebriated, we picked up my tuxedo, which had survived the war with me abroad, from my tailor where I had left it a few days earlier for a face-lift. It looked like new and fitted perfectly.

Picking up the tuxedo did not have a sobering effect on us. In our happy frame of mind, I became nonetheless aware that we were close to where Hanna lived and decided to drop in on her unannounced. It so happened that Hanna's friend, Rosie, came to spend New Year's Eve with her.

Standing at her doorstep, with the tuxedo still over my arm, Titi and I used our combined elocutional aptitude to convince the two ladies to join us at the Officer' Club for a New Year's Eve Celebration.

We announced that we would pick them up later that evening. There was disbelief and some reluctance in accepting our invitation for which, due to our condition, I really could not blame them. However, they were ready and waiting for us when we returned, still on a high note, dressed for the occasion. We brought

LEO ORSTEN

scotch, vodka, wine, sardines, salmon and other items which were part of the perks available to UNRRA officers. With such goodies, we came to realize that we could stay at Hanna's place and enjoy a better meal than the Officers' Club could offer us under the rationing regulations.

We agreed to the change of venue and, with the added culinary artistry of the ladies, we ended up with a feast far exceeding our expectations. It turned out to be a delightful evening and, from then on, Hanna and I started dating on a regular basis.

50. Meet Benji

To describe Benji, I must reach back to when I originally met him in Brno. One of the incidents which contributed to his colorful reputation took place when he was in his early twenties and when, during a visit to Italy, he "sold" the Prague Royal Castle to a rich American. Yes, the Prague Castle. It is not a typing error.

The whole transaction was accomplished on a handshake. He received a deposit, but the deal became short-lived when the Czech Embassy in Rome received payment of the next installment addressed to Benji. The Embassy questioned it and subsequently returned the money to the embarrassed buyer, but not before the Prague Tabloids had gotten wind of it. As I understand it, no return of the original deposit was ever demanded nor was there any additional money paid by the purchaser.

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

Benji, not only had an uncanny talent for languages, but also bore a striking resemblance to the Bourbon Royal Family. In Spain he met a group of shady operators who, in a short time, transformed him into a Prince. After intensive tutoring in Spanish and in princely demeanor and, after providing him with appropriate uniforms and a credible entourage, he and his group started their "princely" tour through countries which used to be part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The group was covertly soliciting contributions for the restoration of the Austrian Empire and reinstatement of the Hapsburg Dynasty. That, in itself, constituted High Treason in most countries. On the other hand, the friends of the dethroned monarchs and other covert monarchists, became Benji's secret contributors.

It was a fail-safe situation, brilliantly conceived because the "contributors" could never claim the return of money contributed to an illegal act.

In Prague, Benji with his entourage stayed at the Hotel Alcron where, at the same time, a visiting Russian army delegation occupied a full floor. The Czechs provided an honor guard at the main entrance to the lobby.

Things were running smoothly until Benji, in full regalia, sporting a three-cornered hat and followed by his escort appeared at the hotel entrance. The Commander of the Honor Guard jumped to attention, barked out his command and, when he recognized Benji, he almost choked. "Benji, you son of a bitch!" he exclaimed. This incident created pandemonium. As it turned out, the Commander of the Guard was Benji's ex-classmate.

LEO ORSTEN

The rest is history. Benji was arrested, was eventually bailed out by his uncle and the Czech Tabloids had a field day.

In the course of the investigation which followed, it turned out that Benji was also AWOL from the Czech army. Now, free on bail, he was instructed to report to his unit in Znojmo. When he arrived there, elegantly dressed he ordered the Sergeant on duty, who approached his taxi, to carry his suitcase to the office. The Sergeant was too stunned to question the order. At the office, it took a few minutes to check Benji's record and turn the distinguished looking visitor into Private Benji - "AWOL."

He soon changed his attire to a striped suit with a number on the back. His new temporary habitat had iron bars on the door and window.

Coincidentally, cousin Fred, under the Czech compulsory military service was, at that time, stationed in Znojmo where he attended Officers School. We had relatives, living in that town who had two pretty young daughters. That afternoon, Fred happened to be in their neighborhood and dropped in unannounced. He found the house buzzing with excitement. Everybody was dressed to the hilt, the maids in their uniforms and headbands, the rest in their Sunday best and the dinner table beautifully set.

Clearly embarrassed when Fred appeared, a member of the family hesitantly explained to him that he could not stay because they expected a visitor, a Spanish Prince who was in the country incognito as a guest of the Czech Government, while studying its army training methods.

When Fred heard the words "Spanish Prince" he

immediately smelled a rat. He pretended not to notice the host's request to leave and managed to stall until the doorbell rang. To the embarrassment of all present, he remained standing at the entrance. When the maids opened the door and ushered Benji in, he was staring right into Fred's eyes. Fred yelled at him, "Benji you crook, these are my relatives."

How he got a special pass to get out of jail, I do not know - but there he was - as large as life. The welcoming ceremony was cut short, while he made a fast exit. Fred was asked to stay for dinner and as he later told me, the food was delicious, definitely fit for a Prince. Benji assured him the next day that he would have never pulled such a stunt had he known that his potential victims were Fred's relatives.

All that happened between 1935 and 1938.

51. Beware of Liberating "Comrades"

Coming back to our entry into Czechoslovakia and the following three years, described before, the Communists continued to strengthen their grip on Czechoslovakia. Considering my years of wartime service in the Czech army, my rank and decorations, I did not expect my loyalty to the country to be questioned. I was wrong. With their Soviet protectors, the Czech Communists quickly consolidated their hold on power and joined with the former Nazi collaborators in stashing away their loot. Those despicable schemers used every possible trick to deny me what the Nazis and they, themselves, had stolen from me and my family.

