

# “The Lord has Helped Us Hitherto<sup>1</sup>”

A history of the Loescher family through World War II and the years thereafter

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Church History Thesis

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<sup>1</sup> The Loescher family would sing the German version of this hymn on their birthdays (33 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*).

Some people focus on the good times. Some say it will get better. Other people tighten their belts and thank God for their buckeye bread<sup>2</sup>.

This is the history of Johannes and Helene Loescher<sup>3</sup>, and their children. Known to friends and family as Hans and Lene, they were married in 1923 by the arrangement of their parents. It seems fitting that the story begins in the troubled years of post-war Germany. God would lead them through many such years; indeed, through three governments and two countries. Most would say they were poor. They would tell you they were richly blessed.

Almost immediately after they were married the young couple came to America, where they found a home in Buffalo, Minnesota. The Lord blessed them there with six children, but after a while Lene grew homesick. A doctor advised them to move back to Germany.

In 1934 Hans sent his family off while he stayed behind to work and pay their way. His children were Gertrude, Esther, Gottfried (Fred), Theodore (Ted), Johannes (John), and Waldemar (Wally). Eberhardt was on the way.

### In Germany Again

Lene brought the children back to Neuwiese (Neuwirnschnitz), where her family still lived. Those were difficult times for her. She was raising six children alone, and all the while people were telling her that her husband would probably not come back. Finally it was too much for her to handle alone. She had to send some of the children to live with relatives. Ted and Fred lived with their Aunt and Uncle, Kurt and Marie Ebisch. They were kind people, and took good care of them. When Ted was sick with tonsillitis on his birthday, his aunt brought him an orange to make him feel better.

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<sup>2</sup> The Communist government in East Germany rationed each person 1 loaf of bread per month. It was very thick and bitter, because they added ground buckeyes (also known as horse chestnuts) and acorns to make the flour go farther.

<sup>3</sup> nee Döst

“I was tickled. Just the smell of it was great. It was the best present ever!<sup>4</sup>” –Ted

Within a year Hans’ shoe shop burned down, and he rejoined his family in Germany. He found a place for them to live in Tierfeld, where he worked in the clay mines making red bricks. Before long Ted wanted to go to them, so his Uncle Kurt Ebisch packed him onto the back of a motorbike and took him to his family. A short time later Fred came walking down the road with a backpack. The family looked upset because there were more mouths to feed now. These were very strict times, but they were good times. The family was together and there was food, although there was little money to buy it.

Mom would send me to the butcher to buy a small piece of beef (2”) which she would cook to make gravy for the kids, and dad would get the meat. I was so hungry, and wanted to eat that little piece of meat so badly! But I didn’t dare. –Ted

Hans joined Hitler’s *Kinderreichenbund*, an organization that offered aid to large families. Hitler had started the organization because he wanted Germany to grow. The *Kinderreichenbund* encouraged large families by paying out 10 marks per child per year, and offering cheap housing. In fact, there was a housing project in Hartenstein, where Hans grew up. Hans moved the family there, where he was given a lot on a hill. Lest we grow jealous over the free land, we should note that they had to excavate it themselves. It was hard work; done by hand in solid slate hill.

The kids worked right along with their father. They dug out the hill and used the slate chips to build a wall around the property. They made a garden by picking out the slate chips and adding manure to the rocky soil. It was hard work, but those were some of their best days. There was food, and Hans actually got a

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<sup>4</sup> All quotations have been compiled from interviews and conversations with these men over a period of two weeks. The quotations were then submitted to the men for review and approval.

job as the service manager for a textile manufacturer. There was a school that the kids went to, and a Lutheran free church<sup>5</sup>.

There was a window over the walkway going into our house. If we saw someone coming, we would try to pour a pitcher of water onto their head. We were mischievous kids. Sometimes we would take a wallet, tie a string to it, and throw it to street in front of our home. When someone comes along and tries to pick up the wallet, you pull the string. One time John lost his wallet to an elderly gentleman. –Ted

### The War

When Hitler first came to power, the Germans thought he was a great guy. Because of him there was food again, and jobs. He built the Autobahn. He was against the Jews, the Jesuits, and the Communists. They didn't know the evil things he would do. They praised him—until their sons started dying in the war. By and by, there were hints of the atrocities too, though nobody guessed it was as bad as it was.

