

# **SMILES AND TEARS**

## **IN PRISON**

by

Olav Brunvand

Translated by Harold Brunvand

Foreword by HILTGUNT ZASSENHAUS

Yesterday I received a letter from Norway; it has been a long time since the last time.... I have not seen the writer in many years... But his name will always remain in my heart...Olav Brunvand...

"Do you remember "Smiles and Tears"?" he writes. "The manuscript on toilet paper that has been buried among old papers over a period of many years. While modernizing my office they surfaced again. By coincidence a publisher happened to see them.."

There is no such thing as coincidence, Olav. I buried this manuscript more than twenty-five years ago. But already at that time I knew that some time in the future it would appear in book form.

"Smiles and Tears" was written in solitary confinement in German prisons. It was cold and the stomach was empty. The only sign of human life was the noise from handling the toilet paper. It was Olav that put down his thoughts on toilet paper, as one of those that lived behind the prison walls. At that time it became more evident than ever before that life and death are holding hands...We learned to understand that if our lives should be taken, the ideals we had lived for, must never die...

One day while visiting Olav, he pulled a small package of toilet paper from his shoes. He wanted me to take it with me home. I never hesitated to take it with me home, both that time and at later visits. By coincidence the last time I had a manuscript with me, I was stopped by a representative from the Nazi police that became suspicious. He noticed that I spoke Norwegian to my companion, the Norwegian Seamen's Pastor. I was detained for several hours, but the manuscript was not found on me.

When I came home to my dark home (because of bombing) in Hamburg, I spent the night in the basement reading "Smiles and Tears", during an air raid. Only the rays from a flashlight made it possible to see the lines. Olav wrote about loneliness, about being cold, about hunger and prison walls. But he also wrote about the people that became united inside these walls. It became very clear to me, one thing he did not mention, what he and his friends contributed for their country inside these walls. There was something within these men that could not be destroyed, something that after all these years, I have difficulty to describe with words. I was more than ever certain of what I already knew, that in German prisons were inmates that would be an example to people on the outside. That night I learned to understand, be it ever so dark, there will always be a light to show the way if we are willing to open our eyes and minds. Even on the doorsteps of death, we were more than ever alive...

Later that night, when it became quiet after the air raid, I went out in the garden and buried "Smiles and Tears" in a tin can. Deep in the soil. I believed that the earth would keep it as a seed, that

someday would blossom and bear fruit.

Baltimore, U.S.A. 1968

## SMILES AND TEARS IN PRISON

BY OLAV BRUNVAND

### WAR IN LONELINESS

This is not a book about exciting and dangerous illegal work. Nor is it a story about Gestapo interrogation and torture. Many have told this story well and correctly.

For some of us there came a time after we had been sentenced: of many and long years behind meter thick prison walls, a life in utter passiveness and loneliness; alone in a cell while millions of human beings were fighting for life and death.

Hamburg was bombed to dust directly outside our barred windows, while the prisoner awakes to a new day of the same prison routine that has existed in prisons, world wide, for centuries. The prison routine is unchangeable; even in wartime. Inside these walls the prime object of the inmates is to make hundreds of paper sacks every day. (Cut paper patterns and glue them together to make bags.) The light is turned out at seven PM, prisoner number so and so gets up at six the next morning, he must then tell his guard the same real and interesting news that he is prisoner number 536, sentenced to twelve years in prison, punished for treason and for "helping the enemy": a new day is about to begin!

As for myself it would be 1,325 days alike, from the fall of 1941 to the liberation in 1945.

These days were not totally alike. Several weeks we remained in the prison in Bergen, a short time in "Ulveleiren" (Wolfcamp) near Bergen, a few weeks at Akershus National Prison, three different prisons in Germany, one and a half years of this time in solitary confinement, nine months "volunteered" to an ammunition factory in Hamburg and the rest of the time in cells with other prisoners. What kind of prisoners? For the most part the usual type of German criminals: murderers, rapists, repeater criminals - and a small group of political prisoners, some from Norway and other German occupied countries, some German Communists, Social Democrats and Catholics.

