

Eberhard Gundalin

My Way Through Life

Eberhard Gundalin came to influence my mother Agnes's life in a decisive way. This is an excerpt from his manuscript 'Mein Wanderpfad'

Summary at page 17 - 18

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German - Swedish: DeepL
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Peter Aspe
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Preface

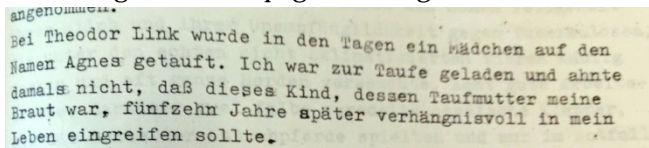
In September 2024 I visited my mother Agnes's hometown, Kuressaare on Saaremaa (Arensburg or Ösel in German), to look for the place where the family had lived during her childhood. I had a possible address: Väike-Sadama no. 1 from 1922. Whether it had been the parental home I could not know; the parents died in 1915 (Theodor) and 1919 (Helene). I went there and found the house; a report about this will come in due course.

The archives that exist about Kuressaare are kept in the museum located adjacent to the Bishop's Castle. A friendly and helpful archivist found a newly digitised database of properties in the town.

Väike-Sadama no. 1 had been owned by my grandfather Theodor Link. He was also listed as the owner of the neighbouring house Suur-Sadama no. 4. At some point in the 1920s there had been problems with a tenant who was behind on the rent. That matter was handled by Eberhard Gundalin, who I had heard was guardian for Agnes and the other children after the parents' death.

The archivist, Ms Äär, had some other interesting information; among other things she mentioned that Eberhard Gundalin had left behind two manuscripts about his life, altogether about 1200 typed pages in German. That material had later been used by his son-in-law, Pastor Adolf Greinert, when he in the 1970s compiled the writings "Mein Wanderpfad 1 and 2" about Gundalin. At first I thought the long manuscript did not seem particularly interesting considering that I had read "Mein Wanderpfad". But a few months later, at home, I realised that what had been omitted from the published material ought to be the more private section, and there perhaps something about Agnes's family could be found that might be of interest.

So now in September 2025 I went, together with my wife Hillevi, back to Ösel for an in-depth dive into the archive. It took me a day to skim through the 1200 pages and photograph what I thought seemed interesting, about 100 pages. Among those there was, among other things, this passage from 1904:



A real cliffhanger; the events the text refers to occurred fifteen years later and are described in detail in the manuscript, as I later discovered when I went through my photos.

Now I have read through the material, selected what is interesting, processed the images, done OCR, translated, and finally edited the texts as carefully as possible. The material has now shrunk to about 20 pages, containing what is of greatest interest. I have included quite a bit of surrounding information to give a sense of the person Gundalin and the period in Kuressaare around the time Agnes was there.

In the text I have indicated which pages in the original manuscript the text comes from. Sometimes there are large jumps between pages; I have marked those with tildes. Excerpts from pages I have marked with dashed lines. And my comments appear within brackets.

Several important passages I have marked with lines in the margins; you fast readers can make do with those texts, as they contain the essence of the manuscript.

Some places have other names nowadays: Reval is called Tallinn, Ösel is called Saaremaa, Arensburg is called Kuressaare, Moon is called Muhu, Dorpat is called Tartu.

For me, what remains is to try to sort out all the people mentioned, how they are related, and to draw up a family tree. Furthermore, there are some details in the material that I have not included here, which I will take a closer look at.

So here is the material now—happy reading!

Get in touch if you wonder about anything or have comments.

Peter Aspe, 2025-11-14

About the Person

Headmaster Eberhard Gundalin was born on 6 August 1880 in Arensburg on the island of Ösel as the son of the pharmacist Oswald Gundalin and his wife Sophie, née Eissfeld, formerly Assafrey.

He was three years old when Ösel's county council appointed his father as manager and medical orderly of the island's hospital. The hospital with its side buildings was located in Arensburg on a small peninsula in the river delta formed where the Peddast stream flows out. The sea, which surrounded this little island from the east and south, made an indelible impression on his sensitive mind and awakened a lifelong love of the sea, which followed him until his last days.

A first serious interruption in his carefree childhood was when he began at Freitag's preparatory school. In 1890 he became a student at Arensburg's gymnasium. After passing his final exams he studied German literature and history in Saint Petersburg and completed his studies in 1906 with a first-class diploma. In all subjects he received the highest grades.

The Faculty of Historical-Philological Studies offered him the chance to stay at the university and begin an academic career, but for family reasons he declined and instead chose the teaching profession.

He married Olga Link, my mother's nineteen-year-older cousin, during the period between his studies and the subsequent teaching position, presumably in 1906.

From 1906 to 1918 he worked as a German teacher at the boys' gymnasium and girls' gymnasium in the quiet and idyllic small town of Welikije Luki in westernmost Russia. There he experienced the First World War and the Russian Revolution at close range.

After returning to his hometown Arensburg in 1919 he served as headmaster and teacher at the German gymnasium in Arensburg until 1939, when almost all Baltic Germans were called "home" to Greater Germany. He and his family were placed in the region of Bialystok in Poland; three of the sons were drafted into the German army and died during the war.

Germany capitulated on 8 May 1945, and Gundalin, like several other Arensburg families, was relocated to the Stuttgart area. Eberhard Gundalin died in March 1974 in Vaihingen at the age of 93.