The soldiers would come door to door and ask, “Are you Arian or mixed?” If you answered mixed, they would take you to prison. They came to our house. John answered the door, and he didn't know what to say. He called out, “Mom, which one are we?” –Ted

The S.S came to town on a recruiting trip. They gathered up a bunch of young men and took them aside one by one. They said all kinds of nasty things to try to get the person mad. If he said anything back, he would be in the S.S. Some of them had heard about this and knew what was going on. They kept their mouths shut. Others did not, and they were volunteered for service.

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<sup>5</sup> Not “a church free of Lutherans,” but a Lutheran church free from state control, as opposed to the German State Church.

The Nazi's weren't the only ones responsible for horrors during the war. The Allies had their part in this terrible war also. Many innocent civilians died in Allied bombing raids.

In 1945, from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of February, the Allies firebombed Dresden. They planned it so that the city would be totally destroyed. I had friends there. There was no reason for the bombing. The German army was tattered. The Russians were only miles away. At the time, there wasn't even anybody in Dresden. All the men were gone; it was mostly women and children. When the air raid sirens went off, my friend and his mother took off for the bomb shelter. When they got there it was almost full, so they kept running to the evacuation site. But they didn't stop there either, they kept on running. There were explosions everywhere behind them. That evening 3400 allied bombers turned the city to rubble. Then 2700 more bombers dropped white phosphorous bombs everywhere, setting off a firestorm over the whole city. The fire sucked all the oxygen out of the air, and people either burned or suffocated. 220,000 died that night. When my friend went back, there were mountains of bodies piled at the evacuation site. Everyone in the bomb shelter suffocated. In Hartenstein, 60 miles away, we could see a bright orange horizon from the fire. There were other cities bombed like this, for which such firestorms had been planned—Berlin, Chemnitz, Zwickau, Hamburg, Darmstadt.<sup>6</sup>

—Eberhardt

Eventually the war came to Hartenstein. The American tanks shelled the castle and the town by day, and the B-52s dropped bombs at night. Sometimes they flew over during the day, too. There were so many that they blocked out the sun.

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<sup>6</sup> The details of these bombings can be confirmed in *Der Untergang Dresdens*, written by David Irving, published first in 1963 and available in several English translations.

I remember seeing the first jet fighters. They were circling the bombers, and they shot down a few. They couldn't turn sharply enough to do much more damage than that, though.

One day an Allied pilot was shot down and parachuted into a nearby field. We came to see the plane, but to our surprise there were two pilots. A German had made an emergency landing in the same field, and we saw them smoking and chatting together in the cockpit of the German plane. It was the neatest thing I saw in the war. I don't know how they knew what the other was saying, but they were enjoying themselves.

The parachuting gave us an idea. One day we decided we wanted to make a parachute. We gave Eberhardt a bedsheet and told him to jump out of the hayloft. He wouldn't fit through that little window, so we decided to try the bedroom window instead. 'Are you sure the sheet will open up?' he asked. 'It'll open,' we said, and shoved him out the window. It didn't, but he landed in the garden without getting hurt too badly. —Ted

Between the bombing raids and the hungry soldiers, there wasn't much left to eat. Like everyone else, the Loeschers were starving. They did have a garden, though, and they grew raspberries, strawberries, gooseberries, cherries, and vegetables. The kids would also walk around and take fruit from people's trees. Usually they picked it off the ground, but if no one was watching they might shake the tree a little.

They would pick the *Sauergrass*<sup>7</sup> that grew down by the creek, and there was a certain sort of wild asparagus called *Otterzungen*<sup>8</sup> that grew in the field in spring. Mom would boil it like spinach. She would put a little teaspoon of something like butter in the pot. Whatever it was, "fatty looking eyes" of it would float to the top.

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<sup>7</sup> Sauer grass

<sup>8</sup> "Otter tongues"

“We would try to fish the little globs out and put them in our own bowl.” –Ted

They kept rabbits for food, but they ran out of those too:

We were down to our last rabbit, and mom said we should save it until we were *really* hungry and had nothing else to eat—unless it got sick. If anyone saw it looking sick, we were supposed to tell her right away, and she would kill it and cook it. We didn’t want to lose that last rabbit! Well anyhow, we were really hungry, so after two days John knocked the rabbit on the head with the back end of an axe and said, “Mom, it’s sick!” –Ted

It finally got so bad that they had to eat their Guinea pig:

“We cooked the Guinea pig. It stunk up the house so bad that I still remember, but we ate it anyway.” –Ted

They did have some textiles from Hans’ workplace after the war was over and everything had been closed down. They would sometimes take some of those products into the country to trade, because some of the farmers out there had a little extra food.

