

Message from „days gone“ Gudrun Rehmann

A holiday in Masuren. I had heard about the pilgrim's church „Heiligenlinde“ with its 280 years old organ and made my way to it.

The sight was overwhelming: the mere outside of the yellow baroque church was charming; and inside the organ with its side parts, that resembled wings, seemed to embrace the observer. When it started, I lost myself in the sound.

Every hour the organist played for fifteen minutes. I had listened the second quarter of an hour and hurried, as it was being finished, towards the staircase of the tower. Expectantly I waited for the organist – would he allow a stranger to touch his treasure?

When he came out - a tender man dressed in black – I asked carefully: „Do you speak German?“ He shook his head. „English?“ Shaking again. „French?“ Nothing. „Italian?“ – „Polski. Ruski.“ Then I pointed towards myself and uttered: „Organista.“

The master turned on his heel and wobbled up the spiral staircase. I followed him and repeated my precious Polish word for „thank you“. Arriving at the organ-loft, he pushed a button at the side and then took me to the organ-bench. I hesitatingly looked at him and sat down, „falling“ into the pedals, because my legs were too long for the position of the bench. Now need became mother of a choral; the hands came into action and I improvised for a quarter of an hour. I voluntarily stopped, not to exhaust the host, and we parted silently.

After having listened twice again to the organist (from below in the church), I returned, somehow dreaming, to my bike, which I had fastened at the foot of a park-bench. And who was sitting on that bench? The man in black, smoking a cigarette. I sat down next to him, wanting to say „djankuje“ once more - as my eyes caught his hand, that brought the cigarette to his mouth. He knew the changing my face would show now, then I saw, that his fingertips were missing, partly also the nails and some of the upper-joints were missing totally. He said, what he must have said many times before: „Majdanek.“ Upset, I took his free hand in mine: the same mutilation. Now I got a presentiment why he was „wobbling“: were his toes missing?

On a piece of paper I wrote down, provided with a starlet, my birthday. Paper and pencil I handed over to him, and he put his birthday below: April 21st, 1939. Five years younger than me he was. In 1943 the farthest eastern european concentration camp, Majdanek, started its killing-business. Thus the man beside me had been four to six years old, as..... And his parents?

Later on, I read on the CD, which was available at the stand, that at the age of eighteen the organist had started his education at a polish conservatory. Since forty years he has been performing the organ-service in Heiligenlinde.

And he is kind to the Germans, too.