

The House

The house my parents had bought was huge, so large in fact that by the end of the war four other families had moved in with us. It was of concrete, bricks, and steel. Cost must not have been a factor when it was built as the villa for whoever had been in charge of the small factory that converted the abundant local peat into insulation panels. Hard times had brought the house on the market and it was picked up by my parents trying to retire in 1938, only to see the whole world turned belly up, with my father finally retiring in 1983 in Texas, not 1938 in Germany. Same numerals, only the order had been changed, as had everything else. I of course did not think about this at the time. It was only in looking back forty or more years later that I fully appreciated just how lucky we had been to have my parents choose this probably most isolated part of all of Germany.

Triangel was near a moor that was being drained to harvest peat for fuel and I remember the operation well. About six feet of peat would be removed from the top of the land, fed into a compactor which somehow squeezed it into a bead about the size of bread loaves to be stacked and left to dry. There would be drainage ditches to remove the water to make the whole operation possible. One of those drainage ditches, as straight as an arrow, flowed past our house on the other side of the cobblestone street.

There was a cellar under the entire house, about half below ground level, and with about four feet above. If one were standing next to one of the cellar windows, it would be at about the right height, but looking out one would be only about a foot or so above the surface. Entrance to the cellar from the outside was by steps going down, although there was also two swinging iron gates for loading coal, when one could get it, otherwise peat, to be fed to the large central furnace in the center of the basement, with the heat distributed throughout the large house by pipes carrying hot water. There was no pump and the water circulated on its own. There must have been a well somewhere in the basement, but I never noticed it. There certainly was no water piped around in the village. Access to the cellar from the inside of the house was by a single concrete stairway.

The first floor had a very large kitchen with two pantries, and three more very large living rooms, one with a very large veranda. The main entrance to the house was by huge oak doors going to a landing, with a wide stairway to the first floor. At the back of the house were two brick stairways going down from each side of the huge veranda. Also in the back of the house was a large dog run with a concrete floor and a first class doghouse. Separate from the house was a large garage, with no car in it.

Access to the second floor was by a stairway with large bowed glass windows, with a large landing with a railing going all the way across from one side of the house to the other. The layout was about the same as the first floor, except the rooms had been intended to be bedrooms. There was also a huge bathroom with tub and on the other side of the house another small bathroom, and another smaller room with a balcony to be used by a maid.

Leading up from the second floor to the attic was a narrow stairway that went to the large attic and two more small rooms and a small kitchen. The attic itself was spacious, had windows to the outside, and a ladder that went to the top of the rooms that were in the attic. The chimney went out through the steep tiled roof.

The whole house was of course quite solidly built. I know the exterior walls must have been at least two feet thick. That could be seen from the openings for the double windows. They were true double windows that would be opened by cranks, with about a foot space between. I also know that the floor of the attic, that is the ceiling of the second floor, was made of concrete, so the whole structure must have been quite solidly built.

The kitchen had a wood burning stove for cooking and baking. The living room had two huge tables and a giant piano that was made for playing music using punched paper tapes, except that it did not work, but I was always fascinated by the punched tapes. We never had any problems with any of the plumbing, the well, the heating, or leaks in the roof or water in the basement. Also I do not remember ever being cold in the house, going hungry or being scared, or the electricity ever going out even as the war collapsed the world around us. I do, however, remember the arrival of the refugees one after another towards the end of the war.