All were dressed in the black uniform of the prison, most became friends. It had to be this way in a most strange world. It is of no use to make believe that one is living in a normal world. If one wants to live - that is to survive - he has to become a part of the prison routine with a minimum of friction. He cannot let his mind be occupied, to any degree, with the house, home, wife, children and all good things. He has no right to be afraid. The thought of dying has never been farther away than

right now.

It may sound like bragging and "near heroism", especially when it comes from a person that in normal life is neither brave nor without fright. This had nothing to do with being brave. The will to live is the dominating factor and - and if necessary - breaks down feelings that otherwise would be normal in a similar situation, but does not here serve this one, necessary purpose.

Four hundred to five hundred Norwegians were locked up in German prisons during most of the war. It was people sentenced to long prison terms by German "War Courts". This life behind the walls was entirely different from the "life lived" in the German concentration camps, where the Nazis practiced their special horrendous system. In the prison the law was still in power, often contrary to and in conflict with the Gestapo. Here ruled the guard that had survived all systems, der Kaiser's Reich, The Weimar Republic and the Nazi Regime. For them the prisoners were first and last a way to earn their living. There were exceptions, both good and bad.

None of these prisoners were physically mistreated or killed. Most of the prisoners that died, gave up because of starvation. Packages from the outside were never permitted. The "normal" prisoners weight went down to half of his normal weight.

This is not a report where physical mistreatment is of prime interest; it was more horrendous at other locations. This is a story of how it feels to be transformed from a human being to a prisoner, from living a normal active life to a passive existence in a time when there is fighting on all fronts.

### A WAR IN LONELINESS

### A MANUSCRIPT SURFACES AGAIN

Have I really written this? It seems so strange and far away. Considering the time it was written it seems so mild, even humorous.

I found the manuscript while remodelling the office in the fall of 1967. Twenty-five years have gone by since it was written. The toilet paper it was written on is somewhat yellow with age, but the letters are distinct and easy to read. This is not the scribbling of a journalist of today.

"SMILE AND TEARS IN PRISON" says the title sheet.. Yes, it did have a special title sheet! I leaf through the old papers, sheet by sheet and admit that I am not really the author of these manuscripts, a person of today, living a normal life! This is written by Prisoner Number 536, and I probably once made him a promise to have this published! It is the story of HIS impressions of himself and his environment. It was strictly forbidden to have a pencil in a German prison, verboten to own stationery, it was not only forbidden but it was unthinkable to try to smuggle out a large package of manuscripts! Nevertheless a way was found - in this case! The prison system had not progressed to the point that one was refused toilet paper in a world where your living area is bedroom, dining room and toilet all in one room! At times the guards considered that the quantity of toilet paper was

unusually large, but the "guard brain" recognized that there might be physical reactions that one had to cope with.

Small stubs of pencils were smuggled in - and guarded as if they were holy relics. They were small and easy to hide. It was a different story with the manuscripts, oftentimes they were hidden for months before they could be smuggled out. This is where the long underwear would serve double duty! They were of the type that had to be tied at the ankles. The manuscripts were padded around the legs.

The guards would at various times of the day check the cell through the "spy hole" in the door. After a while, however, the sense of hearing became so sharp that it was relatively easy to detect the sound when they were tiptoeing through the corridor.

It is not unusual for a prisoner to have a desire to "write his life"! For most of them that is as far as it goes - why does the prisoner want to write? Hardly because he considers himself to be or to have a desire to be an author. If he has this notion, he will soon think otherwise. He writes simply because he is driven to it in his loneliness. Endless days and nights; not a friend to talk to. In fact he has not a friend nearby - so he makes himself one! The manuscript becomes this friend, the best of all! He can confide everything to the paper, his prison life, lecture on his own life's philosophy, bare his immediate thoughts... And he never receives a rebuttal! It is not a monologue for the prisoner, but a conversation, - the ideal!

