

Evelin's Story Told in a Letter to All After a Journey to Silesia in 2007

© Evelin Lindner, 26th September 2007

Dearest All!

My parents and I are just back from Silesia, my parents' lost homeland. See the pictures uploaded on www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelinpictures.php.

You can read about the historical background of the expulsion of which my parents were part, and which has traumatised them so deeply until today, among others at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silesia and en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Expulsion_of_Germans_after_World_War_II.

My mother is from Breslau, Silesia's capital, and it was the first time for me to see it. My father is from Bertelsdorf, a little village near Lauban, also in Silesia (of course, since WWII all these names no longer exist). It was a heart-wrenching journey, particularly for my parents.

On the way back to my parents present house in the western part of Germany, we drove through Thuringia. I am writing this letter to you from there, from the Steiger Hotel, which was near the *Sperrzone* ("restricted zone") until the iron curtain fell. Nobody from outside the village was allowed to enter it. The entire Thuringian forest was isolated, due to its location directly behind the border. My parents visit friends here, the Wagner & Apel porcelain manufacture. It is fascinating to learn how they used traditional technology for making porcelain until the wall came down. Now that they can use more advanced technology, they have new problems: they have grave difficulties competing with mass production from China, even though that is of lower quality. With amazing dedication they try to keep alive the art of making porcelain.

As I wrote to you above, this was a heart-wrenching journey. Somebody asked me whether it was a journey of reconciliation, however, somehow it was not. For my parents, there is but pain when they see that their beloved homeland is no longer theirs. Seeing their homeland be inhabited by strangers, seeing Polish signs and hearing Polish being spoken everywhere, causes unspeakable pain. My grandmother refused to re-visit her homeland because she did not wish to expose herself to that kind of pain.

I am not sure how I would feel, if I were them. How would you feel? Imagine, you would be expelled from your house, and everything would be taken over by people from another part of the world, with another language? And, after years in exile, you stood in front of your house again, and you took a picture, feeling guilty, because it is no longer yours?

Particularly for my father, who loved the farm and the land that he was to inherit from his father, this expulsion is something that can only be succumbed to, in pain, I think. I imagine that the word reconciliation must sound somewhat absurd or irrelevant to him. The pain and sadness is simply too overwhelming. He walks his land every night, in his thoughts, even today, more than 60 years later. He has no problem with those who own his land now. The only people he would accuse, is Adolf Hitler and his helpers, for

victimising half the globe, including him, and including those who now own his land. My parents say "Hitler destroyed our lives." With whom should he reconcile?

In my case, second generation, I am unsure. Also for me the word reconciliation does somehow not resonate. I am not angry, I do not feel slighted by anyone in particular. With whom should I reconcile? With history? With Hitler? ...

To me, the entire concept of property, of entitlement, even of "justice," is thrown into doubt. This is why I define myself as a global citizen. I feel that it would be more constructive for our human family to regard our home planet as our shared home, rather than fight over entitlements over particular pieces of it.

This is also the point where I resonate with my parents' feelings of guilt, or at least unease, when taking pictures. There are people in their situation who travel east and take pictures to document their former property because they would like to get it back. My parents (and I), when we take pictures, in contrast, would like to wave a flag indicating to the people who live there now (and watch us fearfully/angrily taking pictures from behind the curtains) that we are no threat. We feel empathy with those people who inhabit "our" property now; we do not intend to throw them out again, because we recognise that they are pawns of history, as much as our families (they were thrown out 60 years ago when Poland was "moved" westwards, from their homes further eastwards, and they were resettled in "our" homes against their wills). We recognise that throwing them out again now would merely keep the cycle of trauma going. However, again, this empathy somehow belongs to another category than reconciliation. There is no need to reconcile with co-victims.

I see my parents' profound suffering that is not helped, psychologically, by any compensation or comparably good life in the West (myself, I am glad to be born in the West though, just by accident, and I have no interest to reclaim any former property!), and then I see people suffering on "the other side," and I empathize with their suffering as much.

Like in the Middle East, I think we need to stop *aufrechnen* ("keeping score"), but accept that suffering is suffering, and not ask people to suffer less, not remove from them the "right" to suffer, just because others suffer also.

I stand in front of all this suffering and I think we need to get together, acknowledge everybody's wounds, and turn the energy from this suffering into care and love for our shared future.

I think two texts I wrote would be interesting for you, because they describe how my path of adopting our entire planet as shared home has had a healing effect on me (both can be downloaded from www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin02):

1. "How Multicultural Discourses Can Help Construct New Meaning," paper prepared for the Second International Conference on Multicultural Discourses, 13-15th April 2007, Institute of Discourse and Cultural Studies, & Department of Applied Psychology, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China.
2. "How Becoming a Global Citizen Can Have a Healing Effect," paper presented at the 2006 ICU-COE Northeast Asian Dialogue: Sharing Narratives, Weaving/Mapping History, February 3-5, 2006, International Christian University (ICU), Tokyo, Japan.

Sending you all my love and thanking you so much for listening!

Evelin