

Karlsruhe To Kalamazoo: The Krawutschke Chronicle

A Friends' Personality

From Karlsruhe to Kalamazoo, from a little German boy sent to a rural community for protection from allied bombs to professor of Foreign Languages and Literature at a midwestern university, from a high school exchange student to president-elect of the American Translation Association—all these are part of the chronicle of Peter Krawutschke.

Peter was born in 1939 into an artistic family in southwest Germany. Both his parents were graphic artists; his father, and later his brother Hans, were also architects. Given that moment in history, it was not surprising that Peter's father was drafted by the German army—just a short time after Peter was born. Wilhelm Krawutschke was sent to Norway to build chalets for the occupying German soldiers who needed lodgings for their recreational leaves. While working there, he was captured by the British, then transferred to the Americans, and was eventually sent to France—also to work on various buildings. After the war, in 1948, he was able to return to his family in Germany and see his son—now almost ten years old.

During the war years, the German government often sent the children away from heavily industrialized areas to rural villages where there was less risk of allied air raids. Hans, the older son, was drafted, but Peter and his mother Elisabeth were among those sent out of Karlsruhe. The precautions were not

always successful since Peter has vivid memories of standing outside their home watching the sky flame red as bombers obliterated the city just beyond the hills. When the war ended in 1945, Peter and his mother returned to Karlsruhe which was, by then, a bombed-out ruin.

Peter has observed that there have been a number of people who have influenced his life and career and for whom he has great respect and affection. The first of these was Victor King, a young man from Berrien Springs, Michigan, who, as one of the first Fulbright Scholars in Europe, came to Karlsruhe to teach English after World War II. In response to the situation in Germany, King developed his own exchange program in which he arranged for one student each year to spend the school year in Berrien Springs. Peter was the third of these exchange students, first coming to Michigan in 1957. Financial assistance for his steamship tickets was raised by the office of the Mayor of Karlsruhe and by a local newspaper, the *BNN*. While in Michigan, Peter lived with Mr. and Mrs. Wilbur Arnett (his second and third mentors), and graduated from Berrien Springs High School where he lettered in tennis.

After returning to Karlsruhe, Peter did two things which would change his future. He returned to the Goethe Gymnasium in Karlsruhe, and he completed the requirements for the *abitur* that students must pass to study at German universities. He then qualified for legal immigrant status which permitted him to return to the United States in 1960. Unfortunately, his skills were not highly in demand, and he found his first employment as a window washer at the Berrien Springs High School.

One of the ways that an enterprising young immigrant could gain U.S. citizenship at that time was to serve three years in the U.S. Army. Peter volunteered and was sent to Ft. Knox, Kentucky, for basic training, and on to Ft. Benjamin Harrison, Indianapolis, for training as a Personnel Administrative Specialist. The Army then shipped him back to Germany, but did not provide him with a security clearance since he was not yet a citizen. As a result, he could not work in personnel. Instead, he was assigned to an armored cavalry regiment as a medic. However, he did not serve much time as a medic; rather, he spent most of his service years translating among the several languages that he had absorbed from his education and travels. Peter notes, somewhat ironically, that, in so doing, he saw a great deal more classified material than he would ever have seen as a Personnel Administrative Specialist! When his three years were

completed, he returned to southwest Michigan and received his U.S. citizenship.

In January of 1964, Peter began work on a B.A. in Secondary Education at Western Michigan University, which he completed in 1966. In the process, he encountered several new mentors who would help the educational traveler on his academic journey: Hermann Rothfuss in German, Frances E. Noble in French, and Edward Galligan in English—all esteemed professors at WMU. Noble holds a special place in his recollections; it was in her French Romanticism class that Peter met his wife Ellie.

Ellie and Peter have one daughter, Jennifer, who took a B.A. at Bryn Mawr in mathematics and physics followed by an M.S. in applied mathematics at WMU. In the fall of 1995, she will be in Japan as part of the JET program. Ellie earned an M.A. in medieval studies at Western, administered the WMU Foreign Studies office, and then changed careers and completed a J.D. at Toledo; she now has a private law practice in Kalamazoo. Prior to all of this, Peter completed an M.A. in German, in 1967, and began teaching full time at the University, first as an instructor, and by the mid-1980s, as a full professor with a distinguished scholarly record. During the early years of his teaching career, he commuted to Ann Arbor to work on a Doctor of Philosophy in German language and literature that was completed in 1976.

In 1983, Peter started the Western Translation Center, a program in which interns worked as translators for southwest Michigan firms who had global business interests. The program was an immediate success. In 1987, Dr. Krawutschke became chairperson of what was then called the Modern Languages Department. He reinstituted the teaching of Russian, started the teaching of Japanese, and designed a master's program in the Teaching of English as a Second Language.

When, in the early 1990s, several interested faculty and staff members met to organize a Friends group at Western Michigan University, Peter was one of the first to volunteer; he worked hard and constructively becoming the first president (1992-94) of the organization. His leadership was instrumental in determining the structure and role of the current Friends of the University Libraries. All of the foregoing leads to one conclusion: the chronicle of Peter Krawutschke's travels, his odyssey from Karlsruhe to Kalamazoo, from student to professor, from mentee to mentor, has not ended. G.E.



Peter Krawutschke