

Recollection of Dr. Elizabeth Coyle of a visit to St. Ottilien with her husband Dr. Yair Grinberg in the 1980ies

He did not know what to expect from the day, and so set out with a sense of apprehension . The day was a brilliant one, perfect for appreciating the passing pine forests and farms that make up the place known as Bavaria. Initially, these were pleasing to him and his wife as they sat listening to the rhythm of the train and the tracks. But as their destination became more real by the sheer physical sense of proximity, the conversation between the two began to center on the meaning of the visit. As he spoke, his wife began to listen not so much to his words, as she had heard him voice the same thoughts so many times before, but to the sound of his voice. This made her concentrate, quite keenly on his eyes and then on his hands, which were gesturing as they so often did when he began to get excited. Slowly she became aware of the realization that had many times before filled her with terror but now seemed even more dreadful because of the place they were in. She wondered what would have happened to those kind eyes and strong hands had the time been but only thirty years before.

The conductor's voice startled her from her thoughts with the announcement of their arrival at their destination. As they stepped from the train and read the words "St. Ottilien" her husband became aware of a great surge of pride in the tie that linked him with this place. He noticed immediately the monastery behind the train station. It sat quite ageless in its appearance, surrounded by rolling green fields and forests, and, in the distance, mountains. Even if it had had no personal meaning to him, he would have stood in wonderment at the place. He hurried his wife along the path to the gates of the monastery, but stopped suddenly as he saw some tombstones surrounded by an iron gate which had in its center the star of David. He pushed the gate aside and looked slowly over the small graveyard.

A feeling of deep sadness overcame him as he gazed upon the markers beneath which lay the remains of those who had suffered so much. Their deaths were perhaps even more bitter than the 6 million others murdered by the citizens of this country in which he now stood, for they had survived unimaginable horror, only to die here where they were at last being given sustenance and care after years of deprivation.

The ministering had been done by his father, a doctor and himself a survivor of Dachau. The doctor, with the help of an American general, had converted the ancient monastery into a hospital for the displaced persons after the war. When most other Jews were leaving Europe and the rubble left of their towns and lives, his father, Dr. Zalman Grinberg, had elected to stay on in the place that had been the breeding ground of so much torment and pain for his people. He remained to care for the survivors of a people whom most of the "civilized" world had chosen to ignore. For more than one year he worked to try and restore some health and some spirit to the survivors of the Nazi holocaust.

The young man was roused from his thoughts by his wife's gentle urging to complete the task for which they had come. As they walked slowly up the dirt path to the main building, they came upon an old monk, dressed in the traditional brown hooded garment. His wife was startled when her husband began to address the old man in an excited and fluent German. Not understanding the language, she watched the faces of the two men. Shortly into the conversation, the monk's voice became raised and he kept repeating angrily the word "Juden". Her husband's face became tense. He suddenly seized her hand and began pulling her down the path on which they had come.

"What did he say?" She had to repeat the question several times before he would answer. His voice came out low and bitter.

"He said that there is no commemoration to my father, no remaining recognition of the work that he did. He was angry that the Jews had taken over his monastery, even if it was for the purpose of healing people his fellow country- men had tried to murder."

They stood looking at one another in silence for some time. There was no sound except the occasional call of a bird.

She wanted to say something that would ease his pain. More than that, she wanted to tell him that he was safe, that those things that happened to his parents, his grandparents, his aunts and uncles would never happen to him. But she knew she could not make that promise. She had seen it in her own country, even in members of her own family. The hatred was everywhere, touching the lives of all people with the "wrong" religion, or skin color, or political beliefs; stealing from the world gentle people, great people, innocent people. She could say nothing to make it better. But she knew that because of this day, they would live their

lives a little better, try a little harder, give a little more to make the world of their visions and beliefs a little more real. Without speaking, they clasped hands and walked slowly back to the train station and towards the setting sun.