

CHAPTER 2

My beginnings were on the difficult and rather unpromising side. I was born in Budapest, Hungary, on May 16, 1944. It was a year before the end of World War II (in Europe) and the city was a war zone and under Martial law. German troops had occupied and taken control of Hungary two months before I was born, and Adolf Hitler had already sent the infamous Adolph Eichmann into Budapest the month before that, with orders to “deal with the Jewish problem” -- a task that he got some solid help with from a large part of the native and traditionally anti-Semitic Budapestian population. Eichmann promptly occupied the Dohanyi Street Synagogue (which was the largest synagogue in Europe, just to give you an idea of the significance of the Hungarian Jewish population) as his headquarters. He immediately walled off a section of Budapest to create the Jewish Ghetto -- and the back wall of that synagogue became part of the Ghetto boundary. As many of the Jewish population of the city as could be found were forced into that relatively small space; it made them much easier to starve into submission, load into cattle cars, and haul off to their deaths. Or just be herded up and killed and be disposed of like garbage. In 1960 Adolph Eichmann was extracted from Argentina -- where he occupied himself with a job polishing car bumpers in an automobile factory -- by an Israeli team. I read accounts of his having being interrogated. He had no clue whatsoever that he’d done anything wrong. He was merely following orders and “doing his job” -- as he was doing in the car factory.

Holocaust survivors tell heartbreaking accounts about their losses of families, friends, and relatives that were killed, and of homes and homelands . . . and languages and cultures and ways of living life. Those losses are incalculable. They tell of hiding, obtaining false papers, lying, bribing people so as to get out of a tight spot, and escaping to another country. Those are, of course, factual reports about painful events. As are the factual reports of which or how many of their family members were killed. But details about *how* their family members were killed -- and their aftermaths -- are not usually dwelt on; they are too painful; or not known about. I know something about two of mine. One of my mother’s brothers was killed in a mass execution and buried in a mass grave. After the war my grandfather was asked to come to that gravesite and identify his dead son’s decaying and putrescent body. He did. My father’s mother, Irene, was rounded up and loaded onto a ship and crammed and locked into the hold with as many other “undesirable” men, women, and children as could be tightly squeezed in; and then the ship was towed into the middle of the Danube and sunk. It’s both easy and impossible to imagine those people’s terror, as the icy waters in the pitch-black hold slowly rose, and as they scrambled desperately around, tearing over each other trying to stay above the water line . . . until there wasn’t one . . . and in absolute and cold darkness. The children, who were short and unable to struggle, would of course have drowned first. And none of the people who did that were in the least bothered by it; it was business as usual. A job well-done; and that was that. Thinking about that makes me ill.

I don’t have words for that kind of thing -- although a line from Claude Lazmann’s 1985 film Shoah comes closest. Shoah means “Holocaust” in Hebrew, and that film is a nine-hour long documentary of interviews about the Holocaust, and there is not a single scene of dead bodies or rubble in it. At one point one of the interviewees says, *“if you could lick my heart it would poison you”*.

Yeah. And many of the people who did those things took dutiful pride, and even pleasure, in it. For that matter, many of the captured Nazis who were tried in Nuremberg after the war ended were offended and outraged that they were being tried as war criminals. Those things weren't their fault! They had been obeying orders!

I managed to escape such an end although, if I may say, I haven't ever gotten away from the *feelings* and *sense of* Holocaust War. As far as "Jewishness" goes, I guess I might be one. I am the secular son of a Jewish father and a Catholic mother. The way these religions pass on "the religious lineage" in mixed marriages is such that, for the Jews I'm a Catholic because my mother was Catholic. For the Catholics I'm a Jew because my father was a Jew. If I'm Jewish the accent is heavily on the "ish". But mostly I'm just me, a secular person with Buddhist leanings . . . and the rest of me is . . . uh . . . Holocaust Fundamentalism. I was born and raised Holocaust. That sounds strange, but it's true. One is whatever one feels and has taken in earliest and most deeply, and comes to mind first when sense-of-self is in play. No one ever gets away from whatever is the most basic, oldest, and deepest "information" one has taken in; it's what one is until one dies. In my case that was war -- and a racial one at that. My first building blocks of what I am all came from there. And, because of those . . . I *am* Holocaust. It's in my brain's very first brain-cell connections and information-storage. I grew up Holocaust like people grow up Catholic, Methodists, Jewish, French, Chinese, urban, rural, lower class, middle class, upper class, male or female, desert or mountain people, or ocean people. My parents were heavily laden with PTSD and very dysfunctional. And I drank in Holocaust with my mother's milk, as it were. It's what I am.