One time John and I were bringing the cart back from one of these trips—we had some rutabagas or something. I was pulling and John was pushing. As we went up the hill to our house the tank rounds started coming in all around us! I turned that wagon around right away, but John was already half-way down the hill. We probably ran three miles before we stopped. We finally had the guts to go home that night. They never hit the house, but our backyard was full of craters. We had fun picking up the shrapnel—it was everywhere. –Ted

When the fighting was at its worst Hans would gather his family and sing hymns.

“You’re closer to God in those situations than you ever are. Dad would say, ‘Come on, I’ll play the organ<sup>9</sup> and you sing.’ And we sang and sang.”

–Ted

During one air raid, a barn got hit and the horse inside was killed.

“We were all like vultures in there, carving off the meat. There were so many people—it was all gone within half an hour.” –Eberhardt

Everyone was starving in those days. There were burials nearly every week, as the elderly especially could not keep their strength. The church band at the head of the funeral procession would play *Christus is mein Leben, Sterben ist Gewinn*<sup>10</sup>. We might wonder how they could live at all in such times. They say they did what they had to, and God brought them through.

In 1945 the S.S. moved into the castle at Hartenstein. The Allies planned a big air raid for Hitler’s birthday. Machine gun casings fell from the P-51s through the window onto the floor. Afterward they saw the bullet holes all over the outside of their house. B-52’s dropped white phosphorous bombs on the castle. Dad was in the fire department, but couldn’t go to the castle because Lena was giving birth to Jürgen. He sent Ted in his place, 16 years old at the time.

He came to me and said, ‘You gotta go in my place.’ I ran for my life. You could hear ‘em everywhere—*patapatapatapat*. We pumped water from the creek to put out the fire, but the P-51’s came back and started blasting everything. We dropped that hose and let the castle burn. You should have seen it—that hose shot up like a snake! We ran for the creek and never looked back. –Ted

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<sup>9</sup> It was actually an instrument known as a harmonium.

<sup>10</sup> For Me to Live is Jesus, CW 606



In 1944 all the young men were required to join Hitler's *Volkssturm*, or National Guard. Everyone had already learned to march and shoot, but in the *Volkssturm* they would mostly put up road blocks and other things to slow the enemy. They were also supposed to shoot any enemy soldiers they saw, but nobody did that. They weren't stupid. One time, the *Feldwebel* (Sergeant) ordered them to set up a barbed wire fence to try to slow the Allied advance. By noon the tanks were firing on them. When the *Feldwebel* gave them leave to go home for lunch, nobody even thought about returning.

"I almost think he knew we weren't going to come back."—Ted

When the American's took the city, the Germans were afraid.

We were told that we would die when the Americans or Russians came in. We thought the end had come. But after a couple days we found otherwise. They threw crackers and cigarette butts from their tanks. We stood by the tanks and dove for those butts when they threw them down. We brought them home to dad, and he would open them up and strip out the tobacco until he had enough to roll a new one. —Eberhardt

### The Russian Zone

As bad as it was then, it was worse when the Soviets took over. The Americans were the ones who conquered much of the eastern section of Germany, but they gave a large portion to the Soviets at the Yalta Conference. The Germans in the Russian Zone felt they had been sold out.

The Russian soldiers murdered, raped, and plundered. The government took all their goods to 'redistribute' them, but nothing came back. They took the machines from factories, took all kinds of supplies, took the farmers crops—they looted the country. They even cut down much of the forest and hauled the wood away. Their country was empty after the Russians came.

The Government gave out ration cards, but most of the time there was nothing left in the stores. You had to wait until the government decided to give you something.

You had to look in the newspaper. It might say something like, "Today all the people in Hartenstein can get a half a pound of marmalade," or honey, or something. One time it was molasses. We had to stand in line for hours before the store opened, which was always the case. Then we each had a spoon in our pockets so we could eat from it right away when we finally got it. It tasted terrible and it made us really sick.

There was never enough for everybody to get their ration. You had to stand in line all day, and you would probably get pushed out of the way if you were a child. Most of the time you never even got there. If you did, it was all gone. —Eberhardt

You could get about ten or twelve sacks of potatoes for a whole year, which wasn't a lot for thirteen people to live off of. There just wasn't enough food to go around. People would drink and smoke to satisfy their hunger. There were Cigarette rations—two packs per month for everyone over 18. There were liquor rations too; you could get some really strong Russian vodka.

