

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**JULIUS EWALD KARL**  
**Growing Up and War Comes**  
*By Frieda Karl, younger sister of Julius*

Our family lived in Poland for a number of generations. I traced our lineage back to 1793 and all the names on both sides of our family – Karl and Werner - are German. This just means that they had been living there for some two centuries or longer. We do not know why or when they moved to Poland. (See note at end of this article.) However, when in January 1945, the war came to a crashing end; our family still lived there on a farm. At that time, the peaceful coexistence between the German and the Polish population came to a halt. Our family, just like so many thousands of other German families, who lived in Poland at that time, did not escape the hardship and danger that followed the collapse of the Third Reich.

In our area, most Germans were farmers, and also, most Germans were Protestants - mostly Lutheran and some Church of God. The Polish population was exclusively of the Catholic faith. The Germans had their own churches and usually their own schools. In the German schools, for the most part, the curriculum was in German. There were some subjects that were taught in Polish. In the German churches and schools the language was High German.

Our Grandparents, Bernhard Gustav Werner and Christine Rosalie (née Leischner) Werner, Mother's parents, lived in Pinino. They were of the Lutheran faith. Although, they did not attend the Church of God services, they still were God-fearing people. Mother would relate how, when the children were small, her father would gather all his nine children around a big kitchen table and read from the Bible to them. They were expected to learn scripture verses by heart and recite them the next day.

The Lutheran Church did not have a church building in Pinino. They had a school building with a large room that served as the chapel. The Lutheran pastor would come about every four or five weeks from Nessau (Niescawa) and hold services there. On all the other Sundays the Kantor who, at the same time was the teacher, would lead the service. He would read from a Lutheran sermon book, and from the Lutheran prayer book. When the Kantor was not available Opa Werner would lead the service. All the children would always accompany the parents to church. Besides sending all his children to this school, Opa would also instruct his children in reading and writing at home. (\*Opa=grandmother; Opa=grandfather)

When our parents were children, it was not mandatory to send the children to school. Only the wealthier farmers could afford to send their children to school, because the schools were private. They belonged to the Lutheran Church - at least the German schools. Members had to pay the church tax, and that would allow the children to attend the school. They usually sent the children to school in the winter when there was no work for them at home. In the summer the older children had to help with the work in the fields and around the house.

We do not know much of Oma Werner's background. She was a very frail woman. She bore twelve children. Two died in infancy, and one daughter died of typhoid at age nineteen. All of their surviving nine children were literate. That was not a given in those days. In fact, I think, that was huge accomplishment on Opa Werner's part. Many other children were unable to read

and write, simply because their parents were too poor to pay the tuition. I think the value that Opa Werner placed on education somehow reached Julius. Perhaps that is why Julius placed so much importance on education.

Our other grandparents, Julius and Mathilde Amalie (née Frey) Karl, also lived in Pinino. Julius did not have the privilege to get to know them. Opa died before Julius was born (1928), and Oma died (1932) when Julius was just over a year old. They had seven children of which, our dad, Julian (Julius) was the third child.



*Pinino, Poland c. 1920. L to R – Olga and Marta Karl, with their mother, Oma Karl, and brothers Adam and Rudolf Karl. Not pictured are brothers Julian (Julius' dad), Eduard, and Gustaf. Marta Karl married Gustaf Werner (Karoline's brother)*

With the help of his sons, Opa also built his own house where they lived when our parents got married. It was big enough that our parents moved in with them. They had their own area in the house. It certainly was not big by today's standards, but people were happy to have their own small area to raise a family. Our family still lived there in 1945 at that time we were evicted - without compensation - and then a Polish family moved in.

All of Opa's five sons were very handy at fixing things. In fact, one son, Eduard, became a building contractor. Another son, Adam, became a blacksmith with his own business. Our Dad, Julian, was called to be a farmer and a preacher. He provided food for those who needed it. Of all the occupations, that people strive for, the calling to provide spiritual food for the soul in need is the noblest calling. Somehow, later as an adult, Julius felt that spiritual calling too.