I do feel Jewish in that I possess the traditional Jewish cultural value of having a good education, and having a darkly ironic view of the world. I don't have people to whom I can tell my sins and be forgiven for them. Well, I do have a therapist; but she doesn't judge me or absolve me. She does charge me, though. And I don't pay her for forgiveness in any case; I pay her so that I can liberate myself from my ever-active bad memories. I wish she *had* the power to forgive, absolve, and cleanse me.

I also feel Jewish in that I've always felt like an outsider, unwanted, and prey. I don't feel that as deeply as I used to, at this point, and I'm mostly unconscious of it. But it's always there and it floats into my awareness when I'm under any stress. And this feeling of alienation is mostly because that's exactly what my family and I absorbed, and swam in, drank in, early on in my life. It was the **National Policy** and **Law** of Hungary, at the time of my birth, *that we be exterminated . . . on account of the fact that my father was born into a Jewish family*, and thus officially regarded as filthy vermin who should be eradicated. And we weren't allowed to leave; we were to be killed. Plus, the killers were to be praised -- of course -- for eradicating us. The national mantra was: *You have no right to live, and we'll do whatever it takes to kill you if and when and anywhere we find you. It's what our God told us is the right thing to do.* Can you imagine that? And these were "Christian" people who went to church regularly!!! It was common for a Jewish family to be woken up in the middle of the night by the S.S., and taken away, and disappear forever; they were guilty of something . . . heinous . . . and thus forbidden to remain alive.

And when we moved from country to country after the war, no country wanted us. They passed laws against letting too many of “us” in. It was like Black people in the South having been hunted by lynch mobs -- whose behaviors no one would ever question, and who would probably have been given donations of money to help keep them lynching. Hmmm. For anyone who might ask something like *“haven’t you gotten over that yet? It’s been eighty years!”* I’d say, no, I haven’t. One doesn’t. Go have a conversation with a descendant of a Black slave and ask him (or her) if he/she still carries any residue from that, or not.

I do enjoy Jewish culture’s sense of humor: dark, dry, sometimes sexist and ironic, and mostly focused on family members and presented in terms of the petty conflicts that come with the territory of marriage, family, and in-laws . . . much in the self-deprecating style of the Vaudeville comedians who used to talk about life and relationships in characteristic funny and ironic, but harmless, ways. The mindset is basically that of someone commenting on the ironies and difficulties of life, from the point of view of being unable to do anything about them other than just observe and comment on them . . . and without being angry, resentful, or profane. But certainly ironic. Me: I’m not profane. Buy me a ~~villa in France~~ coffee and I’ll tell you some funny jokes.

I like to make puns, tell jokes and riddles, say silly things, and create lightness by blowing things out of proportion, or making things infantile – like my comment about the villa in France. This is a defense mechanism that has served me all my life. It is in place as a reaction to the fact that underneath all that “lightness” are feelings and thoughts that aren’t funny at all. They are, in fact, horrifying and caustic. And I need to defend against them. Aside from all that, though, I also like being silly and funny.

IN BUDAPEST

It was wartime and Budapest was a war zone. Giving birth, as my mother did, is difficult enough without it being done under a state of siege – and it couldn’t have helped that her state of anxieties, and lack of nutrition, affected my development inside her womb. It certainly didn’t help that within the first year-plus of my life, in the last phases of World War II, the city was substantially leveled. 80% of the entire middle sections of it became craters, charred wood, bodies, and collapsed buildings. You can Google this if you want, and see a few archival photographs of a city whose central areas look as though thirty tornadoes had hit them **(fig. 2)**.

This destruction was accomplished by fifty days of non-stop Allied carpet-bombing, and by Russian and Romanian artillery . . . and, at the end, by vicious block-by-block and house-by-house fighting as the Russian forces broke through and took the city like that: a house and a block at a time. Carpet-bombing is what it sounds like: hundreds of airplanes flying overhead day and night, dropping full loads of bombs indiscriminately in an attempt to annihilate everything on the ground **(fig 3)**. I might add that you’re likely to find a greater number of photographs of destruction of other European and Asian cities than of Budapest, because Allied photographers didn’t ever make it into Budapest; it was under Russian control at the end of the war. But there are plenty of photographs of the destruction of Tokyo, Dresden, Hamburg, etc., because our photographers *were* there.

Fig. 2 Budapest at the end of the war.