Based on a foreword by A Greinert in another publication

The little I myself previously knew about Eberhard Gundalin I had been told by Gisela, my cousin thirteen years older, born in Kuressaare, "called home" to Germany with her family, and from 1945 residing in the Stuttgart area. She kept track of most relatives. We met a few times visiting her, among other occasions when Ruth and I visited her for a few days in connection with Ruth's seventieth birthday.

Gisela had no high opinion of Eberhard Gundalin; she called him "the old limper". Gisela hinted that Agnes had left Arensburg early for Tallinn because of Gundalin.

I had read Gundalin's "Mein Wanderpfad" 1 and 2 earlier, and had then formed the impression of a self-satisfied and unsympathetic person. He despised the lowly Estonians and even more the Russians and praised everything German at or beyond the threshold of Nazism. That impression has been strengthened by reading these manuscripts.

Excerpts from: My Path Through Life, Eberhard Gundalin

Mein Wanderpfad. Teil 1, 1880-1918 Gundalin, Eberhard Saaremaa Muuseum Käsikirjad, SM _ 10195:197 Ark	Mein Wanderpfad. Teil 2, 1918-19... Gundalin, Eberhard Saaremaa Muuseum Käsikirjad, SM _ 10195:198 Ark
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Part 1

Page 1:1

Credo

Today, May 27, 1945, on Trinity Sunday, I have begun to write my "Path Through Life".

We are currently living through a difficult time of trial for the German people and for all of Europe. Only the faith in a God who, despite everything incomprehensible and unfathomable that has happened, still loves us, allows me to hold my head high in these days, when everything that was dear to me on earth seems to lie hopelessly and forever destroyed on the ground. There is no German Reich and no sovereign German people anymore. Four victorious nations dictate to us, after we have performed heroic deeds never before accomplished on earth – I mention only the conquest of Crete from the air – their will, and we must, crushed and humiliated, bow to this will. God has placed a burden upon us which we deserve as punishment for our sins and which we must bear in silence. Superficiality, lust for pleasure, dishonesty, hypocrisy, falsehood, cruelty, arrogance, delusions of grandeur – in a word, godlessness – had gained great space. Those who called themselves God-fearing did not believe in God, and toward Christ there prevailed a more or less hidden or open hostility.

And yet no one comes to the Father except through Him, for He is the way. All achievements and all sacrifices have therefore been in vain; they have, according to human judgement, brought nothing to our people, but the fallen will receive their reward of grace from Him who with eyes like flames of fire looks into the hearts. Their bloody heads will be adorned with the crown of eternal life, and the laurel wreath of immortality will encircle their torn breasts. For they have fulfilled the commandment of love: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

In the memory of our people, insofar as it deserves and rightfully bears the honorary title "people", their memory will be anchored for centuries.

But the thought of the future weighs upon us like a nightmare, for we are short-sighted beings, caught in the delusion that we overestimate and overvalue everything earthly, but regard everything eternal as something uncertain and dubious and reject it entirely. Listen to Goethe (Faust part 2, scene 5):

Page 2:1

With tempest force through life ; first great and wild ;
Now is my course more slow, and I more mild.
Earth and its joys full well I know, I ween ;
Beyond them naught by mortals may be seen.
By long star-gazing' man but blinds his eyes.
And dreams his image lives above the skies.
Here let him stand, and shun all vapours dim,
And this, our earth, will not be dumb for him !

Those who are born of the Spirit of God, who see the exalted Saviour of the world on the cross, bow before Him in repentance and have received Him in faith – for them the things of this world have become secondary matters and values, with only short and changeable duration; their value lies only in serving as means for discipline, purification and testing.

Those born of the Spirit can speak with Paul:

“But, as it is written: No eye has seen, and no ear has heard, and no human mind has conceived – the things God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1 Cor. 2:9–10)

If earthly things do not lead to this divine purpose, they lead instead to destruction: the colourful road to pleasure-seeking, the cracked road to despair, the dead road to indifference.

O German people! If you want to be born anew, then come with your sin, your shame, your despair, penitent and in need of renewal, to Him who has said: “Behold, I make all things new!” Then you will receive an eternal, infinitely great, strong and beautiful kingdom, greater than the dreamed and striven-for Third Reich.

Page 3:1

Then your position in the world and all your other earthly matters will settle themselves in a wonderful way; you will find the form of state that corresponds to your innermost nature and play the role among the nations that belongs to you. God will raise up men who govern your destiny justly and wisely, so that “honour dwells in our land, that goodness and faithfulness meet, that righteousness and peace kiss, that faithfulness grows from the earth and righteousness shines down from heaven, that the Lord also gives us what is good and our land yields its fruit.”

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; come into right relationship with your Saviour, and all this shall be added unto you.

O German people, hear the word of the Lord.

I seem to have deviated entirely from my task, but I have not, for everything I intend to write will be characterised by a constant upward-directed gaze toward God and driven by my love for the German people and for my Baltic homeland. These religious-political reflections may serve as the introduction to my life story.

A few weeks ago, I feared the future. The thought of the Reich and of my three sons, from whom I had heard nothing for months and did not know whether they were alive or dead, weighed heavily upon me. Life seemed an unbearable, meaningless burden, until the Lord said to me: “I live, and you also shall live!”

For years I had prepared myself, in my old age – which I had imagined would be carefree and peaceful – to document my earthly pilgrimage. But as a result of our sudden flight from Bromberg on January 20 this year, I have lost all material I had collected and arranged. All documents and papers, letters, diaries, notes, lectures, family registers and poetic works became prey to the Bolshevik invasion.