Once a month each person could go to get a loaf of bread. It was a solid loaf, baked with ground buckeyes<sup>11</sup> and acorns mixed with flour. Under normal circumstances no one would eat this, but it was different for them.

Mom kept the bread for the little ones. She just gave the loaf to the older ones, though, and told us to figure out how to make it last a month. We all had to find hiding places for our bread so the others wouldn't steal some of it. I would get out my loaf and slice off a piece, and all the little ones would be gathered around looking at me. I would give them a little piece

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<sup>11</sup> Also known as horse chestnuts. They are very bitter.

too. I don't remember it, but they say that I stole their bread after mine was gone. I don't know.

But dad—he would squirrel some away in his desk. It didn't take long for the kids to figure it out. We all thought that he wouldn't notice if we just cut off a little slice. But when each of us cut off a little slice, there was never much of anything left for him when he came to get a piece of his bread! —Ted

Mom had to find hiding places for all the food, but the kids always found it. There was a cabinet in the master bedroom with a lock and key where she kept most of it. John got into it though—he worked at a machine shop, so he made his own key and let himself in anytime he wanted to. Once the schools opened up again, the school kids got an extra loaf of bread every month. That meant so much to us! We usually had it eaten before we got home. —Eberhardt

Everyone who was able went to work. The Loescher boys worked side by side with their father making house shoes in their Grandpa's shoe workshop. They worked all day and all week. After the Russians came they didn't have much material, but people would bring whatever they could find. Some would bring old coats to be cut up and turned into shoes. The shop didn't last long, though. Eventually the machines broke down, and they couldn't fix them—nobody had any spare parts.

The shelves in the stores were mostly empty. People would try to trade if they needed something, even though it was illegal. Since the food rations were so slim, the Loeschers would often trade shoes from the shop or some fabric leftover from Hans' textile workshop. He had managed to hide some away before the Russians took everything.

Sometimes the kids would take their fabric and shoes to Thüringen. They had to be careful, just the same as during the war. The only difference was that

they were evading the Russian police now, not dodging tanks. You could be thrown in jail for trading.

We had only one bicycle for those trips into the country, but we borrowed Uncle's bike too. It was patched so terribly that it seemed like it was always flat. Finally it got so bad that there was no fixing it, and we had to push it. That time the Russians caught us. They took away the food we traded for, and sent us home. They told us we would be convicted when we got home, and punished. So we pushed our bikes home. We were empty-handed, and hadn't eaten anything in days. Along the way we found a little potato in a field, and we split it. We each chewed on our half of the potato, just to have something in our mouths. I remember that potato. –Ted

Sometimes we could trade for a little rye. If there was any of that around, we would go in the evenings to pick the mouse turds and the little rocks out of our little pile of rye, and then grind it. In the morning we would boil it and eat it for breakfast, like oatmeal.

Whenever a farmer was digging out his potatoes, everyone would be standing around the field waiting for him to finish. After he was done, we all rushed out into the field to look for any that he missed. You'd come out with two or three." –Eberhardt

Through all of this the family found strength and rest in God. Hans led his family in daily devotions and prayers every evening. As already noted, the family loved to sing hymns. They were all in the church choir, and many of them played in the church band besides. On Sunday mornings, John, Fred, and Ted would go up on the hillside to play hymns. John played the trombone, Fred played the tuba, and Ted played the trumpet. The music would echo through the valley. Then Hans would take his family to church, where he played the organ.

He kept his eye on us, even though he was the church organist. During the sermon he would take a peek down at us from the organ bench in the balcony to see if we were misbehaving. One time he threw a piece of chalk at us. –Ted

When they got home, they would have to tell what they remembered from the sermon:

Most of us could not remember anything to say. He asked Wally—Wally was probably six years old at the time, and he always had something. One time Dad said, “Anybody who knows what the sermon was about, raise your hand.” Wally was the only one who raised his hand. Dad said, “You oughta be ashamed! All you grown ups, and here is this little boy who is the only one that knows anything about the sermon! Alright Wally, what do you remember?” “*Galilee!*” he said. We had a hard time not to explode. I think dad had a hard time to keep from laughing too. –Ted

Early in 1947, Fred, John, Wally, Esther, and Ted found out that they were still U.S. citizens, which gave them a chance to go back to America. It was everybody’s dream to get out of East Germany before starving to death. Those who had been born in the U.S. and were under 18 still had U.S. citizenship, as long as they hadn’t served in the German army.