Opa Karl was not literate. He learned to read when he gave his life to Christ and was saved. He now wanted to read the Bible, and for that he needed to learn to read. All his children could read and write. I suppose that they were sent to some school, although I do not have that information. I do not know anything about Oma Karl's background. I do know that Oma died of uterine cancer. Opa had a growth on his head and it apparently was cancer also.

At one point in our parents' youth, a Church of God-Anderson preacher came to hold Revival Services there. Some of the young people attended the services and found peace with God. Our parents were among them. It did not take long before the Church of God movement took root and the congregation grew. Later they built a Worship Hall (chapel) where, on every Sunday, services were conducted. They had visiting ministers from different parts of Germany, Switzerland and Poland. The congregation also felt that our Dad should be the leading Pastor there. Dad was busy with the farm, but he did his duty to the best of his ability.

On September 2, 1939 the war between Poland and Germany was declared. In the first two weeks of the war many Germans who lived in Poland were in severe danger of being killed. Many succumbed to very brutal treatment. Our parents hid themselves many times. It was not safe to be in the house when some angry group came along and demanded to see the man of the house. Often the men would be taken away, never to return home. Just after two weeks of declaring war, the German army marched into Poland and occupied the whole country. Our family now lived in relative safety until January 1945.

I do not remember much about Julius before September 1939. My memory starts a few days after the Second World War started. It was on a sunny September day in the afternoon, when a group of armed Polish hoodlums came to our home, and started to ransack our house. They forced our Mother, (Dad was not at home just then), to stand in the yard, in front of the door and face away from the house. This was a very dangerous situation. I surely thought that our Mother would be killed. Julius and I ran, crying, along the meadow as fast as we could to my Aunt Emma Hoffmann to hide there. I don't remember how we got home, but thanks to God Almighty, when we got home, Mother was unharmed. The hoodlums had left. Mother later said that she saw us running. She thought that it was the last time that she would see her children. God had decided otherwise.

Our family consisted of our parents, Julian (Julius) and Karoline (nee Werner) Karl, three girls and one boy, Erna, Gertrud, Julius, and Frieda. Julius had a very quiet life up to January 1945. Our parents were small farmers. Besides taking care of the farm, Dad also was a lay preacher. He served the Church of God congregation in Pinino, our hometown.

During the war the German authorities closed most churches. It was forbidden to have any church services. They also closed our church. It was decided by the powers of the day that God was no longer relevant in the daily lives of the German people. What a tragic mistake that was! Those who still wanted to get together and have communion with other believers did so secretly. I remember when they gathered in our house that someone would be outside watching for any strange person that might come to sniff around. Should that happen then the bibles would be hidden. There always was a good reason why the guests were there, not just to have a religious service.

Dad was very handy with woodwork. If there was anything that needed fixing, Dad knew how to fix it. If there was anything that could be built from wood, Dad would know how to build it. Julius certainly had that talent too. It is amazing how much Julius had observed from his

father, even though, he only had him a short twelve years. Dad would have been very proud of his son.

Julius, like the rest of us, went to a one-room school that was only five minutes away from our home. That was a blessing because Julius was never a great walker. Later, when the German authorities closed the school in our village because of teacher shortage, we had to walk for one hour to school - Julius too.

Julius liked to ride with Dad in the horse-drawn wagon and dangle his feet over the edge. He did not care, like other boys, to take the reins in his hands and give the horse a good whipping to make it go faster. He just enjoyed riding along. He was very happy when Mom or Dad did the handling of the horse – or even his older sister Erna.

On winter evenings Dad would often agree to play some outrageous games with us. Mother was not a game person. She liked to watch us play. There was a game where we would blindfold one of us and then go and hide. The blindfolded kid had to try to catch us. We loved to play that game. Sometime we would beg Dad to be blindfolded. Of course, for most of the time, Dad was a good sport. Needless to say he would never find us – or so he pretended. He gave us many hours of fun and enjoyment. And - oh - were we ever proud of him. Our parents tried to make our lives as happy as possible.

In winter, the ponds in our meadow would freeze solid. We did not have skates or sleds to use on the ice. These were expensive items. However, Dad was very inventive. He constructed a square board, big enough for one person to stand on. He made two runners out of wood, shod them with straight heavy wire and nailed the board on top of them. Then he took a long wooden pole and hammered a big strong nail in the bottom end. We then went on the ice on the board, put the pole between our legs, pushed as hard as we could with the pole, and, hurray, we flew across the ice at breakneck speed. Dad's contraption was the envy of the other kids. They just did not have a dad who could make such things.