The only source I have left is my memory, which is no longer completely reliable.

Vaihingen/Enz, 27.5.45 [near Stuttgart]

Page 4:1

Our Family's Ancestors

My ancestors

On my father's side my ancestors are originally of Swedish origin. This fact, however, has not been possible to document.

My knowledge of my ancestors on my father's side I have to thank my grandmother Marie Gundalin for, who died in June 1932 in Arensburg at the age of 72. She was a very imaginative person; poetry and

truth lay close together in her mind. One could never know what in her stories was truth and what was unconscious distortions of the truth. She herself, however, was deeply convinced of the credibility of her statements and stories. Despite her poetic talent she was not capable of giving her feelings and inner visions artistic form. Her creative ability did not correspond to her poetic vision.

At my request she wrote down the history of our ancestors, but it has been lost in the whirl of time. She carried out this work with affection, based on the stories of my grandfather, Friedrich Wilhelm Gundalin, who died half a year after my birth.

Without being able to guarantee that what I write down is true, I still want to write down a few, very sparse facts about the fate of my ancestors. More exact, but unfortunately only scant information, I have received from my aunt Wilhelmine at the Kasti estate of Baron L. Saß.

In 1709, in the disastrous battle of Poltava for the Swedes, Friedrich Gundalin, a very young ensign, born in Karlskrona, was captured by the Russians. He had taken part in Charles XII's terrible winter campaign in Ukraine and fortunately survived, despite the harsh hardships of the Russian winter.

In captivity he must have fared fairly well. He learned the language and married the daughter of a Russian priest, whose name my old aunt did not know.

Page 5:1

A silver cross, which was a keepsake from her, was lost in January of this year together with other gold and silver items.

After the Peace of Nystad – in which year is unknown – he moved with his wife to the Baltics, which had become Russian. The motives for the move are unclear. Did he hope from there to reach his Swedish homeland, or did he, as a foreigner and Evangelical-Lutheran Christian, not feel at home in Russia? Perhaps both assumptions are true – we do not know. He and his descendants belonged to the cathedral parish in Reval, in whose staff register my cousin Willibald Heldt, the last director of the cathedral school (1 Aug–15 Oct 1939), had repeatedly come across the name Gundalin. My aunt knew nothing about his children.

It is only about his grandson Wilhelm Gundalin, born 1755 and died 1816, that some information exists. He was a farmer by profession and as such an inspector on various estates on Dagö and finally on Ösel on the estate Peudehof. As a bachelor he married at the age of 60 under unusual circumstances, which my imaginative aunt surrounded with an aura of mystique, a beautiful eighteen-year-old girl, Liesbeth Hoffmann, daughter of a widow, and had with her a son, who was born only after his death – my grandfather Friedrich Wilhelm Gundalin (May 1816 – December 1880).

He too worked as a farmer. As a young man, perhaps eighteen years old, he had gone to Karlskrona to contact possible relatives. He had also found some there and legitimised himself using our family coat of arms. The coat of arms depicted a Greek warrior's head carved in red carnelian. The carnelian was set in gold, intended to be worn as a berlogne and used as a seal. My grandfather does not seem to have been treated very well by his relatives there, for he never spoke voluntarily about his stay in Karlskrona and only answered briefly and dismissively when asked about it.

Page 6:1

For several decades he was tenant of the state domain farms Grossenhof, Tammel and Nurme on the island of Moon – a capable, hardworking man, tall of stature, serious in his demeanour, childishly devout and righteous. At the age of thirty he married in 1846 the sixteen-year-old daughter of Moon's church sexton, Wilhelm Freundlich, Julie. Wilhelm Freundlich was an original man with a poetic streak, endowed with a healthy sense of humour and great piety, who lived in great harmony with his wife Dorothea, née Hühne.

Eight children were born in my grandparents' marriage: Wilhelmine (1847), Emma (1850), Oswald (my father, 1854), Marie (1860), Selma (1865), Elisabeth (1869) and Emil (1871). Despite the large number of children my grandfather managed to save up a few thousand roubles.

To make it easier for his younger children – the older ones had attended the town school on Moon – to attend gymnasium and the “higher girls' school”, he terminated his favourable lease contracts and moved to Ösel, where he leased the estate Siksaar in the immediate vicinity of Arensburg. However, the meagre income from this leased estate did not appeal to him. He leased the estate Zerell on the southern tip of Sworbe and bought the farm Laumardi, which also belonged to the parish of Jamma. Here he died suddenly at the age of 64 years and 7 months.

My parents told the following about his last day of life. He had gone to Arensburg to do Christmas shopping. As usual he had put a silver rouble in my savings box and given my mother, whom he liked very much, a homemade wheel cheese and a basket of the famous cherry cakes. He ate lunch with good appetite and then set off in order to get home early; he had given orders that the sauna be heated. It had been a chilly day with a northerly wind and a few degrees below zero.

Page 7:1

Shortly after six o'clock in the evening he arrived at Laumardi, heavily chilled, where he immediately took a sauna bath. For supper he ate a pitcher of boiled milk and several bread rolls that he had taken with him from town and which grandmother had spread with smoked bacon, and then went to bed after reciting a hymn. He had complained of great tiredness, which was understandable, since he had left at six in the morning and had travelled more than 60 kilometres there and back.