The five of them went to the American Consulate in Berlin to arrange for going back to America. They needed their birth certificates to be sent over in order to confirm their citizenship. They also needed someone to sponsor them, ensuring that they would be employed upon arrival in America. The government was paying for the boat ticket, and they wanted the assurance that they would be repaid.

Just before they left the Consulate to go home, somebody brought them each a Red Cross package.

When we got to Berlin there was a lot of black marketeering. Someone took us into a basement where we could buy stuff. I could either buy a pound of butter for 200 Marks (at least \$160 today), or a pack of cigarettes for 180 Marks. Since I didn't have 200 Marks, I decided to buy the cigarettes. I bought a pack of Camels, and that was great! Then we went to the American Consulate, and they gave us each a ten pound package from the Red Cross. We opened them, and inside were cookies and chocolate and cornflakes. Anybody with a bowl of cornflakes in those days was in paradise—we were beside ourselves! And there was a box of Lucky Strikes! If only I would have known! We hadn't seen this much in years.

Back at work, while we were smokin' the other guys would gather around and watch. They were waiting until I would finish and throw the butt, and then they would jump on it. Every once in a while I was good to 'em and let 'em have a suck. —Ted

There was a little ditty back then:

Kippen stechen, dass ist sehr modern  
 Kippen stechen, tun auch feine Herrn  
 Kommt ein Mann die Strasse entlang  
 Hat am Stock eine Nadel d'ran  
 'Bumps'—hat er eine Kippe d'ran<sup>12</sup>.

—Wally

There were cans of powdered milk in those care packages. Wally and I would hide them away and eat them. We would add a little water and make a paste—thick like honey or syrup—and we gobbled it down. We got really sick, but it was food. —Eberhardt

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<sup>12</sup> Pokin' [cigarette] butts, that is very modern.  
 Pokin' butts, also done by fine gentlemen  
 A man coming down the street  
 Has on the bottom of his cane a nail  
 'Bumps'—just like that he has a butt on it!

There would be more of those trips before their citizenship was finally confirmed, and each time they could get another Red Cross package.

We had to be careful when we went to Berlin. We would take the train from the Hartenstein Train Station. Sometimes the Russians would stop the train and search it. If they caught us, we would be sent home and punished. Inspectors would come through to find people who weren't supposed to be there or people who were transporting goods to sell. They put those people in jail. Once we got to Berlin, we had to be careful not to be seen crossing into the American sector. In those days there was no wall yet, but there were watchtowers and guards. –Ted

They had to go back to the Consulate a second time to answer some more questions. This time, it also happened that there was a Lutheran choral fest in the British zone. As long as they were going that way, they wanted to take their choir too. But again, they would have to be sneaky. Their cousin Reinhold took them to the border in his truck and left. The choir crawled on through the fog across the no-mans land to avoid being seen by the Russian soldiers in the watchtowers. Crawling out of the fog, they came up to the place where the choirs were gathering.

That night we traded for eggs. We would poke holes in the eggshells and suck the insides out. The following day we were given some food. There were lots of choirs there, but our little choir from Hartenstein got a lot of good comments. We sang Psalm 42. –Ted

Considering the times and circumstances, there may not be a more appropriate psalm<sup>13</sup>.

From the choir gathering they went on to the Consulate a second time and were given another Red Cross package. They were jubilant with all that good food in their hands to take back to the family.

Some time after this they made a trip to Thüringen to trade for food, but this time they were caught right away. The Russians stopped the train and filed everybody out. As punishment they made Ted chop wood for the Bürgermeister<sup>14</sup> all day for three Sundays. He did it once, and then the papers came in for him to leave for America. It was August of 1947.

Ted, Fred, and Esther left together. Three months later Wally and John would leave also. All of them were teenagers at the time, Wally being the youngest at 14.

Mom cried her eyes out. Since she had nothing to give us to remember her by, she gave us all a handkerchief with her initials on it. A few years after we left she suffered a stroke. The health care in those days was so bad, nobody even came in to help her turn over. She died from her bed sores.