LEO ORSTEN

The line was drawn. "We" were on one side and the Communists on the other. On February 23, 1948, they ultimately showed their hand when they seized full power in Czechoslovakia. Cunningly, they arranged on that day for most of our Officers and men who came from the West to be home on leave, separated from their weapons. Needless to say, nobody in the army would question an unexpected furlough.

The Prague police closed its eyes to the trucks, filled with Communist goons armed to their teeth, rolling into their city. The coup was complete. Overnight, they took over the media without firing a shot. Except for a few students, protesting in the streets, nobody raised a finger. The next day, when our men returned to their units, the Communists were in control. President Benes was under house arrest and Clement Gottwald, former leader of the Communist Party, became President.

It became clear what Churchill meant in his 1946 speech, at Westminster College, when he stated that "An Iron Curtain has descended across the Continent."

52. The Plot Thickens

Back in our "liberated" homeland, it was early on the morning of March 10, 1948, when Jan Masaryk's body was found in the yard below the windows of his official residence. He was, at that time, still Minister of Foreign Affairs. There were unconfirmed rumors circulating in Prague that Masaryk was dead but not until Hanna

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

telephoned me at my office at 8:00 a.m. that they just received a telephone call from Paris confirming that Masaryk was dead, did we believe that it was true. Shortly thereafter, I met with her and Titi on Wenceslas Square. There were people milling around, some of them whispering, others crying, while rumors were changing by the minute. Finally, at noon, the government loudspeakers officially notified the public that Masaryk had committed suicide. Except for the most ardent Communists, the whole nation was in shock and, except for the same ardent communists, nobody believed it. One of the unlikely variations was that he was a victim of a defenestration (which would have been the third in the history of the country). From what we heard and were later told Masaryk fell, or was pushed, off the window sill on which he climbed trying to escape the Communist hatchet men who had broken into his residence in the wee hours of the morning.

That was a day no one who was there will ever forget. For us it was the signal that we had only one road left to take - the one leading out of the country.

The political situation was getting more ominous. We started to relive the pre-war days of 1939 when we were looking for help wherever we could get it. The main difference was that now it was 1948 and some of our new enemies spoke Czech and some of them were our former colleagues and/or co-workers.

53. Escape From Communist "Liberators"

Under the current "leaders," Czechoslovakia was changing rapidly. The country had twenty-six political parties and Officers and members of "non-Communist parties" were considered potential traitors to the regime, just as were Executives of major companies. Most of them were immediately rounded up, jailed, fired, or they mysteriously disappeared. Their positions were filled with incompetent jerks who, however, were Members of the inexperienced Communist Party.

People, whose records showed no political affiliation and who were needed to keep certain offices functioning, were temporarily retained and covertly offered positions provided, of course, that they agreed to eventually join the Party. That was the position in which I suddenly found myself.

Still, the fact that the government could function at all, with the help it had, was a miracle in itself. Our office had just recently finalized an agreement between the U.S. Army, UNRRA and Czechoslovakia, regarding reimbursement of freight charges covering shipments of supplies. To help me find a way out of the country, Hanna, with the help of friends on both sides of the Border, "caused" the "finalized" agreement to become "unfinalized," which called for an urgent meeting in Frankfurt.

Most of my colleagues, who were originally involved in the negotiations were, by now, removed. I had been the Legal Advisor during those negotiations and was, therefore, not only familiar with most problems but also acquainted

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

with the individuals involved. It therefore did not raise suspicion when my presence in Frankfurt was requested by UNRRA.

The new Communist Head of our Prague Office summoned me and instructed me to prepare all relevant documents. He also told me to be ready to leave for Frankfurt on short notice. So far, the ruse had worked perfectly.

As I expected, he also handed me an Application for Membership in the Party and asked me to complete it. I was naturally aware that they would prefer to send someone who was "politically acceptable" in my place. There was only one party member who was vaguely familiar with the subject matter but whose English was below par. I could not take any chances. Someone could decide and send him anyway. By some "miracle" (the details of which escape my memory) his Passport had temporarily disappeared and he was therefore unable to travel abroad. By that time, I was almost sure that they did not have a suitable substitute to send to Frankfurt. Therefore, they did not have much choice but to send me. As I later heard, the passport "miraculously reappeared" after I left for Germany.

Only Hanna, and a handful of friends, knew that I did not intend to return. We had to watch carefully that Hanna was not suspected of any involvement which might jeopardize her pending departure for the United States, where she had a Scholarship waiting for her at Carnegie Tech.

Early, on the morning of April 4th, 1948, I left as planned by our diplomatic car, for Frankfurt. I was not sure how much my British traveling companion knew about my plans.

LEO ORSTEN

Only when we crossed the Czech border, and when my companion was sure the chauffeur was not looking and he discreetly shook my hand, did I realize that he must have known all the time.

We arrived safely in Frankfurt, where Fred, and two of my friends, who were with the UNRRA Office in Germany, gave me a big welcome. My office had given me just a few dollars as my per diem allowance. After the initial elation they took me to the Officers' Club (at the former I.G. Farben Building) for dinner. Fred had to rush to Hamburg but, before he left, he gave me some money to supplement my meager travel expenses.

In the meantime, Hanna was in Prague expecting to leave shortly for the U.S. but, unbeknownst to us and without prior warning, the Communists had canceled her Exit Permit.

54. Plotting and More Plotting

The evening, before I left Prague, Hanna and I ran into Benji at the EST Bar of the Esplanade Hotel. She had never met Benji before, but I did not have to explain him to her, as he could do that most eloquently himself. I only had to assure her that his unbelievable stories were true or, almost true. For the moment, they overshadowed the seriousness of the situation and the tension Hanna and I felt. Benji, of course, did not suspect that it was my last evening in Prague.

