

# Ode to a German Friend

by [Samuel Hux](#) (October 2020)



*Camino Abajo*, Hartmut Usadel, 2001

I lived in Spain off and on for a number of years, so naturally I met and befriended a number of Germans. That sentence doesn't sound very natural, so I'll explain. My part of Spain was the Catalan island of Mallorca, which, for reasons I don't really understand, had become, at least by the last thirty years of the 20th century, a vacation land,

retirement home, and/or a place of permanent exile for Germans (as well as a considerable number of Scandinavians). On the way from the capital city of Palma de Mallorca to the Andraitx-S'Arracó area I loved beyond practicalities, one had to pass through the town of Paguera, in which *Alemán* was practically a third tongue (with menus in Castilian, Catalan, and German): I habitually called the place "*Paguerastadt*."

In the charming village of Puerto de Andraitx, which I still often daydream of, wishing I could live there (but, alas, there's the practicality of earning a living), my spouse and I enjoyed the friendship of a homosexual couple who ran a clothing shop, Werner and Freddy. (There was another, and younger, Friedrich-Fritz-Freddy, who worked on yachts in the port, but he wasn't "our" Freddy.) They had met years before in South Africa. I don't remember—I never knew—how Werner got there; but I do know, sketchily, how Freddy did. If you've seen the 1959 German film *The Bridge* (if not you should) about German early-teen students unofficially drafted into uniform in the dying days of the *Reich*, then you know the signal fact of Freddy's youth . . . except for one thing. Freddy threw down his rifle, and began walking westward; and he walked, and he walked.

There's nothing dramatic to tell about Werner and Freddy. Werner lean, witty, caustic, and Freddy, more reticent and almost cuddly, were a delight to know—but delightful doesn't make a good tale, just a wonderful memory.

More dramatic in the Puerto was the only ex-Nazi I've ever known that I knew. I say *ex-Nazi* not to indicate that he'd changed, only to recognize that his old political identification had become passé. But he wasn't *really* a German: he'd only in his good old days emigrated *from* elsewhere in Europe to Germany in order to *be* a Nazi. Need I say that he was not one I befriended? I'll say it anyway.

But two other Germans I first *met* in Puerto de Andraitx

. . . only to become close friends when we all *lived* in the village of S'Arracó five or six miles from the Puerto. S'arracó is Catalan for Castilian *el rincón*—"the corner"—and indeed it was a little corner away from . . . things. This is so both figuratively as well as map-wise. The local schoolmaster was a committed *falangista* (fascist, that is) with bizarre ideas that did not fit with his native charm: not really an antisemite, Hitler loved the Jews, according to him. Those two Germans, so very different, were "Jaspar" and a friend I will *call*, for now, "Horst."

I have written about, as well as casually mentioned, Jaspar von Oertzen more than once in the pages of *New English Review*, so I won't go into any length this time. When I first was comfortable with Jaspar over lunch and cocktails in the Puerto I risked saying to him that he was the most perfect Nazi I had ever met. He laughed, because I had just confessed that I knew him long before I met him, as a *Wehrmacht* soldier in one movie and an SS officer in another. Although never exactly a star on stage or screen, he was a successful "character" actor very familiar to German audiences. Once in the late '80s my spouse and I stayed a few days in a hotel in which Jaspar had reserved rooms for us, near Stuttgart, where he was the emperor in a Goethe play. It was slightly annoying but mostly pleasing to have dinner interrupted several times by fans asking for his autograph.

A deep Platonic love I witnessed was between my spouse, Jewish, and Jaspar, reluctant *Wehrmacht* veteran, but I have alluded to that elsewhere in other articles in NER. And I am still moved, almost to tears, by another memory. I had hoped to buy a house in S'Arracó that I might possibly, just possibly, be able to afford. Jaspar offered me the opportunity to buy his . . . until I asked "But where would *you* live?" and insisted that summers and vacations there without his presence were out of the question because they'd be unbearable. Jaspar died a decade ago in his 90s and neither my spouse nor I have

really adjusted.

But, now, "Horst." Oddly enough, he and Jaspar were only very familiar acquaintances but never friends. I say "oddly," but perhaps not so, as "class" evidently means more in Europe. I think Horst was somewhat put off by Jaspar's name *von Oertzen* as well as an elegant formality; I think Jaspar was somewhat offended by Horst's near-total or at least aggressive-assertive informality. There might have been more that I did not know, but that was my best guess then.

Horst was really very good-looking, in a craggy sort of way and attractive to women, maybe especially because he did not insist on knock-out beauty to equal and pay tribute to his knock-out handsomeness. A pleasant looking German girl would visit from Berlin for several years, but she wasn't about to give up Berlin for this unlikely corner. Eventually he married an English expatriate, no great beauty but pretty enough and sexy to boot, whom I adored, who gave him a son who became a professional linguist . . .