I do not dare to speculate as to how many times the manuscript for "SMILES AND TEARS IN PRISON" WAS READ AND REREAD AND REWRITTEN WHILE IN PRISON. My friend was recreated over and over again, not because of improvement in my style and use of language (although it was needed) but because I could not bear to let go of my friend. The person that smuggled in the pencil stubs and pieces of manuscripts out understood this friendship. This was one reason she took such a chance doing this.

The manuscript came to Bergen in the summer of 1945. It was typed - and parts of it published in Bergen's Arbeiderblad (Bergen Labor paper). Since then it was lost in the files until it recently surfaced!

I was in doubt if it served any purpose to bring this manuscript out again -it had long ago fulfilled the object it was intended for - at that time. It was for joy and comfort; it was a friend.

Perhaps it may be of interest for others to get an insight into prison life and how the prisoner looked at himself and his environment, not reflections after he is set free, but observations made while Prisoner 536! The story no doubt would not have been the same should I have chosen to relive it on paper today. I chose to let the manuscript tell the story the way it was written.

## THE ANGEL OF THE PRISON

Enclosed with the manuscript package from Germany in the summer of 1945 came this letter:

"Dear Friend!

It is like a dream to be able to write a letter and mail it to Norway and be free of the prison walls; it is a joy - a rare flower here right now. All the meetings we had in prison are clear as life in my mind, hopefully it will help me to forget the many dark hours you had in this damned country. It would become a realization of the goal I once aimed for.

- But it seems so unreal. I have to revise my way of thinking when I think of all of you. Too many times do my thoughts end up behind the prison walls, to the many ladders and steps - the basement - and I think of your condition - the penetrating cold and the thin, thin soup - then I wake up. You are home in Norway, all of my friends serving time in prison, what a relief it is.

Love,

Hiltgunt"

A young German woman, Hiltgunt Zassenhaus, wrote this letter. For many years she risked her life to keep our spirits up and to help us. It was she that smuggled in the pencil stubs and the manuscripts out of the prison. This was only a minor detail in her great and extensive work; one can say it was a typical detail; she had a beautiful understanding what these small things meant to the individual prisoner. She was willing to risk her life for things that under normal life would be rather trivial; for the prisoners it meant everything. She carried out her mission with a determination not very often witnessed, at the risk of her life, in a quiet and efficient way. From her home, almost destroyed by bombs, in Hamburg she accompanied the Norwegian Seamen's pastors thousands of kilometers to twenty different prisons that had Norwegian and Danish prisoners.

As the censor of all letters she knew the locations of the prisoners at all times. She tracked them down and registered them in her card file. More than once she was on the brink of a nervous breakdown after depressing visits in prison and long and tiresome travels.

During all these years she lived under a continuous nerve pressure knowing full well that a small misstep would reveal her "mission" to her supervisors. Her life would then be worth less than ours. Nevertheless she always met us with a smile, a smile of a young woman in the midst of serious minded and brutal representatives of the "Vermacht"! In the history of the German penal system for male prisoners it had never happened before that a young woman had represented the German Power Machine. Hiltgunt's entrance in prison therefore, created a tremendous impact on the prison administration. A regular guard was assigned to escort her to watch that everything went according to prison regulations. Hiltgunt said NO. She went to her superiors and demanded to be alone with the prisoners and the pastor on all visits. She was granted her request; her section of the German Powerhouse was the strongest; the prison administration was overruled by GESTAPO!

The prisoners loved Hiltgunt. She touched the strings of our inner feelings that had been dormant in prison life.

I do not want to minimize her role as a Samaritan at this time. For Hiltgunt this was a secondary function. If her real objective had been just to offer herself to help others, there were plenty of opportunities to be a Samaritan among her own people right at home. Her hometown, Hamburg, was being pulverized by bombing and the people suffered and died. She did not have to hunt for something to do.