A few days later, with me in Munich, Hanna ran

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

into him at the Barandov Restaurant, located on a big rock above the River Moldau (Vltava). Benji was walking around with his arm in a big cast. Concerned, Hanna asked him what had happened and he lowered his voice and assured her that it was nothing to worry about. He just needed the cast to convince our Communist "friends" that he was unable to work because the rule was, that those who did not work, were not eligible to receive food stamps. Listening to him certainly helped to lift her spirits.

On April 6, 1948, I sent from Aschaffenburg, to the Head of our office, my Letter of Resignation, which I handed sealed, to our chauffeur for direct delivery. In it I reminded my superior that when he handed me, before my trip, the Application for Membership in the Party and when the next day his Deputy asked me to sign it, it became clear to me that, while such Membership could have temporarily secured my position, in return I would have had to give up a great part of my personal freedom, which I was not prepared to do. I realized that my work, from then on, would be judged by my political affiliation and no longer by its true value.

I closed my letter by saying that there was no bitterness in me, only tremendous sadness and hope that one day the people of Czechoslovakia would be allowed again to think for themselves.

55. The Transportation Department in Munich

Free of any ties to the Czech UNRRA, I accepted a job with the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) in Munich and became Head of its Transportation Department. It was not a simple operation. We had about 200 vehicles, 300 drivers and mechanics, with workshops and an inadequate supply of spare parts.

Prior to my taking over, the Department had been temporarily run by a young American who was then the Executive Assistant to the Head of the European Branch. Therefore, in fact, the Department was run all that time by his Secretary and her husband.

I did not consider it appropriate to make changes before I was able to study or evaluate the present operation. It therefore came as a surprise to me when people whom I had befriended in the Mess Hall told me that certain members of my staff spoke in rather unflattering terms about me. I could not figure out why they resented me because I had not been in that position long enough to earn anybody's disapproval - I had not criticized them nor suggested any changes. My suspicions were aroused and I started checking the existing books and records and found a lot of discrepancies. When I had proof positive and all the evidence showing how this husband and wife team was running their lucrative side business of selling gasoline coupons to the German population, I presented it to the directors of our Organization who were incredulous but of course fired them on the spot.

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

The Department had problems with other personnel too, especially with drivers who were, to a great extent, survivors of Concentration Camps, now living in AJDC-DP Camps (displaced persons). Before I took over, strikes were frequent and discipline was low. My problem was communication. I did not speak Yiddish as most Polish DP's did, but managed to get my ideas across to all on how to run a successful operation.

The following incident helped to earn me immediate respect in the eyes of my staff.

My predecessor who, in the meantime, resumed his full-time position with our Head Office liked to flaunt his authority on every occasion. Shortly after I took over, he arrived at the Motor Pool, behind the wheel of a jeep towed by a truck. It appeared that the drive shaft on the jeep had broken. With about forty or fifty drivers watching us, he haughtily reprimanded me for putting him in a position where he had to be towed in. I voiced my surprise because I knew he could have come in under his own power. He sarcastically told me to show him how. I jumped behind the wheel of the jeep, shifted the gears to "front wheel drive" and drove smugly around the Motor Pool.

My "admonisher" quickly retreated. What he had forgotten (or did not know) was that he was in a vehicle with a four-wheel drive.

The other problem I had to rectify was the lack of discipline of the drivers. They took vehicles out of the Motor Pool whenever they wanted and, when they got caught, there was an extensive investigation but only minor punishment. I called my men together and told

LEO ORSTEN

them that anytime they needed a car, for a reasonable purpose, all they had to do was to ask permission from my Office.

The first occasion I had, to back up my words, came a few days later when one of the drivers requested permission to use a car to take his wife to the doctor between the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. the next day. I made it clear however that, if he was not back on time, he had better have a very valid excuse. He looked surprised but pleased. I further assured him that I fully trusted him and that I was not going to check on where he was going but, should I accidentally find out that he was lying, he would be automatically dismissed. He obviously did not expect that he would get the use of the car without extensive questioning, nor did he expect the additional time which I had allowed him. This then became our standard operating procedure which was scrupulously enforced. We now had the discipline and control and knew where our vehicles were at any time of the day or night.

During my tenure, which was nineteen months, we did not have one strike, nor do I recall one incident of unauthorized use of a vehicle. I was deeply touched by the sincerity of my staff who presented me, when I was leaving, with several gifts and memorabilia, including a photo album containing pictures of me and most members of the staff of the motor pool and workshops. This proves how effective fairness and candor can be, even with men who, over the years, had forgotten that such things existed.

I owe a great deal of thanks to Paul, who handled the Maintenance Department in a truly

professional manner. He now lives in Minnesota and we are still in touch. Also to my assistant who had a difficult name but I called him "Mickey," to my two secretaries, Doris and Gale and to the rest of my staff.

56. Our Clandestine Friends

In the meantime, Hanna's situation in Prague had gotten worse. Not only did she get sick with an acute sinus condition, but the Communist Rulers showed no inclination to release her papers. She was now being closely watched by the SNB and her chances to leave the country became slimmer as time went by. My covert messages, as passed on from person to person, often became unintelligible and my letters, written in "invisible ink" (lemon juice), remained invisible. Still, every week Hanna was getting fresh flowers from me for which I had arranged before I left Prague.

From among our clandestine helpers, I really enjoyed Dodo the most. He usually arrived with a smile and carried with him at least five forged passports, each from a different country. From his aliases, the one which tickled me most was "Dodo Gesuchmir." ("Geh such mir" in Yiddish means "go look for me.") He had oodles of journalistic and other passes. He seemed to have contacts everywhere and, while he assured me that he was never a pimp, I found out that in Paris, while posing as a journalist, he used a bunch of hookers in his undercover activities. But how was unimportant. The important thing was that he delivered.