Mom was a hard worker; content with anything. She lived a hard life. It was hard on her to have so little to give her children when there was nothing to eat. –Ted

I feel bad for mom. She had 11 kids, and had to try to feed them with nothing. She loved us all. –Eberhardt

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<sup>13</sup> “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God... Why are you downcast, O my soul? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.” Though having every reason to be downcast, they found hope and strength in God and his Word..

<sup>14</sup> mayor



The three who left first took the train from Hartenstein to Berlin where they got their tickets. There were too many people on that train. They had to switch trains and hide in a cattle car. In Berlin they boarded another train, heading for Bremerhaven. This time they did not have to be sneaky; they were guarded by American MP's.

“We were supposed to sit quiet, but I couldn't resist sticking my head out the train window to yell at those Russian soldiers.” –Ted

Already onboard the ship they began to enjoy the rich blessings of life in America.

There was a lot of good food, and three meals a day. But during rough seas nobody came to eat. We would go in there and catch all the food as it was sliding off the tables. There was always plenty, but we stuffed our pockets on the way out. –Ted

Three months later, John came back from a trip to the American Consulate and told Wally, “We're going too. Don't worry about what our parents say; I'll work it out with them.” They got back to Berlin easily, because by this time the underground network in Berlin was well established. From there they took a train to an old P.O.W. camp in Bremen. They stayed there for three weeks until they could get on a ship. As was often the case, there was no food. For three weeks they ate nothing but their ration of oatmeal every morning. Finally the word came and they got on a train to Bremerhaven, where they boarded the ship bound for the United States.

In America all five went to work for the man who sponsored them, Otto Francke, their mom's second cousin. He was a good man, though very poor.

“He was so poor that he could afford only a can of beans for lunch, and even that he had to buy on credit because he had no money.” –Ted

Naturally they weren't able to work there for long.

Fred went on to work for another farmer, who turned out to be a very difficult man. John would work for the Schuberts.

Ted also went on to work for a difficult man; a short little man with a temper. The farmer gave him a cold, drafty space up in the attic. He worked him very hard, and blamed him for everything that went wrong. To add to it all, the man's foul mouth made it even more difficult to learn English. It took a while to figure out what *die Kühe*<sup>15</sup> were supposed to be called.

Ted worked at other places also, and for good people, but they could never pay him much. After a few years, he was drafted and sent to Korea. When he got back, instead of going back into farming he went to trade school to become a draftsman. This, however, turned out to be a high stress job and a detriment to his health. Instead, he got a job as a custodian at a school, and worked there until he retired. To some it would have been a struggle of a life, but to him it was the gracious guidance of God that brought him to his best years. Again and again he has reminded us, "God has richly blessed me. I have a great family. My best years were with my family."

Esther worked for a harsh man who owned a grocery store. She took care of his whole house for a few dollars. When she would get together with her brothers on weekends, she would often come with tears in her eyes. The Franckes took her back for a while before she found a job with the Bielkes, who were very good to her.

Wally worked for the Sieg family. They were a very good family, although they also could not pay him much. They did give him good clothes and good food, though—a bit too good at first. He was a skinny 4'5", and his famished body wasn't used to all that nourishment. It made him sick.

One day the pastor asked Wally if he had any interest in the public ministry. He would have done anything to get off the farm.

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<sup>15</sup> The cows

“I used to load hay, hoe, clean out the thistle patches, pick rocks, and whatever else had to be done. Then I did the morning and evening chores too.” –Wally

So Wally enrolled at Martin Luther High School. He would go on to college and the Seminary, in the end graduating and receiving a divine call to be a pastor. He would serve congregations in Canada, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

### Conclusion

Wally's ordination fulfilled a lifelong dream for his father. Hans had always wanted to be a pastor himself, but didn't have the money to go to school. Instead, it was <sup>as I was</sup> always his dream to have a son become a minister. Now that this had happened, the dream became to hear him preach. It didn't seem real, though, because the Communists would only let you visit relatives who were in West Germany. Soon that dream became a possibility.

After Lene died, the children in America tried to talk Hans into coming over. By this time he was an old man, and would not live much longer.

At first he didn't want to come. He didn't want to leave the younger children (who were mostly grown up by this time). Finally he agreed, “If you come, I'll come back with you.” Everybody pitched in a little money, and they elected Eberhardt to go back to Germany to get their dad. The year was 1967.