The work she did as a Samaritan was her way of proving that there was a different Germany than the "damned country" the Nazis had created.

She wanted to be our ally!

Hiltgunt loved her country, make no mistake about that. But she hated Nazism with all her mind and soul. She had come to the conclusion that her native country had to suffer the painful agony of defeat before it could become totally free again. She considered her work for and among us a link in the fight for freedom. It is true, it was a moderate contribution that never would make the headlines. But she HAD to be part of it even though it meant that she would be operating all by herself. She had no organization behind her. Only her immediate family and a few intimate friends were behind her and helped her procure the items she considered so important to the prisoners - and did mean so much to us.

Hiltgunt was an ardent student of the philosophy of Albert Schweitzer; she believed in the personal responsibility of the individual. She was convinced that the base for reconciliation between people could only be obtained when one is willing to place humanity ahead of nationality and race.

Oftentimes she was afraid of herself; afraid her desire for freedom would drive her to think schematically in black and white. Over the many years she had looked upon the prisoners as her friends and the guards as enemies. When this hell one day will end, would she then continue to separate people in groups and blocks, without discovering individual quality? This question tortured her.

Hiltgunt was on one of the war's most difficult fronts, directly in the enemies' camp, the German Police! She had a bedrock belief in fate, there was never a doubt in her mind, this mission was a vital part of her fate. It was created for her! It was a miracle that she could be able to secure this position and enjoy the complete confidence of the most horrendous police system the world has ever seen. The Norwegian Seamen's minister, serving at that time, once wrote: "Of all the wonders of the Lord, the Zassenhaus incident was one of the most remarkable and meaningful". Whether it was the will of the Lord or not will not be discussed here -- But it was most remarkable.

Hiltgunt grew up in a liberal democratic home, under strong intellectual influence. Her father was a rector in Hamburg. She was only seventeen years old when the Nazis took power. She had the

feeling that the world was being destroyed. It was a terrible shock when she witnessed her friends defect; one after the other joined the Hitler youth organization.

Forgotten were all the discussions in college and other organizations that stood for democracy and liberty, debates that were held only days before the Nazis took over.

Only a few remained on the bulwark; but they also cautioned all to be very careful. THAT was a trait Hiltgunt had little knowledge of, she HAD to live in opposition to a system she hated.

She studied philosophy and completed her examination in Danish. She then traveled to Denmark and England, to be able to breathe fresh air. Even here she experienced disappointments. She met people that not only attempted to explain, but actually defended Hitler's take over. Germany "needed" a strong man, it was said. Oh, yes, thank you, we know that story! Many she met had difficulty believing that it was possible to remain a German and at the same time be opposed to the new system. The seriousness of the brutal Nazi takeover was never realized at all.

She returned to Germany. Shortly afterwards the hunting down of the Jews began. Jewish places of business were closed or destroyed; people were mistreated and deported easterly. Many of Hiltgunt's old friends were among them. It was the year 1938; it was only a small sample of what was to come. The deported Jews were still allowed to correspond with friends in other countries and to receive packages from them. She had come to the conclusion it was not enough for her to be an inactive individual; she had to be involved in a worthwhile mission. Her first involvement was that of a censor of Jewish letters. Testimonies from many Jewish families that she had helped tell a story very much like what she did for the Norwegian prisoners. She did tell me her story in a very modest way:

"It was to be the darkest year of my life. What the fate became for people is impossible to describe. I attempted to do what I could to ease their existence; but this was only a drop in the ocean. That I survived is a miracle and because of my strong belief in my fate, I can only explain that there was more important work for me to do. As time went on the Jewish contact with the world become nonexistent. In fact it became strictly forbidden, and thus my official connections came to an end. These years gave me an insight in the treatment of prisoners, and I realized that our country had become one huge prison camp. Under these conditions life was not worth living unless one could hold on to an idea and a purpose to fight for - even a modest one."