Since our parents were small farmers, they did not have a farmhand working for them year round. In the Spring Dad would do his own plowing and preparing the fields for sowing. At potato planting time every able body would have to go to the fields and help to plant the potatoes. Dad would plow the furrow and the women would place the potatoes in it.

At potato harvest time all the children would be going to the field and help gather the potatoes into sack before Dad would cart them home. In later life Julius would often tell people how his Mother, at potato harvest, had put him under the potato wagon when he was a baby. There he would have to amuse himself with the potatoes, while Mother helped harvesting them. He was amazed how much wisdom he acquired there – under the potato wagon.

At grain harvest time the farmers would usually help each other out. In those days there were no combines to harvest the fields. Everything had to be done by hand. The men would use scythes to cut the grain and the women would be right behind them to tie it into sheaves. Then it would be stacked for drying. This was backbreaking hard work.

Mother usually stayed home to do the work that needed to be done at home and prepare hot lunches for the workers. At mid-morning there would be, what was called, a second breakfast. Mother would take that breakfast to the field. At 12 noon Mother would have a hot dinner ready for them. In those days people did not have wrist watches to tell the time. To call the men for lunch Mother would secure a white cloth to a high pole and that

would be the sign for the men to come home for lunch. Thank goodness, the fields were flat so the white cloth was visible for some distance.

After lunch the men rested a little and then they honed their scythes. Every farmer had a whetting stone in his yard. Often it was just a big smooth field stone. On this stone they would put the blade of the scythes and then take the hammer and gently hammer away until it was razor sharp. The tinkling of the hammers was always a welcome sound. On quiet days one could hear it reverberate in the whole village. It was a sound of home, of harvest, of happiness, of abundant blessings. Once again the granaries would be filled with provision for the winter. Nothing reminds me of my childhood as much as the memory of this sound.

After our dad was conscripted into the German army in 1943, Julius was not exempt – none of us was - from doing his share of chores in the barn or in the fields. Even though, Mother had a good Polish farmhand, who came in every day to help with the normal running of the farm, but one man could not do all the work himself. So Julius and all of us girls had to chip in.

As Julius was the only boy among three girls, he enjoyed the status as carrier of the family name. This was very important in those days (1931). In those years the rate of infancy death was very high. So when a couple had a son, and he lived to adulthood, the parents were very happy. This would ensure that the family name would not die out. He usually inherited the family farm too. If by some unfortunate fate, the parents died young, he would have to manage the farm and take care of his younger siblings – especially me - I was the youngest.

I have a strong feeling that it was not in Julius' make-up ever to become a farmer or even to work in agriculture. Cows, pigs, chickens, and other four-legged creatures, did not interest him. He was very pleased if he did not have to take care of them – although he liked pigeons. He begged Mother to allow him to have a pair of pigeons. Mother was not so much in favor of it, but she consented, and Julius had his pigeons. I really don't know what happened with the pigeons in the end. I have no recollection of seeing them long after he got them. I think they flew away, just as a lot of childhood dreams for so many children and youth of the war years, were dashed. They never came to fruition.

Julius would have been 14 years of age on 5 April 1945. On January 18, 1945, at about 1 AM, the village elder came knocking at our door. He told Mother that the Russian army was coming closer. He had orders to tell all the German people, to prepare their horse and wagon, and meet at a certain point on the road by 12 noon. They would then drive as a group towards Germany.

There would be many thousands who would try to run away from the Russians. Mother, and many thousands of other German women whose husbands were away fighting a losing war, was alone with her four children. The oldest was age fifteen, and the youngest age twelve. Mother quickly started packing the most needed things. The wagon was not big, so she had to decide carefully what to take. She needed food for us and fodder for the horse. It was January, Winter, so she needed blankets and bedding. If anyone ever questioned the ability of women to act wisely in difficult situations, you should have seen these brave women, sitting in the driver's seat and driving their horses skillfully. The roads were icy and slippery. Most were just country roads. The wagons were slipping and sliding - so were the horses. There were accidents, broken wagon parts, injured horses. Some wagons simply fell by the wayside, unable to move. But the fear of being overtaken by the Russians kept the long trek going.