LEO ORSTEN

His role in his Organization appeared to be to smuggle people across borders and pass on messages. In Prague, he and his associates contacted Hanna with one of my cryptic messages which, as she later confessed, she did not understand. Still, in order to get it, she let them take her through secret passages where everyone was carefully screened and where visitors had to use passwords. Whatever it was, or whatever it was supposed to do, it worked which, for us, was the main thing.

57. Hanna's Escape

In Munich, I lived in a large apartment on the mezzanine of an AJDC-occupied residential building which I shared with an American doctor, a dentist, a Rabbi (formerly a U.S. Army Chaplain) and my liberated Polish assistant. Most of the meetings with my clandestine contacts took place in my room. When I was with Dodo, to discuss ways to help Hanna get out of Czechoslovakia, and we suddenly happened to hear an unfamiliar sound, he switched off the lights and, before I realized it, he had jumped out of the rear window and disappeared into the night.

Of my co-tenants on the floor, the dentist, in addition to his dental work, was dating my English secretary and I don't remember what the doctor was doing in addition to his healing. The rabbi had a poker game going twice a week in his room. The reason I did not participate was financial. (I took a salary cut in order to get paid in dollars instead of in German Marks and with no permanent home to return to, I could not afford to gamble.)

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

Before I got married, whenever the poker game broke up, which usually was in the wee hours of the morning, the rabbi woke me up and asked me to join them for a drink or for a cup of coffee. To such an awakening, I usually reacted with a resounding "you son-of-a-bitch." He calmly accepted my lack of respect but admonished me that whenever I call a rabbi a "son-of-a-bitch," I should at least follow it with "pardon me rabbi." I was always willing to learn.

Eventually, it was our American friends in Prague who turned into Scarlet Pimpernels and helped get Hanna out. Her dash across the Ruzyně Airport had to be timed to the second in order for her to hop unnoticed on the chartered plane which stopped in Prague, while taking refugees from Poland to Paris. All she could take with her was what she could carry unobtrusively in a large shopping bag. In the other hand, she carried a small Swiss Typewriter on the bottom of which, hidden under the felt, she had taped a couple of \$10.00 bills.

On that particular day, but unbeknownst to her, I was in Paris to review, with the Head Office, our Courier Service and other matters concerning our operation. I tried to make sure that, should Hanna unexpectedly arrive in Paris, she would get every possible help from our Organization. Little did I know that she was already on another floor in the same building, trying on her own to make arrangements for her temporary stay in Paris. Before anybody in our Paris office realized that I had been looking for her, I was on the Autobahn on my way back to Germany to be there in case she arrived in Munich. When I got to the office the next morning, I found on my desk a telegram that she

LEO ORSTEN

had arrived in Paris. After more confusion, just a few minutes later, I was talking to her on the telephone. We were now on the same side of the Iron Curtain.

The date was July 1, 1948.

58. Sous Les Toits de Paris

Once again, Dodo had to be called into action. Hanna had arrived in Paris on phony papers but, within a couple of days, Dodo obtained for her all necessary documents. We saw him a few more times before he disappeared, as quickly as he had appeared, and was never heard from again. "Wherever you are Dodo, you were a great help, which Hanna and I shall always appreciate."

After living in a small hotel in a "good" neighborhood, Hanna ran into an English girl, with whom she used to work at the Prague UNRRA and who now worked for UNESCO in Paris. She offered to share her one-room apartment until Hanna could find a suitable place of her own. It did not take her long and she got settled at an Apartment Hotel on Rue Ordener.

She started to work for the AJDC International Tracing Service in Paris, while pursuing her quest to get to America where the Scholarship was awaiting her. My "urgent" trips to Paris became more frequent. Inadvertently, our conversations turned to our future and ended up with my asking her to marry me. Her reply came slowly. She said "you know, this Scholarship is a chance of a lifetime for me to go to America,"

to which, I modestly replied, "well, I am a chance of a lifetime too." She hesitated, looked at me and finally said "You know what, I think you are right." This was followed by some tears, hugging and kissing.

Now our wedding plans started - with little money - without a home or a country to go to. But "that was the way it was." We decided on a Civil Ceremony.

59. Wedding Bells

Then came the wedding rings. Hanna wanted to match them with a diamond ring, set in platinum, which had belonged to her mother. At that time, neither of us knew that there was such a thing as white gold. She ran all over Paris and I ran all over Munich, in search of platinum bands. Nowhere could we get them, as platinum at that time was very scarce. Then it dawned on me that most of my drivers in Munich did not survive Concentration Camps without being, among other things, street-wise operators. I called two of them to my office and told them that I needed platinum. Without hesitation they asked "how much and when?" I said "enough for two rings" and added, jokingly, "and I need it in half an hour." Lo and behold, a half hour later, I had the platinum on my desk. I quickly verified the quality and the price and the case of the wedding bands was solved. To this day, we are both still wearing those platinum bands.

One of the requirements to get married in Paris was that one of us had to have permanent

LEO ORSTEN

residence in his or her Arrondissement for not less than six weeks. When Hanna met that requirement we got married on December 11, 1948, at the Mairie du Jules Joffrin. My direct superior in Paris became my Best Man and a Czech friend of Hanna's, who was staying in Paris with her daughter in the same hotel as Hanna, became her Matron of Honor.

After an intimate luncheon given by us, our colleagues gave us a Wedding Reception and the Organization paid for our seven-day Honeymoon. Unfortunately, we had no family members present.