Hiltgunt began to study medicine while she waited for new assignments. In the latter part of 1942 she received a request from the Attorney General in Hamburg asking if she would be willing to take over the letter censoring for the Scandinavian prisoners in Hamburg. She received this request because of her education as an interpreter in Norwegian and Danish. Twice she refused because she could not bear the thought of serving as a "watchdog" for the police. The third time she said yes! She envisioned this as a sign that a special mission was waiting for her. She had one request and condition, all letters would be edited or censored by herself only, without responsibility of giving reports. Peculiarly enough her condition was accepted. The first round was won! There really were



no personal contacts in this activity; her only contact with the prisoners were the letters. All together different opportunities opened up when she was asked to serve as an interpreter during the visits the Norwegian Seamen's Pastor was allowed representing the families of the prisoners. On the first visit a guard showed up as a watchman. Hiltgunt realized that this job had great possibilities for her to do more for the prisoners. She went to see the Attorney General in Hamburg and explained to him how illogical it was to have the guard present during the visits. He did not understand what went on anyway and his presence hindered her activity. She would be the guard in a most responsible way.

The Attorney General approved. Hiltgunt received a green Gestapo Pass that opened many doors for her. Another bulwark won!

But this arrangement applied to Hamburg only. As the prisoners were placed in other prisons it took skill and cunning to get the same privileges approved in the institutions that had prisoners from Norway and Denmark. The Director in Hamburg recommended that Hiltgunt be granted this arrangement in all prisons, and it was approved in nearly every prison.

Twice Hiltgunt was called in to headquarters of the Gestapo to explain her activities. It became evident that the Gestapo was more interested in the guards' attitude than the condition of the prisoners. Hiltgunt survived the inquisition. Nothing was discovered. At this time of writing we do know that the capitulation of the German Empire also came as a rescue to her; in the last round of the war she was caught in the "searchlight" (spotlight) in such a way it would have been impossible to survive. For once the "Vermacht" came too late with their spotlight!

How did she perform her work?

### CENSORING OF LETTERS

In accordance with regulations the inmates were permitted to write home and to receive a letter every sixth week. The letters had to conform with a prescribed format; it was permissible to use the Norwegian language. All letters were censored, and it was required that the censor report any irregularities or suspicious matters in the letters. Before Hiltgunt took over, it did occasionally happen that the censor had taken notice of one thing or another. At first the services were given by the Norwegian Seamen's pastor in Hamburg. It was our only form of social recreation and a big event in our monotonous life, although the prison church was wisely designed so it was impossible to see the prisoner next to you. The pastor used to stand at the exit and give each prisoner a handshake. It was a handshake that gave warmth in an ice cold world. A few prisoners wrote home and mentioned that the pastor had given them a "warm handshake". This was reported by the censor and resulted in punishment and naturally it was the end of this small pleasure. If a letter arrived a few days before the sixth week was due the censor enjoyed making the prisoner wait another six weeks before he would receive the letter.

This practice ended when Hiltgunt took over. The letters were delivered regardless of when they

arrived, and eventually this became known by the relatives that the time element was not that important anymore.

All the letters we received were marked "Zassenhaus". At first, this of course meant nothing to us. It would soon have an important meaning however! As we became personally acquainted with her, we always received a small friendly greeting. She gave us words of encouragement, but preferably solid information about the location of our comrades and how they were getting along. She became the key factor that tied the old prison comrades together. Anyone who has lived in the atmosphere of a prison will understand how much this meant. For others it may be difficult.

We, "the old boys" from the first hard winter and spring of 1941-42 had personal ties as close as if we were related to each other. Hiltgund read the details of all the letters, going out and coming in. She learned to know our families. She knew the names of wives and children and noted the dates of their birthdays. Most importantly was her card index file of all prisoners; she was the only person that always knew where the Norwegian and Danish prisoners were located. This information became invaluable at the end of the war when prisoners were sent home, but it also was most valuable for locating prisoners to be visited.