When my grandmother went to bed between nine and ten in the evening she found him peacefully asleep.

A photograph which excellently depicted him, my grandmother and their seven children – Emma had died young – remained in Russia together with my aunt Marie's notes when in 1918, during the Bolshevik period, we had to leave Welikije Luki, where I had been a German teacher at the gymnasium for twelve years.

My grandmother outlived my grandfather by 17 years. She died in October 1897. I remember that I saw her only twice. The first time I was nine years old. I was allowed to read a story from my reader to her. My reading pleased her and was rewarded with a silver rouble. The second and last time I saw her was in the summer of 1897, a few months before her death. She sat in my mother's armchair, a quiet old lady with a friendly face. She said to me: “This gift you inherited from my father, who could write poems in both German and Estonian.”

I cherish this great-grandfather, the church sexton Wilhelm Freundlich, whom the Estonians count among their poets because he wrote spiritual songs and humorous calendar stories in Estonian.

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His granddaughter, the old dean's wife Rall, told me in Bromberg, where I came to know her after the relocation, that her grandfather often spoke with great love of his old, splendid church sexton Freundlich.

Of my grandmother's mother Dorothea, née Hühne, I know only that she was a good woman.

Besides our line of Gundalins there were others in Pernau in the 1860s and 1870s and in Riga at the turn of the last century. Since our surname is unusual, I assume they were descendants of our ancestor, Ensign Friedrich Gundalin from Karlskrona. Unfortunately, I have not traced them and have not contacted them.

On my mother's side I descend from the confectioner Heinrich Friedrich Eißfeldt, born 1820 in Parchim in Mecklenburg. During his wanderings as a journeyman through northern Germany, he came to Königsberg. There, by chance, he boarded a coastal vessel from Arensburg when, in a seaman's tavern, he learned from the captain that in Arensburg, a small flourishing spa town, there were some pastry bakers but no real confectioners. At the end of autumn 1842 he arrived there and soon gained a foothold by shortly thereafter receiving the master craftsman's title in the bakers' guild. He opened a confectionery shop that was modern for its time and local conditions, took over the finances of the noble resort and the Societets House, and finally bought the inn, the so-called "sharp corner", on Gerichtsstraße, not far from the market square. He achieved solid prosperity. In 1847 he married Louise, née Falkenberg, the seventeen-year-old daughter of a master goldsmith in Helsinki.

Page 9:1 (excerpt)

My grandmother had, during the spring of 1847, moved to her brother-in-law Helenius and his wife, her eighteen-year-old sister Friederike, on the island of Runö, where Helenius was Swedish pastor.

But her stay on the island did not last long. During a visit to Arensburg, undertaken to make extensive purchases for the winter, a storm broke out that lasted several days. The journey back to Runö was delayed and had to be postponed several times. They used the involuntary stay to attend a family evening at the Societets House. There my grandfather met the young, cheerful and beautiful Swede, fell in love with her at first sight, became engaged to her, and celebrated as soon as possible a joyful wedding with her, at which, it is said, such wonderful cakes were served that they were spoken of for years afterwards.

There are probably few couples as different from each other as my maternal grandparents. He was capable, diligent, serious, dutiful and responsible; she was light-hearted and cheerful, an eternal child even into old age, who saw only the bright sides of life and skilfully avoided everything difficult and burdensome.

He was in all respects, including financially, the soul of the house; she was its adornment, but almost exclusively decorative.

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Page 17:1

My wife's ancestors My wife's ancestors come from Courland. Rudolf Link, born 1825 in Windau (Ventspils), was an honourable and solid master butcher, married in his first marriage to Emilie Geyde, daughter of the potter-master Geyde in Goldingen. For unknown reasons he moved to Ösel, where he became a farmer. Perhaps he was drawn there because his eldest son Ernst had a secure position.

But on Ösel he had no luck materially. He constantly struggled with lack of money. He had five children from his first marriage: Emilie, Ernst (my wife's father), Theodor, Ferdinand and Theophilie. His first wife, said to have been very beautiful, died young. He soon entered a second marriage with a poor girl, Amanda Lorenzson, daughter of the principal of the teachers' college in Karmel.

This marriage also resulted in five children: Ella, Rudolf, Reinhold, Hans and Konstantin.

I remember him only faintly. In the 1890s he lived with his son Theodor, who was cashier in the business of the leather dealer Consul Wildenberg and who supported him and his family. He often sat at the window, an old gnarly man, looking at the few passers-by and drumming mechanically with his fingers on the window sill.

He was not without humour. When his second wife asked him for money for the household, he called her "a miserable person", but then with a grand gesture handed over his wallet, in which a few copper coins lived a quiet life, with the words: "Take everything."

He died, if I am not mistaken, in 1898 at the age of 73.

His children all became capable people; the three daughters married young.

I knew them all well, except Ferdinand Link, who owned a technical business in Moscow and had married a Russian woman. He also had ten children.

Page 18:1

His brother Johann, born 1822 in Windau, owner of a veneer factory in Petersburg, was married to Dorothea Spring, born 1826 in Riga. He was a very capable man who, despite his modest education, attained respect and wealth. He had two daughters: Wilhelmine and Karoline (born 1858, my wife's mother), and a son, Julius. He died at a young age of pneumonia.

His widow remarried her managing director Habold, a German citizen, with whom she had three daughters: Emilie, Henriette and Katharina. Habold, who managed the factory excellently, suffered major losses because of a fraudulent friend. This affected him so severely that he fell into melancholy and finally into madness.

