**Born during a Dramatic Flight – a Book Review**


*Translation from the original German-language text to American English is provided by Alex Herzog, Boulder, CO, with editorial assistance from Dr. Nancy Herzog.*

Christa Enchelmaier, author of the book, was born in a work camp. Her book documents her childhood trauma.

**GANDEKESSE.** – Christa vividly remembers the house on Birkenallee in Ganderkesee. The now 76-year-old Christa Enchelmaier, nee Hasenfuss, moved into the place in 1950 along with her parents and siblings. The place had neither electric power nor a running water connection. At the time, this did not bother the family. They were glad finally to have a home, for what the family had lived through before was simply gruesome. To work through the memories of her difficult childhood, Christa Enchelmaier, who now lives in Brackenheim in Baden-Württemberg, has written her personal story entitled *Unterwegs geboren – Eine heimatlose Kindheit* [*Born on the Road. A Homeless Childhood*].

Her story begins with the emigration of her great-great-grandparents, who in 1833 moved from the Schwabian village of Kleinheppach in the Remstal all the way to Bessarabia on the Black Sea. But after five generations, Bessarabian Germans were forced to leave behind everything they had built up. Hitler ordered them to be taken to Germany. In occupied Poland, they were to be given a farm. But before that they were taken to a camp in the town of Laipa in Bohemia, where Christa Enchelmaier was born.

**A gun aimed at her**

After a year and a half, the family was finally settled in the *Warthegau* [occupied western part of Poland – Tr.]. “Farms were confiscated from the Poles. When we reached our designated farmhouse, food was still sitting on the table,” reports the 76-year-old. Shortly after the family’s arrival on the farm, her father Robert was drafted and sent to the war front in Russia. Her mother Anna gave birth to a second girl and managed to take care of the family for three years.

When the Russians moved westward again in 1945, the family had to take flight. But because the bridge across the Oder in Frankfurt had been detonated, they did not make it to the West. They were sent back to Poland, landing in a prison in Hohensalza. There Christa attained the age of 4. “Everything we had was taken from us,” she remembers.

But things got even worse. “They wanted to shoot us. A Russian officer was ready with his rifle. My mother held me by the hand and my sister on her arm. We were all crying.”

The family remained in the prison for three weeks, after which they were taken to a work camp. “We had nothing to eat. Infants and many other children died.” After three quarters of a year, the family finally was set free. A strenuous trip ensued.

Via various byways the family reached Elmeloh. A farmer was forced to take them in. Christa and mother and sister Helga were housed in a tiny room with just one bed. In 1949, when her father returned from a Russian POW camp, the family moved into a stable on the same farmyard, but for the night the neighbor farmer allowed them to use a room with two beds.

**Great trauma**

For her work on the farm, mother was given a pig. This allowed father to sell the pig and to acquire a piece of land in Ganderkesee. The Elmeloh farmer lent them 3,000 DM [Deutsche marks], enabling the family to obtain the small house on Birkenallee 52. The house still stands, although renovated and expanded. In front of it a larger house has been built, and in 1958 the Hasenfuss family moved to a new nearby settlement.
In 1961, the author left Ganderkesee. She felt an attraction for Heilbronn, not far from her grandparents. Her father, remaining in the Birkenallee home, would survive the death of her mother for four years. In 1997, he finally left Ganderkesee and settled in an elder home for Bessarabians in Altenheim in Baden-Württemberg, where he died in 2003. Like his wife, he was buried in Gardenkesee.

Her personal history had always bothered Christa. Again and again, she had nightmares, remembering her mother, who had been raped in camp. She wanted to write all the happenings in order to work through it all. During her research, she traveled to Bessarabia and searched through various archives. “The trauma is thereby ended for myself. It’s very good that I have written it all down.”

[Captions:
p. 18, top: Christa Enchelmaier and family lived in this house at Birkenallee 52 in Ganderkesee.
p. 18, top right: Christa Enchelmaier signing her book after a reading in Brackenheim.]