

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE FAITH OF MY PARENTS

#### A Tribute to My Mother

By Julius Ewald Karl

*The following article entitled "A Tribute to my Mother" was written in both German and English by Julius in 1988 with the note: "Happy ninety-first birthday, Mom! I love you and will be eternally grateful to God for you. From your only son, fulfilling the mission you prayed for, Julius E. Karl."*

The German classical poet Goethe says, "No generation stands as a hero or villain by himself, but we stand as tall or as low as we do because we stand either on the shoulders of our previous generations or are chained to their vices." How true. On this Mother's Day and on the occasion of my Mother's 91st birthday, I write this tribute to her whose shoulders raised me to my present elevation and usefulness to my generation and in the Kingdom of God.

My mother, Karoline Karl, was born in 1897 as the second of eight children to a family of German farmers. They belonged to the protestant state church and were baptized as such. In the early 1920s, missionaries from the Anderson, Indiana Church of God in America came to their village preaching, "You must be born again." Most of the children in my mother's family were in their late teens and early twenties. They listened, believed the Word of God, and got saved.

Now the battle began. My grandparents were strongly opposed to the decision of their children. They beat them and used force to stop them from attending the meetings of these people preaching salvation. My mother relates how she slipped out the window in the evening to go to the meetings where she met other Christian young people. When my grandfather found out, he beat her severely, trying to force her to renounce her new faith, but she steadfastly held on to her confession of Jesus.

Because these newly saved people believed the Bible, they took seriously the Biblical admonition, *Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers*. Since there were only a few Christian young people around, my father married my mother and two of his brothers married two of her sisters; and one sister of the brothers married a brother of the sisters. All of this because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Commitment to Jesus meant more than any material inheritance they might otherwise get.

My parents made a sincere effort to raise my three sisters and I in the fear and admonition of the Lord. I remember sitting on the front row in church with my mom and sisters listening to my dad



*A young Julian Karl, Julius' Dad.*

preach. The people greatly respected my parents for their unwavering commitment to Jesus.

In 1942, my Dad was drafted to the German Army, and the responsibility to raise the four of us fell solely upon my mother. She read the Bible to us, prayed with us, admonished us, and chastised us with the rod. Since the Nazis had closed our church and forbidden us to assemble publicly, my mother secretly led the little congregation and took us to secret prayer meetings under the guise of family gatherings and birthday parties. We young children were sentries outside watching for any stranger. One Sunday afternoon I was on duty when I saw someone approaching, and I ran into the house to alert them. They were all on their knees praying, but quickly jumped up wiping their tears from their faces and began to interact socially.

The inevitable collapse of the Third Reich came in spring of 1945. Before the Jews were taken away in 1942-43, they had to wear—sewn on their coat in front and back—a six inch bright yellow star of David. I remember how often, at great risk, my mom took food to the hungry Jews. Also, in January 1945 when the Russian Army occupied Poland and all Germans were civilian prisoners, all the Germans had to wear on front and back – sewn on their garments a white six-inch swastika.

I saw my dear Mother with the big swastika on her front and back—despised, hated, and abused. The innocent suffered with the guilty.

One bitter cold day in January 1945, I had to shovel snow under armed guard. I pushed the shovel under what I thought was a foot of snow, and when I lifted it, I lifted the frozen leg of a dead man. Terrified, I cried and ran inside the police prison where my mother was crying because I was freezing. My bare fingers were sticking out through the gloves. My mother had a needle with a piece of thread stuck behind the lapel of the man's jacket she was wearing. She pulled it out and tried to mend my gloves. When she ran out of thread before she could mend all the holes in my gloves, she started crying with a breaking heart. I felt like wiping the tears from her face—her crying hurt me more than my freezing fingers.

Probably the first incident when I recall that the Holy Spirit spoke to me was when my mother and I were cleaning a police station after hours. Tired, physically suffering, she asked me to clean some area, upon which I got mad at her and showed it on my face as much as I could. She looked at me, and crying asked me, "What wrong have I done to you that you display such anger?" I was only thirteen, but her crying and question convicted me inside and focused upon my sinful, selfish behavior.

I look back and see the power and influence of the tears and the breaking heart of a godly mother upon her children; but I also saw then, and see it now with more perfect clarity, the sacrificial love she had for us.

After the war was over we were not allowed to leave Poland. We were prisoners until June 1947 when we were able to escape to West Germany.

Mom read the Bible to us, encouraged us to read it, and prayed with us teenage children daily. In addition, she spent a lot of time talking to us about being born again and serving God. She devoted herself to private Bible reading and devotions. She taught us both by precept and example to forgive and to ask forgiveness. She often asked us to forgive her with tears flowing down her weathered cheeks. I am sure that most of the time she had not done us wrong but was simply overwhelmed by the enormous task of raising four teenagers by herself. As a result of her prayers and example, all four of us made commitments to Christ as teenagers. She trained us up in the way we should go.

Mom often told me how she had dedicated me to the Lord when I was born and constantly prayed for the Lord to call me to preach. She never wavered in that determination and desire. When I reached my early twenties, she was my greatest cheerleader.

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*Left – Karoline’s 90<sup>th</sup> birthday with her sisters- L to R – Klara, Hulda, and Lidia. Their brother Gustav died in 1946. Karoline survived her other siblings. These sisters met much grief in their life.*

**Emma**, the oldest was married to Ferdinand Hoffman. They had two children, Erwin and Gertrud (Henning).

**Klara** was married to Adam Karl. They had four children: Erika (Bohl), Horst, Irma, and Heidi (Flatt). She died in Germany when she went for a visit. Adam died in Canada from cancer.

**Hulda** did not marry and as a result of some childhood illness was deaf.

**Olga** was married to Rudolf Karl. They had three children: Olga (Schroeder), Ewald, and Heidi (Holz). Rudolph left the family and remarried. Olga immigrated to Canada with her children.

*The Werner sisters had two brothers:*

**Gustaf** Werner, married to Marta Karl: they had four children: Gustaf, Marta (Heimlich), Hildegard (Wagner), and Frieda (Stetner)

**Julius** Werner’s first wife was killed during the war. He remarried and remained in East Germany.

*Emma and Julius were the only two siblings who did not immigrate to Canada.*