

the French and American occupation zones was only a few miles from my hometown.

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The first thing I did when I woke up on the following Sunday morning was to wish myself a happy birthday. I had a good feeling about this day. The following Tuesday was to be my second birthday in captivity and I would be 22 years old. There was no table decked with flowers and greeting cards. I could not even stand the birthday card up which I had received from Sue. I would have liked to keep it and treasure it as a keepsake, but it was too risky. I couldn't even keep any of Sue's letters. Sad to say, they all ended up in our potbelly stove.

I couldn't have wished for a more beautiful day. If it had been raining I would have had to abandon the whole idea. No way could I have attempted to climb down into that steep quarry in wet weather.

I breathed the fresh spring air and noticed that the hedges and trees outside the camp were in full bloom. There were the forget-me-nots, which I had brought from work and planted in front of our barracks, and cowslips and pansies, which my fellow prisoners had planted. It gave us such an uplift to be able to tend to something which was alive and which belonged to us. It helped us to forget the circumstances we were in. All the flowers and blossoms, which I saw that Sunday morning, seemed to smile at me and say, "Good luck, Karl". A small bird in a tree just outside the barbed wire sounded as if

it was singing a happy birthday song especially for me.

I walked with Heinz and Seppie for a while. I told them that I would not be coming back into camp until after dark, and they assured me that they would be looking out for me when I needed to get back inside. Then they wished me good luck and left.

On my way to the kitchen I picked some of my forget-me-nots, to take to Sue.

My friend in the kitchen was expecting me. Quickly, he ushered me into the toilet to change, in case someone walked into the kitchen unexpectedly. The uniform fit me fairly well. Theo put my prisoner of war outfit into a trash can. He said he would hide it there until I came back. All the kitchen personnel wore white uniforms and he didn't want it to be seen lying around.

By 11 a.m. I had to get going. I had arranged to meet Sue around noon and I wanted to be there first. Before opening the window for me, Theo gave me a tool, which they used to sharpen knives with. It was round, about ten inches long, and it had a leather loop threaded through the end of the handle. He thought it might come in handy to help me get a hold in difficult places on the cliff side, a sort of substitute for a climber's ice pick. Thanking him, I hung it on my wrist and climbed through the window.

The descent into the quarry proved to be very difficult. It was almost straight down and there were not many places where I could get a good hold. Since I could not see very well what was below me, I had to make a lot of blind moves until I found something to hang onto. At other times I was just hanging there trying to find a foothold. Luckily there were some small trees and shrubs, which had grown over the years since the quarry closed down.

About half way down I paused on a ledge just wide enough for me to lean back and rest my body. I was exhausted and needed a few minutes to recover my strength. My climb had been very strenuous and physically I was nowhere near as fit as I was when I used to do this sort of thing in my teens. While hanging there on the side of the quarry I thought that I would not do this for anyone but for my sweetheart, Sue.

Looking down to the bottom of the quarry, I saw that I had quite a long way to go yet, and it didn't look any easier. Before long there

was nothing to hold onto, not even grass, nothing but dirt. First I tried to go sideways in the hope of finding a handhold, but to no avail. What a blessing, I thought, to have the kitchen tool with me. With great effort I managed to secure it in the loose dirt just below my knees, hold onto it, and slowly and painfully make my way down over the bare spot. After doing this several times, I came to some more small shrubs and rocks, which I could hang onto.

After that the descent became much easier and the cliff less steep. Finally I had reached the bottom of the quarry.

I sat for a moment and looked up at the cliff face. I could hardly believe that I made it down without falling. However, I did not have much time to spare if I wanted to be at the spot where we had arranged to meet at noon.

The sun was high in the sky, so I knew that 12 o'clock was not far off. Looking at my uniform, I realized that I had to give myself a good clean up. Luckily it was mostly just dry dirt and dust, which came off fairly easily.

It did not take me long to get out of the quarry. I could see the tree in the distance where we had arranged to meet. As I headed towards it I could see some small farms, but not, as yet, any people. If I did meet anyone, I was prepared. After all, I told myself, I was not a German prisoner of war, but a Polish volunteer in British uniform, so my broken English should not be questioned.

Our meeting place was close to a country lane, which I named 'Karl's Lane.' It was flanked on both sides by hedges in white blossom. The fields around were covered in daffodils, cowslips and white daisies. A peaceful feeling came over me. Being away from the camp all by myself made me feel as if I was in a different world.

Several couples were taking their Sunday afternoon stroll along this beautiful lane, but no one was taking any notice of me. I stood at the foot of the big tree, my eyes anxiously searching the countryside.

After about ten minutes, which felt more like ten hours, I saw someone in the distance, walking alone, and I knew it must be Sue. I got up from where I was sitting and started walking towards her. My heart was pounding so fast that I thought it would jump out of my chest.