The Reception was delightful, with everybody pitching in, after which, an AJDC staff car was waiting for us. The chauffeur was instructed not to reveal to us where he was taking us. A few hours later we arrived at our destination in Fontaine La Riviere where an intimate supper, a bottle of champagne and a beautiful suite, with a green marble bathroom, awaited us. Needless to say, a few hours after the reception we were not ready to have supper however, we did not want to disappoint the Owners of the Inn and the staff so we ate and drank what we could. This had a disastrous affect on our wedding night, which ended with Hanna burping me while I was emitting the appropriate sounds. It was a beautiful Honeymoon. The limousine arrived a week later and took us back to Paris.

From Paris we expected to go by train to Munich where a delegation of my staff, with several bouquets of flowers, awaited us at the platform. The problem was that "US" did not arrive because Hanna's Visa was not ready and, consequently, I was standing on the platform with no bride, alone, looking like a misplaced flower vendor.

When I got to my room, I found it decorated with a "Welcome to the Newlyweds" sign from co-tenants and staff.

60. The Bride's Arrival in Munich

Hanna arrived about a week later but, this time, I headed the welcoming committee at the station and supplied the fresh flowers. The next day, after the usual formalities, she started in her new position as Assistant to the Head of the AJDC Emigration Department, US Division.

Considering the fact that we were homeless refugees, we lived very well, worked hard all week and, on weekends, we used to go to Garmisch Partenkirchen, the well-known resort and the location of the 1936 Olympic Winter Games. It offered picturesque settings for skiing and skating, with International ice hockey matches. There, I had a joyful reunion with some of my friends who, as members of the Czechoslovak All Stars defected during the World Hockey Championship to Switzerland and became players of H.C. Davos.

During the summer months we visited the Festivals at the Opera House at Salzburg, Austria. We also went to the Eagle's Nest, the infamous mountain retreat of Adolf Hitler, near Berchtesgarden, as well as other spots in Austria and Switzerland, to do some swimming, sailing and rowing, while staying in top hotels at preferential U.S. Army rates. After almost one and a half years for me and less than a year for Hanna in Germany, our U.S. Entry Visas came through.

LEO ORSTEN

Before we left for the U.S., we made a quick side trip to England to introduce my bride to some members of my family and to introduce me to some of her friends.

***61. The Pilgrimage to the
"Land of the Free"***

On November 13, 1949, we left from Bremerhafen for New York as refugees. Our ship, the SS General MacRae, was the same "Liberty" type vessel as the one on which we crossed the English Channel, as part of the allied liberating forces. Men and women had separate accommodations. Men slept in hammocks and women in bunk beds, about fifty to a room.

There were over a thousand refugees. Hanna and I, due to our knowledge of languages, became translators and interpreters to help those who needed it mainly in preparing their landing documents, etc. That kept us busy but also allowed us to spend most of the day in the ship's comfortable Lounge.

The food which they served us, or whatever they substituted for it, was barely edible. The hard-boiled eggs were moldy and other "delicacies" tasted just as awful.

On that ship we met and befriended Ginny and Charles who hailed from Prague and who had survived the war in Concentration Camps. We spent the entire journey close together. Before the war, Ginny's parents owned one of the best-known restaurants in Prague. After she

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

graduated from a top hotel school in Switzerland, she worked in the family business, while her husband, Charles, like me was a Juris Doctor.

We spent the first day in the United States on board ship looking in awe at the Statue of Liberty. We could not disembark because it was Thanksgiving Day and the Longshoremen, and other port personnel, had the holiday off.

As planned, Charles and Ginny settled in New York, where they had friends, while we, after one week of enjoying the city, got on a train to the West Coast, where my cousin, Dr. Rudi Lederer, was waiting for us with open arms. We remained close friends with Charles and Ginny. When we visited New York years later, they had a delightful six-year old daughter. Soon, I got into a "serious" discussion with her and, although they could not hear me, they seemed to enjoy watching her attentively listening to me. Their attitude changed the next morning, when their little darling refused to go to school. They found out that the reason was that her newly discovered uncle Leo told her that she was smarter than her teachers and her parents and therefore she did not have to go to school. As unbelievable as it might sound, they did not kill me and, as I predicted, the "little girl" grew up to become a well-known and respected attorney.

62. The Pilgrims From Czechoslovakia

When we landed in New York, we did not expect anybody to meet us but, to our pleasant surprise, Dottie, the lady we met while she was working in Germany, picked us up two hours later from the hotel to which we were sent and took us to her home where we met "my almost son" then one year old. We stayed with Dottie for about a week before leaving for Los Angeles.

During that week we managed to squeeze in as many sights as we could, we ventured out on our own and had a great time regardless of our meager finances. We had a vague idea about several places in New York, one of which was Radio City Music Hall. There we enjoyed the movie and, of course, the fabulous Rockettes.

Another place was Madison Square Garden, well known for its sporting events and we were lucky to get in to see the Ice Capades or maybe they were the Ice Follies. Further on our agenda was a Broadway Play, where we got tickets to see Uta Hagen in "A Streetcar Named Desire," followed by what we thought was a "must," dinner at Sardi's. Already in Europe the Cafe Eclair in New York was known as the meeting place for refugees so that, too, was on our agenda and, true to its reputation, we did meet several of our old friends there.

We said our good-byes to Dottie and family and our New York friends and traveled West.

I should mention here the unusual way in which I first met Dottie. To do so, I have to go back in time to April 10, 1948, which was about a week after I had arrived in Munich.