Fig. 3 World War II site after carpet-bombing. Notice the absence of buildings or structures along the bombed-out-and-burned-away path of the bombings. There's nothing left there . . . while what's left of the city is on either side of that flight path.

Fig. 4a is of the city of Passchendaele, in Belgium, right after World War I. I don't know whether it was an important or strategic place, but it is shown before and after it was destroyed. The image on the right shows thousands of bomb craters that remained where the town had stood. There was no town left. All the birds, dogs, cats, horses, cattle, rats, mice, rabbits, snails, weasels, squirrels, moles, insects, snakes, foxes, earthworms, goats, sheep, spiders, parakeets, butterflies, ants, chickens, buildings, structures, and remaining residents were killed, as were 100% of the roads, fences, trees, bushes, flowers, plants, shrubbery, and any other vegetation, all the way down to the weeds and grass. Uh, maybe I should have just said "*everything*" . . . but that's a harmless and colorless word. If anything *had* survived, it could not survive long; the entire ecosystem had been destroyed and such an annihilated natural habitat could not sustain life (**fig. 4b**). And the way Passchendaele looked was like a good deal of Europe looked. And much like I felt on the inside, for a long time. Years of therapy have helped. A lot. If you're wondering "*weren't things better after the war?*", I'd tell you that "*it never really ended for us*".

Fig. 4a The town of Passchendaele, Belgium, was completely eradicated by bombing. It and its surroundings became nothing but craters and dirt.

Fig. 4b Passchendaele, Belgium. A closeup view.

WARTIME IN BUDAPEST

The bombings in Budapest that I've been describing didn't stop until Russian troops entered the city. And then they took Budapest block by block, and building by building, from the German + Hungarian military that occupied it. Unless you have personally been in combat, you cannot imagine such things. Watching movies doesn't count. They lie. Neither, really, does reading any descriptions count all that much. Seeing such images remind me of the Greek playwright Euripides' comment about a battle that he had taken part in, years ago, as he stood on the battlefield afterwards: "*Glory? I see no glory. All I see are dead bodies.*" It certainly makes one think less well of humans.

The Winter of 1944 was, furthermore, brutally severe. The civilian population of Budapest was without heat, food, water, electricity, transportation, or anything but the most rudimentary medical services, and was caught between two fighting forces neither of which was going to quit. Adolf

Hitler had commanded the German troops in the city (which included all the Hungarian troops) to not withdraw nor surrender, and to dig in and fight to the last man . . . and that's pretty much what happened. And along the way noncombatants died by the scores of thousands, frozen to death, shot, blown up, starved, buried alive, and dead of their wounds and disease. It didn't help that Death Squads continued to hunt "undesirables" (Jews and their accomplices, traitors, homosexuals, anti-Nazi resistors, and anyone without "official" papers or a foreskin) throughout all of this, until the very end, too.

I lived through these events as a neonate -- along with the corollary facts of life in a war zone, such as the continuing shaking of the ground as bombs hit day after day . . . and the unending fear ALL THE TIME . . . and then the horrible silences . . . and also the stench of decomposition everywhere . . . and the cold . . . and the hunger. Well, it wasn't just me; all surviving Budapestians went through these things -- although they weren't being hunted by the S.S. The whole country, plus all of the neighboring countries were going through the same too. 85,000,000 people were killed in World War II. That I survived, and that my parents survived, is like flipping a coin 500 times and having it come up heads every time. Some might say that God favored me. I think that any Christian would believe that; Christians are trained to look at life's wrinkles through the lens of an authoritarian God who is benevolent toward those who follow his dictums and punitive toward those who don't.

Well . . . o.k. . . . so maybe God favored me, even though I was too young to believe in anything, let alone Him. But what about the other 84,999,999 people who were killed in World War II? And why all the things that were killed that weren't people? And the things that weren't alive but were destroyed anyway? Honestly, W.T.F.? It all set the bar pretty low, for me, in many ways. If I had been born in a slum in Bangladesh I would still at least have had two parents who were mostly sane, and some food every day. And decent, if sometimes rainy, but not freezing, weather.

I did very nearly starve to death. I had a prolapsed bowel; this is when the bowel becomes unattached from whatever point or points of attachment it has internally. . . and in that loosened state flops/ drops/ sticks/ protrudes, inside-out, from the rectum. The doctor my mother took me to pushed it back in and advised her to feed me *only tea, and nothing else*, for a certain number of days; I was much later given to understand that the bowel needed a certain amount of time without processing any food so that it could heal/reattach itself -- although that, just by itself, has never made sense to me. Otherwise, there was no surgery performed on me. Or anything else that I know of.