The widow moved with her daughters from her second marriage to Arensburg, where my future father-in-law (Ernst Link) had opened a butcher's shop, was tenant of several farms and conducted a lively cattle trade. She had saved capital from her factory in Petersburg. In her hospitable house, where one danced on Saturdays during autumn and winter, my father also socialised. As a curiosity he told that for supper they always served milk porridge as dessert, but that it was always somewhat burned, which, however, did not affect the good mood.

My uncle August Eißfeldt made a futile attempt to take her daughter Emilie, called Mila, home as his bride.

He is said to have tried to win her heart by giving her oranges, but these were rotten, so not only did they fail in their purpose, they also completely discredited him in her eyes.

When the widow's daughters had finished their schooling at the higher girls' school, she moved to Riga, where she bought a house. All three daughters, who were very beautiful girls, married there within a short time. My wife has clear personal memories only of her grandfather Rudolf Link; she was fifteen years old when he died. She saw her grandmother Habold only fleetingly as a small girl, so she has only vague memories of her.

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Around sixty years of age Mrs Habold died of kidney disease. She was a very resolute woman with good humour.

When Adolf Schubert, a genuine Arensburg native and teacher of German, proposed to her daughter Mila, Mrs Habold declared plainly that she could not entrust him with her child, because she had from reliable sources learned that, due to a dissolute life as a theology student in Dorpat, he had diseased feet; she would give her daughter only to a healthy man. Adolf Schubert, being a genuine islander, did not say a word, unbuttoned his trousers, pulled them down, rolled up his long johns and showed his surprised future mother-in-law his healthy calves. She calmly replied: he may have her daughter – but he must pull up his trousers again.

Another story:

In Petersburg, where she often visited her orphaned nieces and nephews who grew up in an orphanage, she had once, before Easter, brought many sweets for them and distributed them. An employee had noticed and reported it to the orphanage director. Mrs Habold was summoned and informed that according to § X all gifts must be handed over to the administration for fair distribution, and she had violated the rule. She must pay a fine of 25 roubles. He asked for her name. She looked at the fat director and said: "My name is Cowass," then left. When the astonished gentleman ran after her, he saw only her elegant carriage rolling away.

Thus, in my children's veins, counting from their grandparents, flows the blood of the Gundalins, Freundlichs, Eißfeldts, Falkenbergs, Links, Geydes and Springs.

It is partly Swedish and partly from one ancestor Russian, but the German part is nevertheless dominant. German has also always been the essence, feeling and thinking of all of us – and now more than ever. (7 June 1945)

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Page 462:1 excerpt, from 1904)

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June passed, but it did not get warm. It was as if the sun had lost its power and a new ice age was near. My father suffered from his shin inflammation, my mother was irritated by her tenant, Mrs Halkiopoff, wife of a Russian colonel who was fighting in Manchuria. She was young and full of life, neglected her nine-year-old daughter, and wanted to enjoy life. She herself came from an old Riga family but had adopted the ways of a Russian officer's wife.

At Theodor Link's a girl was baptised by the name of Agnes. I was invited to the baptism and did not suspect that this child, whose godmother was my bride, would, fifteen years later, have a fateful influence on my life.

A few weeks later a son was baptised in the Eißfeldt family, and I was his godfather. Dean Bloßfeldt made it easy for himself; both his baptismal speeches were identical. The content was simply that the child represented a new bond of love between God and the parents and between the parents themselves.

## Part 2

### An interposed word

This far I had come on May 24, 1954. And then? Yes, then this beginning remained ... a beginning.

Suddenly it no longer worked. I failed to continue my writing when I realised that I neither wanted nor was able to write the whole truth about my private life at that time. For me a period of "confusion and being lost" had begun, which I could only look back upon with shame, and over which I had to draw a veil of silence. Who willingly reveals his mistakes?

But I also failed because I could not describe objectively the conflict that began between Roderich Greinert and Matthias Stackelberg around 1925 and which finally divided our small German community into two hostile camps. This struggle was not honourable for either side. Not only our opponents, but we too failed.

Added to this came the religious split: Here the state church, there the free church. And before that the dirty affair – Boris Danko – Ludwig Baron Saß.

Nevertheless, I have decided to write down some things that may be of interest. The autumn stars looked down upon us then. Winter cold broke in upon us.

My memory is only a sieve now.

But time passes. I will soon be eighty-four. So we try.

Kleinglattbach

22 June 1964

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Page 13:2, excerpt (February 1919–1920)

Roomassaare peninsula, a grass-poor, desolate, ravaged heath. The uprising had been crushed by forceful measures from Reval. (Clashes during the Estonian War of Independence, Ösel 16–21 February 1919, approx. 200 casualties.)

On Monday our school opened its doors again. We somehow finished the first half-year and in autumn began in Untersekunda (6th class in gymnasium).

Then came my mother-in-law's death as a sombre event.

With the collapse of traditional ways of life her existence had suffered a deep upheaval. She could not adapt to the new conditions, her Russian money had lost its value, so that she was dependent on help from her son Ernst, with whom she did not get along well. We also could not offer her much, since the first seven years (1918–1925) in the old homeland were lean years when we lived from hand to mouth. Many silver spoons and pieces of jewellery had to be sold so that we could survive.