### VISITATIONS

After considerable pressure the Seamen's pastors in Hamburg were finally granted permission to visit the Norwegian prisoners as representatives of their families, under the same rules as for the German prisoners - one visit every fourth month. A Norwegian business man was used as an interpreter at first, but the prison administration decided it did not give enough security. A German had to be found that also was fluent in Norwegian. This is the way Hiltgund came into the picture and remained there! She was already a censor of letters. We were naturally very skeptical when we first met her in the visitors' room. We had participated in illegal work and we knew full well the role of the "Nazi inspectors"! It was nothing new that young German girls were used to get the prisoners to reveal secrets. At the first visit I was together with, among others, Fredrik Ramm. Hiltgund made only a few routine remarks before she let the minister talk to the prisoners, just a quiet talk about family and home, at the end a short devotion and prayer. Suddenly Fredrik broke the ice, he shook hands with the interpreter and said: "I thank you also"! This was highly irregular and broke all prison regulations. Hiltgund took his hand and smiled.

We followed his example, and had a sensational feeling that she had a special message to us. It was the first tender contact!

Slowly, but surely grew a friendship and mutual trust. It was dangerous, perhaps irresponsible. But one has to take some chances! It began with cautious smiles, and a bit of kindness. Surely the drab visiting room had noticeably been changed because of the touch of the hand of a young woman; it reminded us of home when she arrived with a tablecloth and flowers from her own garden. We became less formal and on a first name basis! Hiltgund "closed her ears" when the pastor gave us the latest news of the war from home and other fronts. As time went by she also became active by

giving us news and she brought along small gifts for all of us. She began to make up the itinerary herself for all visits, and prison rules were not adhered to. She arranged to have old friends meet in the visiting room, and she was not too particular if we met in less time between visits than the four months that the prison regulations specified. As time went on we forgot that she was here to watch for irregularities and represented the "enemy"! She became a most important part of the visits, a fountain of inspiration and encouragement. As we left her, she might put a small piece of paper in our hands to bring back to the cell. An example from 1943:

"Dear Friend:

Every time I say goodbye, it is with a heavy heart, and I have to send you a little greeting to take with you into the cell. I beg you dearly to have patience and to take care of our boys that are discouraged. Spring is coming, be sure of that. These times after all, have not been in vain."

A breath of humanity in a cold, cold, world.

It was "am strengsten verboten" (strictly forbidden) to bring anything in to the prisoners, both for the pastor and the interpreter. Since it was the duty of the interpreter to enforce the prison regulations, this part was simply discontinued! They never came empty handed thereafter! Hiltgunt's suitcase became heavier and heavier for every visit. It did happen that the prison personnel asked her why she always dragged along such a heavy suitcase. She had a ready answer: "Hamburg is bombed every day and night, I take no chances, I always bring my emergency equipment with me". The hardest part was to make the suitcase appear as heavy when she left!

These were the chances she took. The "emergency equipment" was for us, small items selected with the individual in mind. She was selective in getting the small items that brought special individual joy. Some had a particular hobby they would like to keep up with, others appreciated a book. All of us needed vitamins, and most of us were happy to get a little chewing tobacco. Many were ill and were not able to get the medicines they needed. Hiltgunt got them! Only a few knew that the medicine came from the German army where her two brothers served as doctors! Several would like to draw or write; Hiltgunt brought pencils and paper, later she smuggled out the drawings and manuscripts and buried these in tin cans in her garden.

It may not sound very spectacular and bold. Actually both the pastor and Hiltgunt took their lives in their hands on every visit. This was especially true for Hiltgunt, because her duty was to observe that the regulations were strictly enforced for prisoners from foreign countries. She was in charge, her activities would be considered most horrible treason.