I think it was on our third night away from home, that the Russian army overtook us. We were staying for the night in a farmer's horse barn. There was some straw in the corner where we bedded down for the night. Towards morning there was some shooting heard outside. I don't think that many of the adults – mostly women – slept much that night. They took turns in keeping watch at their wagons. When we got up in the morning, there was a solid line of the Russian army moving towards the West. It was January 21, 1945. Now there was nothing else for Mother to do but to turn around and try to get back home.

When we got home our house was occupied by a large contingent of the Russian army. It was because of the prayers of Mother and Aunt Klara, who with her four small children was with us now, and the Grace of God that nothing untoward happened to us there. God held His Mighty Hands over our lives.

In January 1945, the Russian army overran Poland and occupied it. Our lives, as Germans, changed drastically right there. We were now enemies of the state in which our ancestors had lived for hundreds of years. The German children were not allowed to attend any school. Julius, and all the other children, lost at least three years of schooling.

We were robbed of all our belongings. The Polish authorities came and took us away and put us in a camp for a short time. Julius had very sad memories of this particular camp. He was called out and was made to bury those bodies of people that were killed during the night. It made a deep impression on his thirteen-year-old mind. I think that of the four of us, Julius suffered the most emotionally. In our parents' house violence was abhorred. Our parents instilled in us Christian values. We were to be kind and forgiving. To be confronted with such brutality all of a sudden was very hard on him.

After a week or so, we were allowed to go back to our house. Our Aunt Klara was also with us in the camp. She had her own three children, and also our cousin Olga, who somehow got separated from her mother. Now there were four small children from age 2 to age 7 with us. The distance to walk was about two hours. We walked along a railroad line so as not to be seen. The children had to be carried. By now Olga's good boots had been taken from her. She was given shoes that were worn and leaky. She could not walk in the snow and slush. I shall never forget that walk. I thought that once we reached our home, our suffering would be over. I was very wrong.

Our home was totally empty. There was not one single piece of furniture, clothing or food in the house - no pots or pans. The barn was empty of any livestock. Mother tried to scrape together some potatoes and fry them on top of the stove elements.

My sister Gertrude and I were sent to the fruit cellar to look if we could salvage some potatoes that were not frost bitten. The doors had been left open and the frost damaged most of the potatoes and other roots that Mother kept there. While we were there, a Russian officer, and his subordinate, who were stationed just three houses down, came to see us. While the officer stayed in the kitchen with Mother, the subordinate came to the top of the steps leading to the cellar and called us to come out. We did not speak Russian, but we understood what he was saying. He wanted us to come out and tell him what we were doing there.

Gertrud and I were so scared. We just did not move. Then he said that if we did not come out he would shoot. We quickly took a handful of frozen potatoes and came up. He made us go to the kitchen where the rest of the family was with the officer. This Russian officer looked at what Mother was doing. His face expressed sadness and concern. Our situation

somehow evoked some pity in him. I am certain that all the while Mother and Aunt Klara sent silent prayers out to God for protection. To have a visit for any Russian soldier did not bode well for women at that time. Mother and Aunt Klara were beautiful women, not to mention my sisters Erna and Gertrud who were coming in to their own by now. After a while, the officer told Mother that Julius should come with him and he would give us some bread. Julius did come back, and in fact, they had given him bread for us.

After two or three days at home we were again taken away to the police station in Slusau/Sluzewo for interrogation. We were put in a small room where already there were many other German women and children and one or two old men. The fear and tension in this room was almost palpable. After a while Mother was called out to be interrogated. Mother had a small bag in which she carried her Bible. The men that interrogated her knew our family. One of them asked her what she was carrying in the bag. Mother showed him the Bible. Then the man asked her if she lives by it. Mother said yes. Mother was allowed to leave that room. She later told us what she saw in that room. It made her very worried and scared. Thank God she came out of it alive. One woman was not so lucky.

