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The next day I received another letter from Sue. She said her father was planning to come to Connington by car some time in July and they would stay for about three days at a nearby bed and breakfast place. My excitement was indescribable.

I mentioned to Jack that my English girlfriend and her family were coming from Yorkshire to pay me a visit. He thought it was a wonderful idea and suggested that I tell the camp commander, but not to mention that she was my girl friend. The commander would have to give written consent for me to leave the camp and spend the day with the family because they would most likely take me more than five miles from the camp. Mr. Ridgway would also have to sign a note every time he picked me up, to say that he took full responsibility for me while I was with them. Jack didn't think that there would be a problem as long I took care of the mail.

I hardly closed my eyes all night, wondering what it would be like to see Sue again, wondering if she had changed a little, wondering if the family would be allowed inside the camp. I would be proud to show them my post office and the place where I lived.

The following day, although I had a hard time concentrating on my work, I managed to get an appointment with the new commander. I found he was a very nice person. He assured me that it would be all right for the Ridgways to come and visit me, as long as I took care of my postal duties. They could pick me up in the morning and bring me back at night. I was thrilled to think that I would be allowed to spend a whole day with them while they were here.

<u>Tel: Sawtry 55 & 18</u>	
<u>P.O. No. PASS</u>	
No.: - A 870368	Rank: - Ogefr. Name: - Kern, K
of 59 IOW Camp, Wood Walton Lane, Sawtry-Hunt	
has authority to proceed beyond the 5 mile limit of this Camp for the	
purpose of Visiting/Proceeding to.. Peterborough	
between the hours.. 10.00	to.. 22.00 ..hrs, on 26. 3. 48
Issued at Sawtry Camp	(R.T. Hook) <i>B. Sahymer</i> Capt. Adjutant, No. 59 German IOW Camp.
Date: - 26. 3. 48	

Here is the original permit issued by the Commander.

My work in the post office was very demanding. All the men in the camp were allowed to receive personal mail. Only once in a while was I asked to hold the mail for the commander to look through it, and very seldom did he open a letter and read it. Whenever he did, I had to reseal it and the commander put a label on it, to say it had been censored.

When I had some spare time during the day I went for a walk with Struppie. Once in a while, when he was not on a leash, he would chase a rat and instantly kill it. He never lost one. He was by now very obedient to me, except when it came to rats. Nothing in the world would stop him when he was chasing one.

While I was in the village, I looked in on the Pettifer family. Mrs. Pettifer, as always very polite and friendly, asked me to come into the house. She was very excited to hear about the upcoming performance that our group in the camp was putting on for anyone who wanted to attend. We had quite a nice size band and also an amateur acting group, which put on plays. They usually performed outdoors, unless the weather was bad, in which case it was held in a large military tent, and the number of spectators had to be restricted. There was a small fee to get in, the proceeds of which were used to buy new instruments for the band.

During our conversation I told Mrs. Pettifer about Sue's family coming to visit and asked if she knew of a bed and breakfast place near by. She recommended a nice little place approximately three miles away

and promised to have the address and phone number the next time I was in the area.

On our way back to the British compound, I stopped to pick a few buttercups to cheer up my room. Before we got to the gate I met with one of the tailors, who lived in a Nissen hut on the outskirts of the camp. These men made tailor-made uniforms for the officers of the camp staff.

We talked a little about home and family. His brother was a prisoner of war in Russia. His family was all right but they hadn't heard a word from his brother.

I told him that I was going to have visitors from Bradford, and wondered if he could make me a jacket and a pair of trousers, without the yellow sun and the yellow stripes on them. He promised that he would if I could do him a favor also. He wanted me to send a parcel for him without it being checked.

It was agreed that he would bring his parcel to my office and then measure me for a new outfit there. I was thrilled to think that I would have something nice to wear when Sue and her parents came to visit.

Every time I walked around outside the camp, I was reminded of the beautiful trees that grew in the part of Germany where I came from. We owned a large fruit orchard and I spent a lot of time there with my brother and sisters when we were children.

I wondered what kind of help my father would have to take care of all the trees and to cut the grass for our caged rabbits. When the apples and pears started to ripen, my brother and I would go to the orchard after school and at weekends. It was a good half hour's walk from our house. We gathered all the fallen fruit for my mother to make jelly. We also grew our own vegetables, and though we had to carry the water from a small brook nearby, we had a lot of fun doing it. I figured that my sisters would have to do all that kind of work now.

I took Struppie to the kitchen to pick up some food for him and to have some supper and a 'cuppa' [cup of tea] myself. Jack was there too and he told me that the camp commander had suggested that I act as assistant interpreter in emergencies. The other interpreter, whose name was Bruno, was frequently not available. Usually an interpreter was needed when one of our men was punished, or if there was an accident, or someone was taken to hospital.

I reminded Jack that when I had parcels to get ready for the post

office, I practically worked all day and all night. He assured me that they had thought about getting me some extra help for a day or two, when I was overloaded with work.

The next morning, there was a letter from Sue. I couldn't wait until I had delivered the rest of the mail so I opened it right there in the guardhouse. She informed me that they would be coming to visit me on Saturday, July 17th, only six days away. I started to count the days, hours and minutes until we were together again.

I looked in on the tailor, to see how he was progressing with my tailor-made uniform. The jacket was ready and I thought it looked beautiful. It was shorter than the standard British army jacket, with a zipper in the front instead of buttons. It looked better on me than the long one, which I was issued with, because I am not very tall. The tailor told me that the trousers would be ready in about two days and added in a whisper that he would bring them to the post office with another parcel for Germany. I assured him that was all right.

The next lot of 90 parcels was ready for inspection. Though a lot of the original restrictions had been eased, each parcel still had to be presented in an open condition, so that all the contents could be checked by the captain. That could take hours, depending on what kind of mood the captain was in and how busy his schedule was.