My mother did what was asked of her and, somehow, I didn't die. Hmmm. Many adults, teens, and even children survived those horrors; but most infants did not. It's understandable but not helpful that my parents really didn't have much mind, brain, or soul left over after World War II had gotten done with them, with which to attend to a child's needs. They were malfunctioning and horribly wounded wrecks. Or surviving rats. Take your pick. My great-aunt Janka, who also lived through all that, said exactly that: people were hunted down and killed like rats (*mind a patkányokat*).

MY FATHER GOT HAULED AWAY

In the middle of all this, my father had been hauled away . . . to be killed . . . expressly and solely because he was a Jew . . . about a month after I was born. I was 17 months old when I next saw him. My mother, being the wife of a Jew, was quickly dispossessed of the apartment we had lived in. She got kicked out and the apartment was given to someone “more worthy”. It had also been decreed that Jews could not be hired, that they could only shop in certain stores during certain limited hours, that they could not use public transportation, that they had to wear yellow stars to identify them as the vermin that they were . . . and eventually that no Jews could live in the city. They had to live in the ghetto; if one didn’t go, and they found him, they hauled him to the ghetto and crammed him in. All the buildings and rooms in the ghetto were crowded, and more and more so as more and more people were shunted into there. And, sooner or later, every person there would be hauled off to a place where they’d be killed. Eventually, the logical conclusion of that poisonous algorithm was that *Jews should all die*. Period. That Nazi *policy decision* was arrived at in the infamous Wannsee Conference by Chief of Reich Security Reinhard Heydrich, who was later assassinated on the outskirts of Lidice (*Li-di-che*), in German-controlled Czechoslovakia.

In retaliation for the killing of Heydrich the Germans killed all the men and animals in Lidice, and hauled the women and children away to the death camps. They then leveled the town down to the ground, cut all the trees and vegetation down, and bulldozed the rubble away so that there was no sign left of any town ever having been there. It was literally eradicated from the map. My stomach is in knots as I write these sentences. And the Holocaust was like that on many levels.

My mother didn’t want to wear the mandatory yellow Jewish star that all Jews had to wear on their clothing so as to make her easier to identify. She refused to; that was an act of defiance and courage, and that enabled us to not be slaughtered. She and I survived the next year and a half by hiding in my maternal grandparents’ basement, and also among various friends. As for myself, I have no conscious memories of, or from, my first year-and-a-half of life. Well, most infants don’t. But their brains will have been continually taking readings of what’s out there, 24-7, and archiving them.

My father managed to survive, somehow. Miraculously. Against all odds. But we knew nothing of him -- nor he of us -- *for almost a year-and-a-half*. He came back barely recognizable and quite crazed. And he NEVER talked about his experiences in the Camps, much less what humiliations and brutalizations he’d experienced or what horrible things he had to do to stay alive. For that matter, it’s also hard to imagine what the year and a half was like for my mother as we hid. As I said, she and I hid with a few friends, and with my dad’s mother (his father was already dead) for a while, and with my mom’s parents later. We had the clothes we wore but no personal home, no furniture or possessions, no kitchen, no place of safety, no job or money, virtually no transportation, no readily available food or water or heat, minimal bathroom and laundering facilities, no husband, and constant fear of being caught and killed for being the wife of a Jew, or even for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. And without warning. I doubt that she was even able to do any ordinary *rational thinking*. All in all, I think I can honestly say that I was raised in difficult circumstances.

Actually, my father did ONLY ONCE EVER talk about anything that had happened to him. My mother talked all the time . . . but like someone with bad PTSD, which she did have. She rambled on in a not-coherent way, without a sense of which things had happened first, or next, or last. And she talked about the same episodes time and time again, but without connecting any one of them with anything else. Her mental processes were in pieces and never got put together; they were so fragmented and crushed that I don't think any kind of therapy would have helped. I feel emptiness and sadness, more so than rage, in thinking about such bad things. Years of therapy have helped me. I really wouldn't be very functional without that. I'm sorry to say that my father behaved like a violent bully towards us. I believe that his highly traumatic experiences between the time he had been hauled away and when we next met him after the war ended had broken him into unfunctionality. Also, as far as parenting skills were involved, he had not been taught good parenting by his own parents, and even if he'd had been taught he never had the time to bond with me. Mostly, though, he'd never learned how to.