At the beginning of the holiday my wife travelled east with the children for two weeks, while my mother-in-law and I stayed in town. We tried to get the most out of the garden, which was relatively large and fertile. When we weeded every day, she caught a heavy cold – the lawn was wet after rain, the wind sharp. She began to shiver violently. I called the doctor on the second day. He diagnosed double pneumonia and described her condition as serious. What weighed heavily was that her will to live was completely broken.

When my wife came home with the children, she (the mother-in-law) was already rather apathetic. With her last strength she drew up a notarised will, in which she bequeathed her farm Tohvri to her son Ernst, my wife, and her four grandchildren – Hedda, Sigurd, Helga and Wolf – in equal parts. One sixth to

each. When my son Sigurd became a farmer, the other heirs relinquished their shares so that he became sole owner.

On the evening before her last day, I sat at her bedside.

Page 14:2

She breathed heavily and seemed to lie in an apathetic sleep. Suddenly she said, loudly and clearly: "You know, Ebo, I had not thought that it would be so hard to die." Those were her last words. The next day she faded away like a burnt-out candle. Her death was a great loss for me, for I lost someone who understood me and judged me correctly without condemning me.

Honour her memory! Peace to her soul!

Entirely different difficulties were brought by the election to the first municipal council.

We had no shortage of eligible voters, but few candidates who dared to openly profess their ethnic group and stand for the German party (saksa erakond). I do not wish to name those whom I approached and who declined out of fear of the Estonians. But I will mention the fearless German women who bravely stood up for our cause: Miss Malvine (Mally) von Sengbusch and Miss Ellinor (Lolo) Greinert. Both were elected.

We achieved great success – the strongest party – with 10 members. Social Democrats: 8, People's Party: 7, Christians: 5, A small splinter group: 2, Total: 32. If we allied with the Social Democrats, we had an absolute majority. Sometimes we joined them, sometimes they joined us.

Baron Freytagh-Loringhoven left the school board and moved to Germany. Pastor Bloßfeld left as well. Pastor Greinert replaced him. Konstantin became chairman of the school board.

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Page 20:2, excerpt (1918–1925)

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When we had completed the move, I was exhausted, not only because of the intense work but even more because of a deep depression into which I had fallen. It is not the purpose of these lines to reveal my private life and my family's intimacy. But the latter cannot be separated from my public activity.

My marriage, entered into on a solid bourgeois and material basis, had not led to true mutual understanding; we were too different in nature. Now, after social upheaval and our very poor situation, it stood on a weak foundation.

My wife had little understanding for my poorly paid work at the school. The maids – some lazy, one even syphilitic – also made her mood worse.

A blessing was the American aid (Quakers of Pennsylvania). They fed our children and clothed them warmly.

Our cousins Ilse Link and Elmi Kesk helped in the household but left for better positions. More lasting was the service of Mrs von Poljakoff and of our student Lully Carstens.

My wife had had it hard since 1918, partly because of my carelessness. A conversation with my wife clarified our relationship and made living together bearable again.

To regain my inner balance, I travelled in summer 1921 to Järwemets to Mrs von Tettenborn, where I found peace ...

~ ~ ~ ~

Page 26:2

But my heart opened when the Latin and Greek words echoed through the room; I too was a classicist – a breath from the Forum Romanum and the Areopagus touched my beauty-thirsting soul. As a reward for his eloquentia maxima (perfect eloquence) the master was lifted up by four strong gymnasium students and carried in a triumphal procession around the festive table. There was no improper intoxication. Even

the boys who appreciated alcohol kept themselves within reasonable limits and made no excessive spectacle when they went home “very late at night at sunrise”. At any rate, I do not recall having heard any complaints about loud or conspicuous behaviour.

More than forty years have passed since then. Many of them are covered by Mother Earth, even the Russians; others are scattered all over the world and hold good positions or have honourable professions. One of them, however, has been sentenced to prison as an SS-man because of Jewish pressure. I raise my hat to him.

With this cheerful story my activity as headmaster of the Walter-Flex-Gymnasium came to an end.

Now the task was to push through Greinert’s election as headmaster. In the meantime Stackelberg had made contacts with Pastor Traugott Hahn’s younger brother (Traugott Hahn was murdered by the Reds in Dorpat). His brother Hugo became bishop in Saxony.

He came from the Weimar Republic to Arensburg, examined the school’s situation, postponed a decision, was indecisive, and returned to Germany.

Six weeks passed without him pronouncing himself. In mid-August, when time was running out, I presented him an ultimatum; the answer was immediately no. He had been called to a more important office.

I then proposed Roderick Greinert. Stackelberg agreed after hesitation; he must have sensed a vague concern that this person could become an equal opponent in a changed situation and under prevailing circumstances.

As a newly married man – his wife Ebba was youngest daughter of Dr. med. Albert Baron Saß – Greinert assumed, after the board’s consent, the leadership of our German school on 15 September 1923. The Greinert era had begun.

Before describing it, I must explain the following:

Page 27:2 (1919)

A schoolman, especially in a leading position, must have a balanced inner life to exercise his difficult profession. And that I did not have then.

My love – I hesitate before this word – for was it really love that I felt for my wife’s fifteen-year-old cousin [Agnes]? At that time I was convinced that the feeling I nurtured for her fully deserved this designation. Today I can only describe my behaviour and actions as a flight from an unsatisfactory marriage. My wife never showed the slightest understanding for my inner life, especially not for my poetic endeavours. Even my latest attempt at prose, “The Seven-Branched Candlestick”, which she was the first to read, was ignored by her without making the slightest impression.