Before long we were in each other's arms. I held Sue tight and

kissed her passionately. She whispered, “Oh Karl, I love you,” over and over again.

I replied, “Oh my darling, I love you too with all my heart.”

Here we were, two people who had never even touched each other before, not even by shaking hands. One was a prisoner of war, outside the camp in forbidden territory, and the other, a young English lady. Yet we were in each other’s arms in the middle of an English country lane, oblivious to what was going on around us.

I don’t know how long we stood there, kissing, hugging, and stroking each other’s faces. We heard voices saying, “Hello,” and looked up to see a middle-aged couple walking by with a big smile on their faces.

This brought us out of the clouds and Sue greeted them with a “Good afternoon.”

Before we walked on, arm in arm, Sue took a handkerchief out of her handbag and wiped the lipstick from my face. Now I remembered the forget-me-nots in my pocket. I took them out and proudly handed them to her. Unfortunately they were a little squashed from all that hugging and squeezing. She said, “Oh how thoughtful of you.” Then she put her arms around me again and I was rewarded with another kiss.

We sat down under the big tree. Then we kissed again and Sue wished me a happy birthday. I could not remember a happier birthday in my entire life. Sue opened her handbag and brought out sandwiches, one for each of us, and also some cookies, which her mother wanted us to have. How wonderful it felt to sit so close to her. There she was, sitting at my side, looking at me with her big beautiful eyes, holding and stroking my hand.

So far we had hardly talked, but we had a lot to tell each other. The first thing Sue wanted to know was how old I was. I told her I was 22. She would not tell me her age, however, and kept me guessing for a long time. She was afraid I would think she was too young for me.

After a while, Sue brought out a packet of cigarettes for me. I took one and realized that I had no matches. A few minutes later, a family walked by. The man was smoking, so I saw my chance to get a light. I was about to get up to speak to the man when Sue took hold

of my arm and whispered, "Please don't, please don't."

I said, "Don't worry, it will be all right," walked up to the man and said, "Have you a light please?"

He said, "Sure," reached into his pocket for his lighter and lit my cigarette. I then thanked him and bid him a good afternoon and Sue called out to them, wishing them a pleasant day.

As I sat down next to her, Sue said, "You are really daring."

"I wouldn't be sitting here next to you, if I wasn't," I replied.

While I was smoking, Sue started talking, telling me all about her parents and her two sisters, Pat and Daisy. She was just bubbling over. I got to know all the things I had been wondering about, including where they lived. I also got to know about their dog, Sally, and her cousins. She then asked me if I had a photograph of myself. I told her I did and it was all I possessed, but it was taken in my air force uniform. Since I didn't have it with me, I promised I would send it in my next letter.

I told Sue a little about my family and mentioned that a few days ago I had the first sign of life from them for three years. She could not fully comprehend the devastating circumstances in Germany. I didn't really know myself at the time. Besides many other things, she wanted to know how and where I was taken prisoner. I did not go into details, but gave her a rough idea where and how it happened.



The afternoon went by so quickly. Soon it was 3 o'clock. Sue pointed out that it would take her two hours to get home and she wanted to be there

before dark. Her father still didn't know that she was seeing me, and she didn't want him to find out just yet.

I put my arms around her and told her that I wished with all my heart we wouldn't have to leave each other. She said, "Oh Karl, believe me, I don't want to. I would like to stay here with you for all eternity."

We kissed again and Sue whispered, "Karl darling, I have to go."

I gave her another big kiss and held her tight for a few more moments.

We walked down the country lane, away from the big tree, and then stopped to look back at it. I thought to myself, I must remember this tree for the rest of my life. As we walked arm in arm, I told Sue that I would come with her as far as I possibly could. We both grew quiet. The thought of having to part was too painful and I tried to cast it out of my mind.

As we got close enough to see the bus stop, Sue looked at her watch again and said, "We have ten minutes." So that we couldn't be seen by anyone, we stepped into some shrubs and then we were in each other's arms again. I held her so close to me that I could feel her heart beating. Sue kept saying, "Oh Karl, please be careful when you go back, promise you will be careful, I love you so much". We kissed and squeezed and kissed until it was time for her to leave.

Before we let go of each other, I told her once more how much I loved her and said, "One day I will be free, please wait for me. In the meantime I will write to you." I stayed till she was on the bus and riding away.

Slowly I walked back towards the camp. It was still very light, so I lay down in some bushes and fell asleep. When I opened my eyes, it was getting dark. I waited a little longer until it was completely dark and then made my way towards the camp.

When I got there I heard a voice calling, "Come on Karl, it is open." It was Seppie. He had the barbed wire already separated. I crawled through, and was back inside.