

# „Pete’s story“ — Siegertext des 2. Englisch-Kreativschreibwettbewerbs des DFG



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Towards the end of his life Pete spent most days on the porch of his old wooden house. He would sit and gaze at the beauty of the land that surrounded it, his mind drifting, lingering, particular moments in his life reappearing before his inner eye ... some had become blurry over the years, others were still astoundingly vivid.

Among all those memories, all the wonderful and painful experiences that he had gathered throughout his life, there was this one day that would stand out from everything else, the day that had changed his life so profoundly.

He just turned sixteen and his mother had presented him with a movie ticket to the *Thief of Bagdad*. He was looking forward to seeing it. He didn't go to the movies very often, because he and his mother were short of money. His mother barely made ends meet with her new job as a tailor. Nevertheless she made him this gift for his birthday. The movie he was going to watch was a fantasy film produced by Alexander Korda with the gorgeous actress June Duprez. In addition, since it was a color film and not one of the ordinary black and white films, good entertainment was guaranteed.



Thus one day after school in January, 1941, he went to the cinema. The projection began and it matched his expectation. But suddenly, in the middle of the movie, a voice interrupted the story: "Sorry. We have to stop the movie. An air raid has begun and we would therefore recommend that you leave the cinema." Portsmouth was being bombed for the first time. Since he lived at the other end of Portsmouth, he decided staying would be safer. He waited nervously for the bombing to stop.

After a time, which seemed like an eternity, it was over. He fought his way out of the theatre. Outside the sun had already set. On his way home, he ran with a heart full of fear for his lonely mother. Since it was the first alarm, they hadn't bought a shelter yet. The shelters were narrow, heavily reinforced steel cages in which you could hide when the bombs came down. The closer he came to their small

house the more he panicked. All around him he saw nothing but a stony black desert. Most of the buildings lay in ruins. The bloody moon in the sky was obscured by clouds gray like ashes. He bit his lip and tried to fight back the tears. *Hope against hope. She's alive. She's alive.* He kept repeating like a mantra. That was when he finally saw it.

His entire house was destroyed. Feeling numb as if his soul had left his body with only a hollow shell remaining, he came nearer and began to search the ruins for his mother. Finally, under one of the fragments of the red stone wall, he saw a pale fragile hand with a slight ring on its long ring finger. It was his mother's hand and it was deadly cold. He felt for her pulse. Nothing. Her amber eyes which were so much like his own would never contemplate her young son again. His empty shell filled with desperation, grief and rage.

The cold biting into his face, he ran aimlessly through the town.

*They* had murdered his mother in her own house. *They* had murdered his father on the field. *They* had made him an orphan. Cold hatred filled his heart and tore out all the other feelings that had been there before.

In this moment, he knew he would join the army.

It was years later when he met the tough German Ingrid with her green eyes and her auburn hair like autumn, that he was able to surrender his blind hatred. During the war she had worn a swastika with apparent pride in public while in private she hid Jews in her basement. Together, Pete and Ingrid moved to Canada to begin a new peaceful life.

His train of thoughts was disturbed by cheerful laughter. His grown up grandchildren poured out of the wooden house into the garden to keep their grandfather company and to enjoy the last sunbeams with him. They were closely followed by an older woman. Her gentle amber eyes were full of love when she gave her daddy Pete a smile, her auburn hair with silver strands blowing quietly in the wind.

*by Helena Wagner*