Her friends warned her when she became too daring. Once during a visit it almost came to a crisis between the pastor and Hiltgunt. We had been transferred to a new prison far East in Germany. It was not known how the administration would react to the visits. After a long period of negotiations the pastor and Hiltgunt finally were given permission to visit on their terms, but they had to sign "on their honor" an oath that nothing could be brought in to the prisoners. They gave their word of

honor! It had been a long day for them, and they tried to make as many visits as possible that day.

Late in the day I was in the visitors' room with a comrade. It was during one of our terrible periods of great hunger, our stomachs were aching for nourishment and our weight reduced to 48 kg. and little to sustain us and we worked all day long. But we tried to smile as best we could. The visit was an encouragement itself.

The pastor took out his "grey bag lunch" and said: "I hope you will excuse me that I eat my late breakfast now, I prefer not to take any extra time out, because I want to visit as many prisoners as possible today".

Two pair of starving eyes ate up the sandwiches! It was just too much for Hiltgunt. "Pastor, you are carrying this too far." She placed her package on the table and said, "Help yourself"!

"Be careful, Miss Zassenhaus, we promised on our honor that we would not give anything to the prisoners. This might mean the end of our visits, and could lose your head", said the minister. "To be careful is not my way of life, I should rather lose my head than my heart," answered Hiltgunt.

There was a moment of silence. The conversation turned to other subjects.

This gives a picture of Hiltgunt, but not a fair picture of the pastor. In his eagerness to make as many visits as possible, he momentarily, without thinking, indiscreetly acted this way before two hungry individuals. He did not want to break the promise he gave under oath and possibly lose out on future visiting rights.

But Hiltgunt did what she HAD to do. This was the motive of all of her activities. Naturally the small gifts we received during visits could not in any way relieve our pangs of hunger, a result of years of hunger. It was not the nourishment that counted, but the gesture of human kindness we experienced.

There was no way that we could reciprocate this kindness. But it did happen ONCE that she returned home with her suitcase almost as heavy as when she came in! It was on a visit just before Christmas. The fellows in the tailor shop had remade cavalry pants into infantry pants and made slippers of the surplus leather! From all sections of the prison they came with gifts hidden under their prison uniforms, small things they had made, dolls, file folders, photo albums. Last to come was a young, shy Dane, he brought two spools of thread he had stolen from the shop.

"If you have any use for them, take them!" Hiltgunt's eyes became moist from tears. She had to give the boy a motherly kiss! It was his first Christmas away from home.

All of it was stolen goods. Never had anything been stolen with a purer heart!

Once a comrade asked her a little uneasily if she ever "carried fleas and lice with her home".

"Oh, yes", she replied, "that is OK. I take that as a friendly reminder of my boys!"

Sick prisoners received all her attention and special care. She "flew from King Herod to Pilatus" to get them better care, or if possible let them return to Norway. Many will attest to what a young man from Bergen wrote to her. He had been sent home after suffering from TB.

"I can thank you for being alive today, with your encouragement during your visits you gave me the spark to stay alive!"

I shall never forget her telling me of her feelings when she received a telephone call from Hamburg that permission had been granted to send Fredrik Ramm home.

"I ran down Helgolands Avenue, passed the statue of Bismarck with the sword in his hand and gave him a haughty look. I felt as if I was on my way to announce that peace had come"! In reality it was only the message that one sick prisoner was allowed to be sent home.

In my manuscript written in German prisons only a few words are mentioned about Hiltgunt and her work, or about the widespread work of the pastors, all of it done behind the back of the Germans. That needs no explanation! It would be too dangerous and completely unnecessary risk for our friends to describe their activities while we were still in prison. On one page of the manuscripts is written in neat letters: "The chapter about the 'Angel' will come later!" Only two visits have been mentioned in the manuscript. This was written at a time late in the war when we were out of danger.

Hiltgunt Zassenhaus was called "Tukthusfangenenes Engel" (The Angel of the prisoners). The name was very appropriate for her, although she was not very happy about it. She did not want to be considered a supernatural individual. She wanted to be our comrade in war and to represent the "hidden Germany", which she was convinced existed. No event of the war ignited in her as the attack on Hitler's life July 10, 1944. A hope of freedom from Nazism before a doomed capitulation.