While waiting in the lounge of a hotel in Salzuflen for a couple of buddies who were taking me out to dinner, for my birthday, I was approached by a stunning lady who addressed me by name. She told me her name was Dottie and she seemed to know a lot about me and my citizenship status. It turned out that she also knew my cousin Fred. Without much hesitation, she asked me if I would consider marrying her. While I tried to conceal my astonishment she explained that she was pregnant but not married. The expectant father, whom Hanna happened to know very well, was married - but, to someone else. She definitely wanted to have the child and was looking for a father to give the baby a name as she was planning to return to America.

I told her about Hanna and my other plans, which she understood and she decided to "go it alone" and we became and stayed good friends until her death in 1995. Shortly after our meeting, her sister arrived in Munich from America on her way to Prague and we asked her to look up Hanna and see if she needed any help. While there they spent a lot of time together. Coincidentally, both sisters met with Hanna again in Paris, shortly after she arrived there and were of great help. They formed a lifelong friendship which also includes me. The sister is still living in San Diego.

63. Hollywood

In the meantime, Rudi in Hollywood, was mainly concerned that the oranges on the trees in his garden should not fall off before we arrived so

LEO ORSTEN

that we could have the thrill, for the first time in our lives, of picking oranges directly from a tree.

I, on the other hand, wanted to surprise Rudi so I did not let him know when exactly we would arrive. (Not one of my better ideas.)

When we arrived in Los Angeles, my surprise backfired. We called Rudi from the train station and later from the hotel, to which we were sent by the USNA, but neither Rudi nor Helen, his wife, were anywhere to be found but we left a message with someone at their home. I then called Dottie's sister who at that time, lived in Los Angeles with her husband. She picked us up about an hour later and took us to a party in, of all places, Pasadena. Our first introduction to the only L.A. Freeway.

The next morning, Rudi appeared at our hotel to take us to his house in Hollywood. The drive from the hotel to his home would normally take about twenty minutes. But the word "normally" was not in Rudi's vocabulary. He arrived, met Hanna and it was mutual love at first sight. The time was nine thirty in the morning and we just had a small breakfast. Rudi decided to take us on a sight-seeing tour. He showed us the wooden elevator doors of Bullock's Wilshire, the Hollywood Ranch Market which "never closed," the Hollywood High School on Sunset, where his wife, Helen, taught and we also had to see the Farmer's Market and zigzagged through Hollywood to see more of his favorite places.

All that time we were getting hungrier by the minute and I kept asking Rudi if we could at least stop for a cup of coffee, but he kept going and it was close to four p.m. when finally

we arrived at his beautiful house in the Hollywood Hills. Little did we know that since his student years and hospital internship, he ate just once a day. The twenty minute trip took us six and a half "hungry" hours. But that was Rudi in his unique way. He was proud of his Hollywood that he loved.

When we reached his picturesque house, with a huge patio overlooking Hollywood and when we finally met Rudi's wife who had been worried all day that something might have happened to us, Rudi continued with his guided tour, totally ignoring the fact that we had not eaten all day. He still insisted that we first pick oranges from the tree, look at the garden, the three hundred birds, the plants and the rocks which he found in the desert.

In the meantime, our stomachs continued to growl until I decided to make a bold approach to Helen directly and tell her that we were starving and getting weaker by the minute. She almost fainted. She gave Rudi hell, broke off his on-going tour of their twelve room house and quickly took us to the dining room where a delicious meal had been awaiting us since early morning.

That was Hanna's introduction to Rudi, or just to a small part of his uniqueness.

64. More of Rudi

In spite of the twelve year difference in our ages, I remember Rudi as my buddy and idol. He was popular and eccentric, to say the least.

LEO ORSTEN

While attending University in Prague, he acted in amateur plays and performed stand-up comedy. He was a truly lovable character.

Both, his room on campus and the one in grandmother's house in Trebic, were furnished with items, which bore the name of the establishment from which they had "mysteriously" disappeared. Signs on his windows came from trains and read "please don't lean out of the window," although the windows were on the ground level. His door opened to the inside but the sign on it read "please push" and it also read "insert half a crown," although there was no slot to do so, and many other misleading signs in different languages.

Legs on all the furniture in his room were cut down. Rudi never smoked but on his table he had over one hundred ashtrays and, as the centerpiece, he had a bottle containing a fetus, preserved in alcohol, obviously removed from the hospital where he interned. When in Trebic, he loaned me his room for intimate purposes, but I had to cover the bottle so as not to spoil the "romantic" mood.

Rudi's American wife, was an English teacher, in adult education, always groomed and immaculately dressed, in contrast to Rudi, who was totally informal even before the Hippie era. Rudi and Helen met while he was attending her English classes at Hollywood High School at night. He turned out to be a pain in the neck because he kept disrupting her lectures until she ingeniously resolved the situation by falling in love with him and marrying him - at least, so the story goes.

Their house had about twelve rooms, a big patio, a lovely garden and a breath-taking view of

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

Hollywood. The interior walls were covered with expensive wallpaper, which nobody could see because, as soon as it was installed, Rudi concealed them behind boxes and cartons of medical samples, old newspapers, magazines and miscellaneous memorabilia. There were seven refrigerators, all filled with food. This was because each time they bought a new model Rudi could not part with the previous one. Outside in the back he had an aviary with a variety of 300 screeching birds and an owl in an adjoining cage. The philosophy behind that was that if one owned a dog or a cat one might get emotionally attached to it while, with 300 birds, if one died one would not even miss it.

As part of his landscape, Rudi planted everything that could be thrown away or found in the desert, or on the freeway, including hubcaps, used lipsticks, burned out light bulbs and anything else that caught his fancy. He held onto old furniture and other items that he acquired at auctions. He kept in his collection four broken record players, with automatic changers, hoping that one day somebody could make them into one that worked. To my knowledge, nobody ever did.