The little cousin, on the other hand, had a warm and affectionate nature and gave me what I needed: understanding and feminine tenderness. That no sexual relation arose between us was God’s preserving grace.

But the fact that she was seduced spiritually remains, and that is probably worse than the physical for a girl at that age. It served as preparation for her two failed marriages; the drives had been awakened and wanted satisfaction. But she has overcome everything.

Today she must be around sixty. Her daughter from her first marriage is already a woman and mother. Her son from her second marriage is to give her joy. I know nothing further of her fate.

I was more than forty years ago caught in severe delusions and confusions, out of which, as poetic fruit, came “The Cross Songs” (Die Kreuzeslieder), of which I write down here a few that still echo in my soul. Imitations? Not originals? That question is not decisive; they document my inner division, which forced me to resign from my hard-fought office.

I remained as a teacher. A teacher's influence and responsibility were smaller. Little by little I found my place. But preferably I would have become a capable farmer or an honest craftsman, earning daily bread by plough and scythe. But most of all I would have wanted to place the poet's laurel wreath upon my head – a dream since childhood, still dreamed now, however ridiculous it may sound. How gladly would I have become a successful poet ...

Page 28:2

The Cross Songs (1920–21), five poems by Eberhard Gundalin, one is shown here:

### **Gallows Wood**

We both must carry the selfsame cross,  
The cross of renunciation.  
No heavier sorrow in life exists  
Than total resignation.

Now your path leads into darkness.  
And mine? I do not know where.  
I only know this: we stand prepared  
The gallows wood to bear.

And with that the first period of my activity as headmaster came to an end. Nothing to be proud of.

5 August 1964

~ ~ ~ ~

Page 138:2 (1941)

On 21 June 1941 we marched into Russia, and despite our great military successes we committed one political mistake after another.

The Loewis family had barely moved out when we received new lodgers, first Sergeant Haase, a very pleasant man from Danzig, and then the cousin Woldemar Ptaschnikow with his wife Franziska – half Polish, half Russian. I have never understood how such an educated man could take home such a woman as Wilma, née Bruhns. The positive in her was her coarse physical attractiveness, the negative – her incredible ignorance and a mental horizon that ended in the bedroom and in the neighbour's kitchen. But I thought of Goethe and Christiane Vulpius. If this outstanding intellectual person (Goethe) was satisfied with Vulpius, then cousin Woldemar could be satisfied with Franziska, about whom he once exclaimed in my presence: "Your brain sits in your arse." Pure animal magnetism can create bonds that remain a riddle.

So we marched into Russia; we were victorious and captured one Russian army after another. The Russians fought without enthusiasm. In July the Life Guard (Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler) left for the front, and with them also Sigurd and Erni. Very soon we received word that Sigurd was lightly wounded – but it later turned out to be a treacherous shrapnel injury.

On 10 August Uta was born in Thorn. Great joy in the Bergmann family and in ours.

And on 15 August our Erni fell in Ukraine.

The message of his death came on 29 August, when my wife was visiting in Thorn with Wolga. My chivalrous son was dead. I could not grasp or comprehend it. My grief was tearless. Barely twenty years old he had fallen for "Führer, people and fatherland".

A comrade writes about his death:

Page 139:2

In Russia, 14 December 1941

Dear Mr Gundalin,

In connection with your letter of 19 October I have been instructed by my company commander to fulfil your wishes regarding your son Ernst.

The department "Fürsorge" has taken care of the transfer of the remains and will inform you.

I cannot write to you as his squad leader, since Ernst was never in my squad; but as his comrade I want to tell you about his last hours.

As far as I knew Ernst, he was always a decent boy and a dutiful SS-man.

Especially in service he always behaved bravely and courageously.

In the group he served actively as MG-gunner II and proved himself diligent and persistent.

We deeply regret his passing.

But in the company's memory he will always live on among us who gave our young lives in Russia for Greater Germany's freedom.

On 15 August, the day of his death, he fulfilled his duty to the last moment.

Just as he wanted to hurry to assist a wounded comrade, he was struck by the fatal bullet.

I myself lay not far from him in my foxhole and later helped carry him back.

It had been a warm day.

Our company had been deployed near Nowo-Danzig (Nowy Dwór), where the Russians with heavy force tried to break out of their encirclement.

They had already made several unsuccessful attacks, but were always repelled.

Suddenly they came with two tanks that fired so heavily on our position that one could hardly lift one's head.

Suddenly Ernst's neighbour on the left was wounded and soon no longer responded.

Ernst became worried and called his name three times.

When he still received no answer, he wanted to jump over to check.

He had barely lifted his head when a bullet hit him just above the left ear and penetrated the steel helmet and skull, causing instant death.

His grave lies about 50–60 km north of Nikolayev in Marianowo.

The place where he fell, Nowo-Danzig, lies 10 km south of Marianowo on the Bug.

That, dear Mr Gundalin, is the information I can give you about your son's last hours.

If you have further questions you may write to me.

With friendly greetings,

Josef Krebs

SS-Unterscharführer

Page 140:2

And now the next letter:

Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler  
The Commander  
Berlin-Lichterfelde  
20 December 1941

Mr Eberhard Gundalin  
Bromberg  
Thornerstr. 18

Dear Mr Gundalin,

A year of great decisions, the war year 1941, draws to a close.

After the victories in Serbia and Greece, the Führer's Life Guard was able, within the army, to achieve new great successes on the battlefields of Russia.