After this we were sent to work for a Polish farmer. For about two months Mother, Julius and I stayed together at this farmer's place. It was getting towards spring. The fields had to be prepared for sowing seeds, and planting potatoes. Julius had to work in the fields. Mother and I worked in the kitchen, and in the barnyard feeding the animals.

One day a farmer, from a different village, came to get us to work for him. Of course, Mother had nothing to say in this matter because we were just civilian prisoners. However, the farmer loaded us onto his wagon and drove away. We were gone, perhaps half an hour, when the first farmer noticed that we were being taken away. He then realized that he was losing a good farmhand - Julius. He got on his horse and came after us. He brought his horse close up to the wagon and tried to pull Julius off the wagon. The two farmers began a shouting match. Both wanted to keep Julius. Mother wanted to have, at least, her two youngest children together with her. She sat in that wagon and silently cried out to God Almighty for deliverance. In that instant, the first farmer let go of Julius' jacket, turned his horse about and rode off. This was a direct answer to Mother's prayer.

I mention this because at this time there was just about no law and order in the county. The people could do with the Germans as they pleased. There was no legal recourse for any German. It was in these situations that you needed faith in God, who would take matters into His Almighty Hands.

As the months of our dismal existence turned into years, there would be many such instances where Mother would experience instant Divine intervention in situations that were beyond her control.

Mother, Julius, and I stayed together at the new farmer's place for perhaps three to four weeks. Then again some other farmer came to get Julius to work for him. I think Julius stayed with this farmer until 1947, when Julius escaped to Germany.

I would like to relate just one more event that occurred while Mother and I stayed at this farmer. One day Mother saw a band of roving armed men entering the yard. She knew that they were looking for her. Any German person was fair game. She just had enough time to hide. The nearest place was an empty pig enclosure. Fresh straw was strewn all over, but in one corner the straw was high enough to hide a person. She hid there. Meanwhile, the men came

and asked for Mother. Mrs. Farmer and her son, asked me to come out with them. While we were standing there, the men demanded that Mrs. Farmer and her son tell them where Mother was. Mrs. Farmer did not know where Mother was - nor did she make any effort to find her. After a lengthy argument, one of the men said that if they could not have Mother they would just shoot me. I can still see Mrs. Farmer nervously moving in circles trying to defuse the situation. In the end, the men left without harming me or finding Mother.

While Mrs. Farmer and son tried to save me, Mother, hidden in that pig enclosure, was beseeching God for her and my safety. God is not restricted to any time or place. He is where his children need him most – even in a pig enclosure.

In May of 1947 Julius thought that he could not take the hard work with that farmer any longer. By now, Mother had a little easier job. The authorities had moved Mother, Erna, our Aunt Emma, and her daughter Gertrud, to the small city of Slusau (Sluzewo). There they all lived in a one room shack and worked for the City. They had to clean the municipal building, cart away the trash, and do any job that they were asked to do. This was the first place where they were paid some meager wage. From this very small pay, Mother saved just enough Zloty to purchase a train ticket for Julius (and later for all of us) to escape to Stettin (Szczecin).

Julius was off work every other Sunday after the cattle were fed. It had been decided between Mother and Julius that on his next Sunday off, he would not return to the farmer. He would try to escape to Stettin (Szczecin). Mother knew, that from Stettin, the Polish authorities sent a transport of about 1500 Germans to East Germany every four weeks. The difficulty was to get to Stettin without being caught and returned to a worse lot than what you already had.

Mother was a Christian, and in the most difficult situations, she always called upon God for wisdom and protection. It is hard to imagine what thoughts and sadness must have been in her heart to let go of a child, not knowing if she would ever see him again.

Julius came on this particular Sunday. He did not want to go alone. So he decided that he would quickly walk over to his friend, Bruno Schmitt, who also wanted to escape, and ask him to come along. On his way back he had to pass Mother's shack again. Mother told him that she and the rest of the family would not be home when he came back with Bruno. This was just a safety precaution for Mother. She knew that the authorities would come the next day and ask about Julius. Now she could say that she was not home. It also was arranged that when Julius passed the shack again he would leave a bouquet of Lilac flowers at the front door. This was the sign that they, in fact, had left.