THE FALL OF BUDAPEST

I can't help but think that, after months bombings, shellings, destruction, and extreme cold, deprivation in Budapest was constant and steadily worsening. It would not have had much of any functioning water delivery, electrical service, transportation, fuel/heat, sewage systems, medical services, or food left. And Budapest was soon to be caught between an army that was determined to take the city and another that was defending to the last man.

Hitler, besides wanting to get rid of the Jews, had wanted the city to become a bulwark against the advancing Russian (and Romanian) armies, as well as the approaching Western armies. The Hungarian government had been considering a surrender to the advancing Allies, and Hitler surmised that if this were to happen it would be the first of his dominoes to fall. Consequently, in March of 1944, he sent troops in so as to effectively take Hungary over and instituted Martial Law. Then as the war escalated and the going got tough, he *forbade surrender or withdrawal* of his troops which, by then, automatically included Hungarian army units in that city. Well, indeed, very few of the German and Hungarian military defenders survived what came next. Budapest underwent months of military siege, including almost two months of intense daily and nightly carpet-bombing by Allied airplanes, and artillery shelling by the Russians, and then a lot of utterly horrible block-to-block and house-to-house fighting with rifles, machine guns, flame-throwers, snipers, cannons, and hand grenades. Civilians were of course caught in the crossfire. If this had been a movie then mostly only the bad guys would have been shot. But this wasn't a movie. As I said, we who survived . . . and we did just barely . . . survived it for 357 days from the day I was born. The war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945.

I was six to nine months old during the very harsh Winter of 1944-45, during which I came close to starving to death. My mother probably came close to starving to death too, but I'm guessing that. We weren't talking much with each other at the time, and I was very withdrawn into myself. She said that I slept most of the day, every day. Well, there was no upside to being awake. She also told me that I came close to dying at one point, from hunger and the fact that my body just couldn't

take any more. I slept a lot and even now, many years later, I still find it easy to seriously withdraw during times of crisis or tension (NOTE: the fancy word for that is *latibulation*).

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I've never gone back to Hungary but my sister went there some years ago to meet what family we had/have there. She was hoping to initiate some relationships. But she couldn't. Not really. No one talked. Everyone lived the way she and I had lived in our own household: behind walls of secrecy. The younger members of our family there had no idea that they/we were Jewish. That was entirely taboo. As was discussion of the family history. My sister had ONE conversation with a family member regarding family history. And that was with a cousin who almost whispered the information in fear that someone else in the family might overhear or learn of it. The Somogyis (and other surnames of people who had married into or out of the family) were a sealed-off time capsule. And they couldn't have been the only ones afflicted like that.

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Historically, Budapest was at the time one of the most advanced cities in Europe. It was called "the Paris of Eastern Europe" because it was a comparable center of culture, music, literature, theatre, poetry, art, and architecture. It was the first city in Eastern Europe to have a subway. It had streets that were cobblestoned not with stone, in the traditional way, but were instead made up of who-knows-how-many end-grain blocks of wood. End-grain is the toughest and most durable aspect of wood, and you would use that if you were going to surface streets with it. These blocks of wood were torn up during the war, especially in the Winter of 1944, and burned for fuel.

Another of the horrors for civilians in the war was that, in the absence of food, they ate their pets. The siege of Budapest was a horribly, horribly blood-soaked dark campaign in which scores of thousands died of bombs, bullets, wounds, starvation, hypothermia, disease, and being buried under rubble. I know I'm repeating myself; but I *was* there during all of this. At the same time, in terms of National Culture, Budapest was also, like the rest of Europe, strongly racist and anti-Semitic. It's still like that, underneath the level at which the average tourist experiences Hungary as a modern and cosmopolitan place. You don't change your prejudices because you now live in a glitzy, rebuilt, and prosperous city . . . especially when you've never come to terms with, or even acknowledged, them.

Perversely enough, as I said above, the seeking/finding/and killing of homosexuals, Jews, and undesirables by the death squads continued throughout this period; they'd stop men on the street at gunpoint, demand to see their papers and/or force them to drop their pants; if their papers were not in order they'd be hauled away; if they were circumcised they'd often be killed on the spot. Toward the very end of the war, the Death Squads were *still* trying to do a thorough cleanup against an approaching and increasingly urgent deadline. They'd enter basements full of civilians and, there too, get the men to drop their trousers; if anyone was circumcised he'd be shot on the spot. Between the bombings, shellings, and the summary killings the streets were littered with corpses. Dead animals -- especially horses -- didn't lie around long; they were eaten. As I said, people ate their pets.