There were fights between Rudi and Helen about allocation of space, for those "uncollectibles" but there was always enough love to suppress their occasional homicidal tendencies.

After a few weeks, when Hanna got a job which looked solid and, after Rudi agreed to let us pay for it, we rented the patio apartment. It had a separate entrance and also a stairway leading to the main house. One night, we heard some banging of doors upstairs and when I went

to check it out I found Helen, slightly inebriated, alternately slamming the doors of the seven refrigerators. Again, she was ready to kill Rudi. I tried to find out the reason, but she only told me that she could not even divorce that "son-of-a-bitch." Compassionate as I am, I asked her why she could not divorce that son-of-a-bitch and she explained to me that they would end up like the couple who went to court and the wife asked the judge to grant her a divorce, the judge asked her why she wanted it and she replied "because my husband keeps rabbits in the bedroom and they stink something awful." So the judge asked "well, why don't you open the windows?" to which the wife reacted with horror "What? And let my pigeons fly out!"

I think that this is the best and shortest way I can describe that unique and lovable couple.

65. Our Family Matinee Idol

I had not seen cousin Francis since 1932, when he stopped in Trebic to say good-bye to his mother and the rest of the family before leaving for Hollywood. Hanna met him about a week after we arrived in Hollywood when Rudi and Helen took us to visit him and his wife Marion for a family reunion at their ranch.

I shall be brief in describing him because, over the years, he has had so much world-wide publicity that I could only repeat what has already been written about him in detail, in newspapers, magazines and books.

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

He started his acting career in Czechoslovakia, became a leading man, on stages and in films in Germany and England and, while starring on Broadway, he was described as the "Matinee Idol of two continents" and, in print, as "the most handsome man in the world." His name, as a Star, is engraved forever on the Hollywood "Walk of Fame."

He was the Founder and President of "The American Academy for Performing Arts" in North Hollywood. He and his delightful wife, Marion, a Canadian by birth, bought a Spanish ranch-style house in the Northwestern part of Los Angeles where he also was Honorary Mayor for many years. The last few years, they spent most of the time in Palm Springs where he died, in the year 2000, at the age of one hundred. Needless to say, he was the pride and joy of the whole clan.

66. The Land of Opportunity

We arrived in Los Angeles, with a briefcase full of letters of recommendations which really were of no help.

Hanna immediately found a job as secretary. It did not pay much, but it was the first salary earned by either of us in the States. We were happy that we could manage on our own.

My first job in America was for one Sunday and consisted of helping a used car dealer to take inventory of nuts and bolts. My total earnings were \$3.00.

LEO ORSTEN

My second job was selling Directories of Exporters and Importers on a commission basis only. It lasted three days and I earned \$2.50. My only customer was the man who recommended me for the job.

My third job lasted almost two weeks. It was a night job from 7:00 p.m. to midnight at an insurance company. I had to feed flyers and advertising materials into a huge machine, that folded and inserted the material into envelopes, then sealed them ready for mailing. I earned about \$10.00 for the two weeks.

After that, I was hired as Head of the Shipping Department, actually a Stock Room Boy, in a Ladies' ready-to-Wear Store. My "office" was a windowless basement and I used it for receiving, unpacking, packing, shipping, as well as for steaming of merchandise. In short, I was the Department and the only employee. I worked six days a week, between fifty-five to sixty hours, for \$45.00.

Our store became the only store in a 74-store chain to have the distinction of employing a Stock Room Boy, with a Doctor Degree in Jurisprudence, who was also fluent in four languages.

When I started that job I did not know the difference between corduroy and gabardine but, in spite of that, in less than a year I was relieving managers in various stores of the chain during their vacations or absences and, in about two years, I became a full-fledged Manager of one of the stores. I owe much of the store's success to most of my twenty dedicated employees. To this day I still receive Christmas cards from some.

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN

As Manager, my responsibilities and my income increased considerably but, unfortunately, so did my hours. My relationship with our customers was good although, occasionally, they expected too much in special favors for which they offered, in vain, to compensate me in the "Lay Away" Room. I had to handle my rejection delicately and with a smile, explaining that the "lay-away room" referred to prepaid merchandise only.

On Fridays the store stayed open until 9:00 p.m. and I usually had dinner in a nearby steak house.

One day I read in the local newspaper that one of our customers was sentenced to jail for trying to entrap an elderly gentleman into taking her well-endowed fifteen year old daughter across the state line with the obvious intent to blackmail him. Unfortunately for her, the man somehow got wind of her plan and it backfired. He hid a private detective in the trunk of his car who recorded the entire transaction.

The judge permitted the mother to keep her job but every weekend she had to report to jail. My curiosity got the best of me and, that particular Friday when she came to the store to make her weekly \$2.00 payment, I suggested that maybe she should buy a striped dress. She took my remark in good humor and I asked her to join me for dinner.

When I complimented her at dinner, on the fact that in spite of her week-ends in jail, she remained in good spirits and did not feel sorry for herself, she assured me that during her incarceration she had a great time with the young Sheriffs.

LEO ORSTEN

After she told me the whole story, which I thought was hilarious, she asked me if I could adjust her weekly payments during her time in jail because she did not want to jeopardize her credit rating. I was happy to accommodate her because I was truly touched by her loyalty to the store, and her concern about her credit. She never missed a payment.

Another unusual event I remember during my time in the ladies' ready-to-wear business was one Sunday, about 6:00 a.m., I was awakened by a call from the Glendale Police who wanted me to come immediately to the store which was about six miles from where I lived and when I arrived there I found the front display window shattered, an undressed mannequin broken on the floor and the interior of the display window in a mess. It turned out that some pervert had broken in and raped the plastic mannequin. Luckily, I was able to get hold of my window dresser, two helpers and a glazier and by Monday morning there were no visible traces of the unusual orgy.