Eberhardt flew to Frankfurt and rented a car to drive into East Germany. It took a day to get through the border control station. Everyone was interrogated; everything was searched. For three weeks he stayed in Hartenstein visiting with his dad and siblings. During the whole time he had to be careful not to talk to anyone outside the family about why he was there. In order to get his dad across the East German border, Eberhardt got a visa for him to visit a niece in West Germany. They couldn't cross the border together, though. Hans had to ride the train to avoid suspicion. On the other side they agreed that they would meet up at a certain restaurant.

“You should have seen how we jumped when we met up on the other side. We beat the Communists!” –Eberhardt

They went to the American Consulate in Frankfurt and spent three days there getting a visa to make the trip to America. After everything was ready, they went to the airport.

Dad was so excited at the airport. He was going to see his kids and grandkids. And he had never seen a big passenger airplane like that. You should have seen his eyes. It was all new stuff to him, and very mysterious. He had a big smile. –Eberhardt

On the plane the stewardess brought drinks and cigars.

I bought dad a drink. He looked at the cigars and said, ‘Can I have one of those too?’ I said, ‘Yeah, dad, you can have one of those too.’ He thought he was the king of China! –Eberhardt

Everybody was there when they arrived in Minneapolis. They all went to Ted’s house to celebrate. The next four months would be some of the happiest of Hans’ life. He stayed with each of them for a little while, enjoying himself with his kids and grandkids. Then, finally, his last life’s dream was fulfilled. Wally came down from Canada for a district convention, and was invited to preach at Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Minneapolis. Two days later Hans Loescher died, a man full of blessings.

This covers the history of the Loescher family from 1923-1967. To those who have not lived through similar times, it is shocking to think that these things could ever actually happen. One might wonder how this family found anything to be thankful for. And yet, if you talk to them, they will all tell you that they have been greatly blessed, and they are greatly thankful. They have an appreciation for God’s greater gifts, his Word and our families. They appreciate the prosperity

which the younger generations mostly don't even notice. They have learned the difference between those blessings and true, lasting treasures in heaven. The reason is easy to see. The father showed by his example that God's Word was precious to him, and he taught his children the same. They went to church and were taught to pay attention. When troubles came, the father taught his children to find peace in God's Word, leading them in hymns while the bombs fell. Later in life, the father's lessons stuck with his children. They continued to search the Scriptures and sing their hymns through some difficult days in America. Now, as those children have grown old and looked back on their lives, they are thankful. Their overwhelming thought is that God has been good.

All of us look at God's gracious blessings; his protection and preservation—his greatest blessing is our faith. —Eberhardt

Even in such poverty, we were blessed because of our faith. Now, in a life so full of goodies, it is difficult not to become too attached to all the material things that will be destroyed, either before or on Judgment Day.

—Wally

### **Appendix 1—Paulina Augusta Loescher Helps Start the Free Church in Hartenstein**

Because the union of Lutherans and Reformed in the State Church in Germany was so distasteful to true Lutherans, many throughout Germany were beginning to meet separately. These groups would become the *Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche*. In the area around Hartenstein, groups in Planitz, Zwickau, Dresden, and other places were already gathering on Sunday afternoons to read the catechism and listen to sermons. In 1876, pastors from these congregations visited Hartenstein and encouraged the orthodox Lutherans there also to separate themselves from the State Church. Paulina Loescher heard these men and took action. Realizing that the Word of God alone is the rule and norm, in 1882 she left the state church. Her action encouraged others to do the same. It was a difficult move, though, because it caused hostility with those in town who belonged to the state church. Some of those were members of her own family, including her own mother. 3 more families dared to take this step, and by 1902 there were 9 families and 37 souls in this bold little Hartenstein congregation. Paulina was Hans' grandmother.<sup>16</sup>

### **Appendix 2—Wally Enters the Public Ministry Only by God's grace and Special Guidance.**

Wally had a strong desire to get off the farm, as well as a need to make some money. He decided to enroll in the ministerial course at New Ulm's Martin Luther High School. It wasn't that he had a special desire to be a minister. His pastor suggested it to him, and he liked the idea of getting off the farm.

Starting school was difficult, though, because he knew no English. He picked it up bit by bit, though, especially through studying Latin.

Our gracious God would use a severe accident to lead him to focus on the public ministry and decide to continue his studies at Northwestern College. This is how it happened:

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<sup>16</sup> Information taken out of a bulletin insert from Zion Evangelish-Lutherische Kirche in Hartenstein.