The stench of death must have been constant. Cleanup-crews seemed to be on strike. The population itself – both the soldiers and the civilians – lost all civil sanity.

The horror and suffering in Budapest was compounded when the Russian forces finally took the city and unleashed a tremendous orgy of their own violence. They stole everything they could get their hands on, randomly executed anyone they felt like killing, and perpetrated mass rape. It is believed that 50,000 Hungarian women and girls were raped, kidnapped, and even murdered (estimates have ranged to as high as 200,000 but “the consensus is that $\frac{1}{4}$ of that number is closer to the truth”). This was no doubt revenge for their own losses, plus the fact that the Russians had been fighting both German and, of course, Hungarian army units – both being armies being regarded as hateful enemies to be destroyed, by the Russians. And then, what soldier on either side of a war is “sane” after months of frontline combat and his or her own sufferings? My mother told me that she herself had narrowly escaped being raped by a Russian soldier; she was about to be assaulted, and quickly took me out of my baby carriage and showed me to the soldier; he backed off, evidently not wanting to rape a mother who’d just given birth to a child. That was decent of him.

My great aunt Audrey was a Brit who lived through the war in Hungary (she’d married my Hungarian great-uncle; they both survived the war and emigrated to England afterwards). When I visited her in England some years ago she told me that when the war ended and the Russian soldiers – who had been bundled up in heavy Winter clothing -- felt safe enough to finally remove their parkas and winter head gear, that many of them were women! Well, the Russians had lost a great many men. A great many.

A SIMPLE IDEA THAT YOU’D THINK WOULD BE OBVIOUS

Humans cannot function well without a focus, a sense of purpose, a sense of fitting in -- even if it’s an irrational fantasy. I think that we are brought up in such a way that we don’t know who we are and mostly don’t know *what to do* with ourselves, without such a thing. People are ready to broadcast opinions about who they are and how they think, at every opportunity. But those are usually recitations of things they’ve been taught to believe, instead of looking at how life actually works. Well, a lot of what life is about is finding out how one fits into the scheme of things; and that works best when individuals are given the freedom to find themselves . . . by themselves. But rather few people are given that opportunity. They’re taught to do, think, value, and say. That has certainly applied to me. My early years consisted of being told what to do, and what to think, and what to be, by parents who never seemed to have a thought of their own in their own heads and who were following a script that they’d learned that *they* had to follow. It was all knee-jerk automatic . . . like actors who knew their roles and could speak the lines without even thinking about what they were saying.

I was brought up to believe that I had no right to say “no” to anything or anyone. It never occurred to me that I had the right to do so, or to just have any personal opinions and actually *give voice to them*, until I was in my forties; so I didn’t know who or what I was, or what I was for, until I was of “mature” age. I would have been a good worker who did what the boss said, and never made

trouble. I was mostly a smart, friendly, agreeable, and acquiescent robot who did what he was told to do and say what he was told to say. All my early girlfriends bossed me around; I was both used to it and expected it and it never occurred to me that things could be different. My role was, quite literally, to agree, be submissive, and otherwise shut up. I remember that once, when I was in college, I was talking with someone who knew something about whatever it was that we were talking about, and who asked me a (perfectly reasonable) question. My answer to him was offered in the spirit of someone who felt virtually no permission whatsoever to have his own opinions. I said: "*I probably might*". I was afraid to say anything that hadn't been pre-approved. And I didn't know what *I* thought. That's pathetic. I could talk about whatever I'd learned in school, but that material would not have been my opinion; it would have been the teacher's. That was safe territory. But no one knew this; and not even I. I'd learned my role. I presented well. That was all understandable. And pathetic. From my present perspective, I grieve for that young guy. Otherwise, making guitars saved my life because it was, for many years, the *only* thing I did that I wasn't told to do, or how to do it. It came out of me. It was authentic.

In fact, had I not gotten a lot of good therapy later in life, I would not ever have felt the right to write my books, or anything else that had the impertinent stench of being an opinion of mine. That fact, too, is pretty pathetic. But, as I keep on saying . . . that's what I was brought up to be like. I think that having spent my very first year and a half being cold, and without food, neglected and forgotten about, while hiding from bombs, in an environment clogged with terror, must have been a strong formative factor for me, as I never found any behavior that would bring comforting and warmth. I didn't know that there was any to be gotten. The closest I ever came to it, until midlife, was making guitars . . . by myself . . . without involving or referring to anyone else. So that was not complete comfort; it was partial. That's not true now; but it was true for a long time.