These successes I owe to my capable officers, NCOs and soldiers, who all gave their utmost.

At the threshold of the new year, as we look back on these eventful weeks, we stand in reverence before our comrades who gave their lives in the struggle for Germany's freedom.

Among them was your brave son, SS-Sturmmann Ernst Gundalin, who remained on the field of honour.

Even if he no longer marches with us, he lives on in our ranks as an exemplar of highest military devotion to duty, our guarantee that each one of us strives to emulate him until final victory crowns the effort.

To you, as his father, the entire Life Guard and I personally send our greetings at the end of the year.

Sieg Heil!

[signed] Dietrich

SS-Obergruppenführer and General of the Waffen-SS

Unforgotten by all of us you will be, dear Erni. Living on in our hearts.

Today it is 4 October 1965, etc. I have become somewhat older and more tired ...

And life went on and had to go on. There was nothing to be done about it. Our beloved homeland was occupied by us in August – but Erni was dead. In Ukraine Kiev fell – but Erni was dead.

During these historically memorable days, I believe it was 19 September, Uta was baptised in Thorn. All our children and the older grandchildren were there – there is a photo – but Erni was no longer among us. I clenched my teeth.

~ ~ ~ ~

Page 165:2 (1945)

23 [May? 1945].

At 16:30 very kind people helped us onto the train, which departed at 19:00. We were able to sit. From Ansbach it became lighter. In Crailsheim good people helped me change trains. At 13:00 we were in Aalen. I sought out the NSV. There we received good coffee; bread and artificial honey we had ourselves. Helga and Uta could stay there overnight; I travelled at 18:30 to Neresheim to Aunt Jenny, where I received a very pleasant reception. Inge has become very handsome. After a good dinner I slept like a log. For me the last stage of the flight was thereby completed.

Now our life in the land of Swabia began.

(2 April 1966)

## Summary and Comments

**Eberhard Gundalin came to influence my mother Agnes's life in a decisive way.** Headmaster Eberhard Gundalin was born in 1880 in Arensburg (now Kuressaare) on the island of Ösel. He belonged to the German-speaking upper class. After completing his secondary education, he studied German literature and history in St Petersburg, finished his studies, and became a teacher – first in Welikije Luki in western Russia. He married Olga Link, my mother's cousin who was nineteen years older than he was, a marriage that proved unhappy but nevertheless lasted until the end.

From 1919 he served as headmaster and teacher at the German Gymnasium in Arensburg until 1939, when all Baltic Germans were "called home" to Greater Germany. He and his family were settled in the Białystok region in Poland. After the end of the war in 1945, Gundalin was relocated to the Stuttgart area. He died in March 1974, at the age of 93.

The little I myself knew had been told to me by my cousin Gisela, who lived in Stuttgart. She had no high opinion of Gundalin; she called him "der alte Hinke" – the old limping one. Gisela hinted that Agnes had left Arensburg early for Tallinn because of Gundalin.

In these manuscripts, as in the material published earlier, Gundalin gives the impression of being a self-satisfied and unsympathetic person. He despised the lowly Estonians, and the Russians even more, and praised all things German in ways that approached – or overstepped – the threshold of Nazism. He also seems, at least in his earlier years, to have been something of a "woman chaser".

By a lucky coincidence I learned in the city archive in Kuressaare that Gundalin had left behind two manuscripts about his life, about 1,200 typed pages in German. This material had served as the basis for *Mein Wanderpfad 1* and *2*, published after his death. In September 2025 I returned to Ösel for an in-depth dive into the archive. I went through all 1,200 pages and photographed what seemed interesting – about 100 pages. Among them was, for instance, this passage from 1904:

*At Theodor Link's a girl was baptised by the name of Agnes. I was invited to the baptism and did not then suspect that this child, whose godmother was my bride, would, fifteen years later, have a fateful influence on my life.*

A real cliffhanger; the events referred to took place fifteen years later, in 1919, and are described in detail in the manuscript. I have summarised that section here:

*A schoolman, and especially one in a leading position, must have a balanced inner life in order to carry out his difficult profession. And that I did not have then.*

*My love — I hesitate before this word — for was it really love that I felt for my wife's fifteen-year-old cousin [Agnes]? At that time I was convinced that the feelings I nurtured for her fully deserved this designation.*

*Today I can only describe my behaviour and actions as a flight from an unsatisfactory marriage. My wife never showed the slightest understanding for my inner life, least of all for my poetic aspirations.*

*The little cousin, on the other hand, had a warm and affectionate nature, and gave me what I needed: understanding and feminine tenderness. That no sexual relationship arose between us was God's preserving grace.*

*But the fact that she was seduced spiritually remains, and that is probably worse than the physical for a girl of that age. It served as preparation for her two failed marriages; the drives had been awakened — they wanted satisfaction. But she has overcome everything.*

*Today she must be around sixty. Her daughter from her first marriage is already a woman and a mother, and her son from her second marriage — both marriages ended in divorce — is to give her joy. But I know nothing further about her fate.*

Gundalin was forced to resign as headmaster, but continued as a teacher. Agnes moved to Tallinn as soon as she could.

The sections above form the core of the manuscript for me; a missing piece – one of many – in the puzzle of my mother's life.

The parts I have left out here contain interesting information about family connections, and further context about Gundalin's ideas and what it was like to live in Arensburg in Agnes's time.

The English translation is made from the Swedish by ChatGPT 5.1, and not directly from the German original.