It never happened.

Hiltgunt Zassenhaus was decorated with the order of St. Olav for her work among Norwegian prisoners. She is the only German to be awarded this honor for her activities during the war. The Danes honored her with the order of Danebrog. Perhaps it WAS FAITH that she was assigned a Scandinavian Mission! Her knowledge of languages brought her to us. She could just as well have worked for other nations fighting against Nazism. She and the few she worked with had the idea that they wanted to help a certain nation. As a typical example, her eldest brother who served in Holland, was honored by the home front for his contribution.

It was not a national mission they strived to do. They wanted to be personally involved in the fight for humanity against inhuman tyranny. They felt that the individual human being had a definite responsibility in such a fight. A person with this philosophy knows no national boundaries!

To appraise the contribution one must not forget it is easy to fight for a cause when it coincides with one's own National interest. It takes great inner strength and courage to take up the fight against the official policy of one's own country.

### SMILES AND TEARS

During a visit with Hiltgunt, I mentioned to her I had some ideas about writing about our life in prison. I was in solitary confinement at the time and was in need of doing something beside gluing paper bags together. I wanted to relate the prisoner's experience while in prison and possibly describe the inner feelings of the prisoner. Without Hiltgunt it would have been impossible. The prison walls were too thick and the system too impregnable. It would have been impossible to smuggle out the manuscripts.

Hiltgunt was elated over the idea. She was of the opinion it would also help her to get a better understanding of the way we lived. She gave me a pencil stub and asked me to get started to write on prison toilet paper. She carried out the manuscripts regularly on her visits. The writing took place during the long periods of solitary confinement in Hamburg, Rendsburg and Dreibergen and the very last part while in concentration camp at Neuengamme on the way home.

In the summer of 1945 Hiltgunt dug up the manuscripts from her garden and sent them to Norway. I repeat the story as written, very little has been omitted. Nothing has been added.

## JUSTICE AND CELEBRATION

### German Court of War in Bergen

"Twelve years in prison." The judge reads with a dull, lazy voice, barely looking up from a large stack of papers and adds: "You have no right to appeal. Do you have anything to say?"

"No comments!"

The judge squints at the clock on the wall. The hand is about to creep over number twelve. (Noon) He is satisfied; he has reason to be. Three cases out of the way, altogether 31 years total in prison, almost a working life, a generation has this judge given out.

German justice works with lightning speed. The war front is Bergen State Archives Fall of 1941. Comrade Kristen and I were both sentenced to twelve years prison each, two very small numbers in a long, long row to come...

"Congratulations, you didn't get the death sentence!" Our friends, the guards in Bergen City Prison give us this greeting of welcome. The bars, the cells and the chain of keys belong to the prison. The spirit and voice of the Norwegian guards belong to our friends and liberty! At this time of the war there are no German guards in the prison. We are in temporary quarters and are placed in the same cell. Friends on the outside are showering us with the most delicious food. Even the best hotels could hardly have met the high standards of living at Bergen City Prison at that time. We sink our teeth in a wonderful thick steak! What a feast!

"Skoal, comrade!" There is no risk "skoaling" with German Steins!"

We had barely lit the cigars when the flowers began to arrive - twelve red carnations - from whom? Nobody knows! This continues all afternoon - we are happy in spite of all. The Home Front knows what it is doing. Our doomsday reminds us more of an anniversary celebration. We enjoy our drinks and talk until late in the evening, only the two of us.

We hear footsteps in the hallway. The night watch is turning out the lights.

It is wonderful to be able to rest with peace of mind. It has been hard on our nerves the past few weeks. Gestapo, interrogations. Was my name called in the hallway? Was there a noise of keys at the cell door? Never any peace. Interrogations, interrogations!

It is over with. Free of tension at last.

Sentenced??

I would rather call it freedom!