After John was drafted during the Korean War, he asked Wally to use his '41 Pontiac while he was gone. One weekend, he and five buddies took it on a trip up to Minneapolis. After a day of fun and frivolity, they had a disagreement over which was the fastest way back to the car. Naturally, they split and raced. Wally raced across a parking lot, but didn't see the neck-high cable in the shadows on the other side. It caught him and flipped him head first onto the cement. The next thing he remembered, Ted was beside him in the hospital. Ted had stayed with him all night. After being released from the hospital, Wally stayed 3 weeks on a couch in Fred's house in Minneapolis. The whole event shook him up and led him to a new resolve to keep on studying for the ministry.

But still, even in his second year at Northwestern College he wanted to stop studying for the ministry. He told John that he actually wanted to enlist. John responded with one short sentence, "Don't do it, you will regret it later." That short sentence stuck in his memory.

I never would have made it in the public ministry in the WELS, had the LORD not found a way to keep me on track. It was only by his grace and special guidance. —Wally

### **Appendix 3—Eberhardt's Life in Germany and Immigration to America**

Eberhardt was only 12 years old when the four brothers and Esther left for America. After graduating from *Grundschule*<sup>17</sup>, he got an apprenticeship with a typesetter in a printshop. The Communists would shut down the shop before he had a chance to finish. They shut down almost all private businesses in those days. Instead of trade work, the Communists felt the future lay in mining and industry. So, Eberhardt went to work in the coal mine at the age of 16.

Mining is always dangerous work, and it was all the more so back then. There were a lot of cave-ins, the equipment was dangerous and poorly maintained, and the coal dust was everywhere.

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<sup>17</sup> The German equivalent of elementary school.

Safety didn't mean a lot in those days. Production was everything, and it didn't matter how. It is only by the grace of God that I am still here.

—Eberhardt

Later he did finish his apprenticeship, but it was only a short time before he left East Germany.

The communists were big on promoting sports and youth organizations. At 15 or 16 Eberhardt joined the youth fire department. They had a fire truck, sort of. Instead of a bed it had only a frame and some boards.

One night the fire department was called out because two trains had collided. A passenger train loaded with young miners had been on its way up to the Uranium mine. The young men were packed in; even sitting on top, and standing on the ends and on the running boards. The train collided with an oncoming freight train.

To this day, what I saw is like a nightmare. There was blood running out of the cars. We had to go in and pull out the bodies and line them up. —Eberhardt

The Russians pushed the German people to the limit. In June of 1953 there was an uprising of all kinds of workers in East Germany. Of course they had no weapons, and the Russians massacred them. The uprising did help though; because the Russians realized from this that they could only push the people ~~only~~ so far. After this, people were allowed to visit their close relatives in the West.

This was significant for the Loeschers, because John was stationed in West Germany at the time. They could get a visa to cross the border for a visit. Hans and Lene and their son Eberhardt all got visas and went to visit. They stayed three weeks, and then Hans and Lene had to go back, since their youngest children were still at home. Eberhardt, however, stayed in West Germany.



His brothers in America eventually talked him into coming over. He couldn't go right away, though. There was a quota, and he had to wait until his number came up. He ended up waiting for three years. While he waited, he looked for work. There wasn't much work, but he did pick up enough odd jobs to eat. He would brag about how good it was, though he was still about the poorest guy around.

After a while, he had such a strong desire to see his family in Hartenstein that he took the risk of going back, not knowing if they would let him back into the West or not. He almost stayed home, but did come back and eventually got on a boat for America. He was 20 years old.

It was the saddest day of my life—seeing the country I grew up in go off in the distance. I was sure I would never see anybody again. That was done, and I didn't know what was ahead. —Eberhardt

In America he worked at the same farm where Fred was, at first. After 2 years he got a job in town as a helper at a print shop. Two years after that he was drafted and went to Korea.

Looking back, it seems tough. At that time it was a fight for survival, and you didn't think about it. You did the best you could, and didn't cry about it. But it's been a good life, and I have a good wife. —Eberhardt

**Bibliography**

All information was gathered through interviews and conversations with Theodore Loescher, Waldemar Loescher, and Eberhardt Loescher. The interviews and conversations took place from November 5, 2010 to December 14, 2010. They spoke from their personal experiences as well as their own personal research into the history of their family and country. Since new details of their story would come out in later conversations, it was necessary that most of the quotations be compilations of things that were said at one time or another. These compilations were then given to the men who were interviewed for review, and were approved by them.