Many times in Lilac season, when I look through my kitchen window and see the Lilac blooms, I am reminded of that day, when these beautiful flowers secretly performed a very important task.

Thank God - Julius made it safely to Stettin (Szczecin). Once there, he lived in bombed out houses and worked in a camp where Polish people, who worked in Germany during the war, returned home. He had enough to eat there because he worked in the kitchen, and was close to food sources.

While there, a Polish man who knew our parents well, met Julius. When this man came home he told Mother that he had seen Julius, and that he was well. This man also had a letter from Julius in which he told Mother how to get there and what to do once we decided to escape – Mother planned that for the rest of us, too. At the end of June 1947, Julius finally was sent to Germany - and to freedom.



By this time we already knew that some of our relatives were now living in East and West Germany. Uncle Gustav Karl now lived in Bad Schwartau near Luebeck, West Germany. Julius made his way to Uncle Gustav. He was determined not to live under communistic rule again.

On June 29, 1947, the rest of our family escaped. We reached Germany in the middle of August. That was the time when our family was finally reunited and free—of course, without Dad. He was already dead, although Mother did not know it at the time. It was not until many years later that the German Red Cross was able to notify us where and when Dad died. The time of death was set at August 31, 1944 in Romania. His whole division perished at that time.

At this point it is important that something be said in praise and gratitude, for those Polish people who helped our family in those difficult years. There were many times when our family needed protection, food, or clothing and someone came along and helped out. God uses many different methods to provide for his children. Sometimes it was not so much their words as their actions that changed a very dangerous situation. Not everyone agreed with some of the brutal treatment that was handed out. Many remembered our parents from before, and during the war. They also remembered that our parents treated them with respect. Now, in their own way, they reciprocated.

Julius and the rest of us could not stay in Bad Schwartau/Luebeck. Uncle Gustav and family lived in an unused classroom. Germany was still reeling from the aftermath of the war. Most of the cities were reduced to rubble - the destruction was almost total. Accommodation was not available. Food, if there was any, was rationed. People lived wherever they could find a place to sleep and could somehow keep their families together. To cope with the influx of all the German refugees from the East European countries, the West German Authorities sent them to different parts of the country where it was easier to accommodate them. Mother chose to be sent to the Rhineland; thus, after some stops here and there, we landed in Rath-Anhoven, Rhineland.

We were given one room in a big farmer's house. At this time it was only Mother, Julius and I that moved in. Erna and Gertrud had stayed as household helpers with other people. In this one room we slept, cooked, and moved as best as we could. Later, when Erna and Gertud came to live with us, the authorities forced the farmer to give us a second room. In those days of extreme shortage of living quarters, the authorities had the power to go to the farmers and decide how many rooms they had, and how many they would have to give up for the refugees. This, of course, did not endear us to the native population. Julius was now sixteen years old. He applied at a furniture factory as a carpenter apprentice. After three years he successfully ended his apprenticeship. We lived there for seven years in total, until we immigrated to Canada in 1953.

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**Here's a note that might explain why the German colony was in Poland:**

The Kingdom of Prussia became the leading state of the German Empire after its creation in 1871. However, the Treaty of Versailles following World War I restored West Prussia to Poland and made East Prussia an exclave of Weimar Germany, while the Memel Territory was detached and was annexed by Lithuania in 1923. Following Nazi Germany's defeat in World War II in 1945, war-torn East Prussia was divided at Stalin's insistence between the Soviet Union (the Kaliningrad Oblast), the People's Republic of Poland (the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship), and the Lithuanian SSR (the constituent counties of the Klaipėda Region). [4] The capital city Königsberg was renamed Kaliningrad in 1946. The German population of the province was largely evacuated during the war or expelled

shortly thereafter in the expulsion of Germans after World War II. An estimated 300,000 (around one fifth of the population) died either in war time bombings raids or the battles to defend the province. (This and more information can be found by Googling "Prussia")

*Germany 1950-Gertrud, Julius, Frieda. Canada 196 -Frieda, Julius, Erna & Oma Karoline, with Erna's children Rainer, Norbert, Karin. Canada 1961-Frieda*



*Gertrude & Julius, 1958. Gertrud & Artur, 1998. Willi & Erna, 2002.*