Jack and I then took them to my post office and I had to wrap them all, checking each address and making sure everything was correct before I could take them to the village post office.

That evening, a young man called Fritz was sent to my post office by the German camp commander to help me out. I showed him how to rewrap parcels and to get them ready. I noticed that he had very nice handwriting and all his work was very neat.

In the early morning hours we were finally finished and we had a cup of coffee and a chat. He said that he would be helping me for another two days and that he did all of the office work for our German camp commander.

The next morning Jack, Fritz and I drove into the village to mail our cargo of 93 parcels. As usual, we had a good chat with Ken, who was always very friendly and had a joke or two to tell us. Ken said to me, "If you keep this up I am going to have to hire extra help." I told him that I already had help, and introduced Fritz to him.

On our way back we stopped off at Jack's girlfriend's house. He suggested we go for a walk until he returned. That was perfectly all right with us as we usually had some time to spare after we had delivered parcels.

It was a beautiful day, sunny with just a few clouds in the sky. We followed a small stream until we came to some willows where the grass was lush and green. We sat down and talked.

Fritz came from the northeast of Germany. He was very tall with wavy blond hair and clear blue eyes, typical of that region. He told me his family was OK but the Russians occupied the area and that when his repatriation came around, he would not go back to where his parents lived. He had served his apprenticeship as an accountant and he didn't trust the Russians. By the way his parents worded their letter, he could tell that they were afraid it would be censored, and they were not telling him what was actually going on. He had a friend in Bavaria, which was occupied by Americans, and he would give that as his home address.

After a while, Fritz fell asleep, lying in the grass. I lay beside him, resting my head on my hands and gazing up at the sky. It felt good to feel the warmth of the sun on my face. Watching the clouds go by gave me such a feeling of peace and tranquility, and I let my thoughts wander.

I saw my life drifting by before me. I felt that three years of war and over two years as a prisoner were a long time out of my young life to be wasted. I vividly remembered the time we were being heavily shelled by the enemy. Our unit was seeking shelter at a farmyard in Belgium. While some of us were in the cellar below, we had some direct hits on the farmhouse above us. The results were devastating.

I was hit by shrapnel, but thanks to my leather map case, my injuries were very slight. The leather case took the brunt of the blast. My friend next to me however, who was also my machine gunner, lost both of his legs. One of them was completely ripped off and the other one was only dangling on bits of flesh. I carried him across my shoulders to the nearest field hospital, which was only about 200 feet away.

On the way there we were barraged by grenade fire. My friend, who amazingly was conscious in spite of his severe injuries, begged me to leave him and seek shelter for myself. To my deep sorrow, when I finally got him there, he had slipped out of this world. [He had just returned from leave, during which he got married.]

My thoughts came back to where I was, lying in the grass, alive and well. I realized that I should thank God for having spared me such terrible suffering, instead of complaining.

The sound of the Land Rover's horn brought me back to reality. Jack had ended his visit with his girlfriend and we returned to camp.

Before it got dark I took Struppie for a walk through the fields. Some of the farmers were making hay. It reminded me of the days when as boys we used to help the farmers in our village bring in the hay. I noticed dragonflies dancing and hovering over a pond. Their wings were shimmering in the evening sun and reflecting all the colors of the rainbow.

Struppie watched them, as fascinated as I was. I was very glad that Struppie had found the door to my Nissen hut, and that I had him as a friend. Sometimes I even talked to him in German and he seemed to understand me.

On Friday I arranged for a meeting with the colonel, the camp commander, to make certain that the arrangements were all right for the visit of Sue's parents. He told me that he would leave a paper at the guardhouse, which her father had to sign each morning when they came to pick me up. I also had to be signed back in, in the evening. He assured me that I could bring them into the camp to show them my post office and the place where I lived.

The evening went by very quickly. My smart new outfit was ready and I had also acquired a tie and a new blue air force shirt from the quartermaster, for whom I did a favor once in a while. I cleaned my place up and tried to make it look nice. Besides the clothes I wore, I didn't have many possessions.

My bed consisted of a wooden frame with a straw mattress, very plain but luxurious compared to the rest of the men in the camp. There was also a small table and a chair. Chairs were unheard of in the barracks. At the foot of the bed I had a blanket laid on the floor, which was Struppie's bed and no doubt a luxury for a farm dog. Besides that, I had a wall shelf, which was given to me by my friend Jack. On it I had an ashtray and a coffee mug, given me by the canteen. At the very end of the shelf stood my most precious possession, a picture of my darling Sue. A luxurious 'apartment' for a prisoner of war.

There was one more thing I still had to do, and that was to give Struppie a wash. I wanted him to look his best for Saturday. Most wash

places in the camp were nothing but a metal roof over a row of taps.

The shower was next to it and consisted of four posts with a corrugated iron roof. The sides were about three feet of corrugated iron, which started about 18 inches up from the ground. Otherwise it was open. One did not see many men using the shower on a cold day, because there was no hot water.

This evening I got a bucket of hot water from the kitchen and gave Struppie a good wash in front of my Nissen hut. He didn't care much for water and snarled at me. Since it was a warm evening I let him run, so that he could shake himself dry.

Now all the preparations were taken care of and I just hoped that the weather would cooperate for the weekend.

I realized that this would be the first time we had a chance to be together without having to worry about being seen or caught. We had had two years of hiding and dodging guards, always having to look over our shoulders for fear of being seen. It was an unusual way to fall in love. But as Sue once wrote in one of her letters, no one would ever be able to stop us from loving each other. I wouldn't have missed one minute of it. Being in love was a beautiful thing, especially as a prisoner of war.