I remained Manager of that store for three years, even though I disliked this type of work but the time had come for a change. With a partner we started a business of importing and repairing dental instruments and marketing our own invention. Neither of us knew much about that type of business and the results were accordingly disastrous. Consequently, I tried to find a different field of endeavor.

67. *Where Do I Fit In?*

One day, my friend and former army buddy Henry, suggested that given my legal background and business experience, I should explore the field of Commercial Real Estate. I followed his advice and, within a short time, I had obtained my initial license. A few months later, given credit for my Law Degree, I was issued my Broker's License.

The owner of the firm who sponsored me and whom I found in the Los Angeles Times, turned out to be an intelligent, well-to-do "play boy," slightly preoccupied with matters of the heart. That did not leave him much time for real estate and I soon found myself negotiating on my own sometimes quite complex tax-deferred real estate exchanges. How I did it at that time, I do not know but I used a lot of common sense, listened a lot and said very little.

When, in 1959, the owner of the firm retired from the business, I decided to open my own Brokerage Office in Hollywood.

Hanna's help and moral support were invaluable, while I muddled my way through the fine points of commercial real estate, she took over administrative matters, giving me a chance to concentrate on the business at hand.

First, I tried to specialize in Tax-Deferred Exchanges which, at that time, only a few old-time brokers dared to tackle. From my two-line newspaper ad which read "we trade properties," I generated a lot of calls from owners with potentially valuable but, at that time, unsaleable properties.

LEO ORSTEN

As a result of these ads, I met a bright young man, who was a CPA, studied law and had just passed the State Bar. We established a good working and personal relationship and I later helped him carry out some unusual transactions.

Soon he told me that he did not intend to practice law. A rather unexpected statement from somebody who had just passed his Bar Exam. In answer to my question what he planned to become, he replied, "a millionaire." I was impressed by his answer but even more so when he actually became one.

Now my business had grown and I was lucky to acquire a very competent assistant whom I decided to call "Dizzy" because, the first day on the job, she created a disaster by breaking my \$1.25 postage stamp holder I have never let her forget it. Among her office duties, she did not object to making me sandwiches. While typing this "Masterpiece," she even laughed at the right places. I could say some more nice things about her, but why should I?

One of my luckiest encounters took place when a client of mine, who owned a big dairy, asked me if I would like to have lunch with him because he wanted me to meet a bright young man. That was how I met Joe. He was a graduate of Stanford, in Finance and Economics and, during lunch, I was much impressed by what he had to say. There must have been some feeling of mutuality and trust because, from that day on, I felt that I had not only found a client but also a wonderful friend, which is still ongoing.

After he retired in 1989, I continued working with the company until I retired in 1998. To

say that it was a pleasure to have worked with him would be an understatement.

The Joe I am referring to is none other than the founder of Trader Joe's markets.

Satisfaction is not only what is accomplished but, more often, with whom.

68. Why Did I Write This Book? You be the Judge

The events described really happened although, except for historical facts, they might be slightly embellished. I believe that they should be preserved, not for my family and friends only, but for posterity. All characters described in this book are real, but some of the names have been altered.

In my lifetime I met many wonderful people of different nationalities, ages, and professions with whom I formed not only good business relationships, but also lasting personal friendships.

If, inadvertently, I failed to mention somebody, or omitted an event, please forgive me but gosh, I guess I am not that good!

A Few Select Photos
From the Life of Leo Orsten



The Ornsten residence and business - Trebič, 1900



A Contemporary Setting of Trebič



Trebic - Charles Square with Watch Tower in background



One of the Ornstein trucks - Charles Square, Trebic

LEO ORSTEN



Erna and Alfred planning Leo's birth -
Trebic, 1912



Leo planning this
book - age 4



Leo with his parents and
cousin Fred - Trebic, 1939

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN



We're in the army now -
Leo and cousin Fred



On the artillery range



Exiled President Benes
reviewing the Czech
troops



Leo in the army -
England, 1942

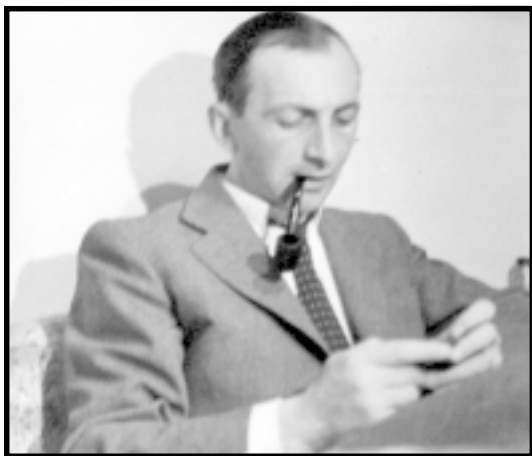
LEO ORSTEN



Prague welcoming its returning heroes - May 1945



The Boar Hunt - Cleve, 1947



Leo planning the next step -
Germany 1948

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN



Leo and Hanna just married - Paris, December 1948



The Czech all-stars who defected - Germany, 1949



Leo and Hanna on the way to the U.S. from Bremerhafen - November 1949

LEO ORSTEN



Leo and Hanna with Marion and Francis at their ranch - Canoga Park, CA, 1949



Rudi clowning with Francis and Leo - Canoga Park, CA, 1950

GOSH I'M GOOD: MEMOIRS OF A MODEST MAN



Leo and Beda - Hollywood, 1954



Trebitz trio: Leo, Rudi in his Sunday best, and Max - September 1957

LEO ORSTEN



Leo and Fred back in their hometown - Trebic, 1995



Leo and Hanna, 50th Wedding Anniversary - Las Vegas, December 1998