As well his son might, as Horst himself was fluent in five languages: German (of course), English, Spanish, Catalan (or the local dialect *Mallorquin*), and French. Somewhere (?) I've read a comment on Horst's linguistic facility by the multi-tongued English actor Peter Ustinov. (Which fact tempts me to tell an irrelevant story. Before I knew any of these people I was sitting at a *hamburgesa* joint listening to people at the next table: Horst's then-distant-wife-to-be, a Pole I'd meet later, a Frenchman, and Ustinov. Ustinov conversed with all in Spanish, but when he spoke to Horst's-to-be he spoke with a British accent, with the Frenchman in Gallic-accented Spanish, and to the fourth in what I later figured out was Spanish as a Pole would say it. I have other memories of Ustinov, always "on stage." Such as a parody—but actual—of a fat man getting out of an under-sized Spanish auto. You'd know Ustinov was in town when you saw his yacht docked, the "*Nitchevo*," Russian for "Never mind.")

I failed to mention that Horst was a painter, and an exceptionally good one, if you would accept his *world*—for which he had a name I'm embarrassed to have forgotten (I only forget important things). Neither an abstractionist nor a realist, Horst painted his playful-grotesque just short of cartoonish visions of things and events, which showed internationally and which you could see online if you knew his real name. None of this was "to be expected."

His youth could not have been easy. I doubt he was of the *Hitler Jugend* (some did escape membership), but I doubt it only because I cannot imagine it. He was an early victim of the war, as his father was killed on the Russian front in 1941, which cut short a career as an opera singer. Perhaps that explained certain limitations on Horst's education: no university degree (or even attendance), but a diploma of sorts from a carpentry program. Horst did not remain long in Germany: like Freddy he began walking westward although not geographically as far. He lived and worked on the French coast for a while, part of that time in a cave of all places (which he later delighted to recall). His fluent but very odd English he picked up in the Caribbean and mid-Atlantic, of all places once again, as he learned to cook (an excellent chef) on English yachts. By the early 1960s he was acquiring his Spanish and Catalan, as his sea-faring days ended on Ibiza and then Mallorca. When I first encountered him in Puerto de Andraitx he was scratching out a living with a Danish pal as a carpenter, while raising and selling rabbits on the side—and, though not for livelihood, painting whenever he could find the time. Fairly swiftly—within three to five years—the carpentry ended, except on his own *casita*, on which I occasionally helped him just for the hell of it. He began to sell paintings, and, not born a proletarian in spite of carpentry school, he seemed to "come into" a bit of money. His wife, who taught English to Spaniards and Spanish to English, perhaps eased the burden until he was firmly established.

I mentioned that his English was odd, but I really only mean his inventive use of it. Since he had a dog before I came along as an *amigo* my name was *Samuel Segundo* until he preferred *Samuel Bigotes* ("Mustache"). Or he felt no discomfort in saying to me with a *neither-nor*, "*Weder* the British *noch* the Americans speak a proper English!" Except he didn't actually say "*weder noch*"—he had invented his own English: "nee nee." One got used to Horst's proclamations, a part of his charm, although some of them left one stunned, unless one accepted-but-dismissed them with a "there Horst goes again!" More than once I heard him proclaim (I try to capture his pronunciation): "Zair never vass a Nazi zat vass a Prussian!" I understood that this was a function of his being Prussian himself, born in Potsdam. But I did not understand how loaded the proclamation was until later. The first "later": at some point I saw a photo of his father; I don't recall how since it was certainly not on display, but he was a handsome man with a *Swastika* on his sleeve. Which did not bother me, since I do not hold anyone responsible for his or her parents. But I imagined then that it must have bothered Horst . . .

We were very close for a number of years. More than once I was a long-term guest in his *casita* as it became a *casa*. Once, later, my spouse-to-be and I lived rent-free in his house while he and his wife spent a couple of months in Prussia on one of his rare visits to *der Heimat*. It became unimaginable to me that Mallorca would not become eventually our home, with my German friends, and a couple of Swedes who aren't part of this tale, to say nothing of our *mallorquin* hosts. I bought dirt-cheap a small property in the nearby town of Andraitx (not the Puerto, which was far beyond my means) but I never found the time nor the cash to build anything on it (another story altogether). And then life, or its practicalities, intervened. The result was a note or two now and then but much more than a decade of only the most distant kind of relationship—while, I am happy to say, Horst's career

as painter and what one might call cultural impresario took off. *And then my old pal died two years ago.*

Now I'm going to interrupt these memories to mention something else.

A very few years ago I became absorbed with the SS, especially the *Waffen SS*, as I am a World War II buff. As many will know, that purely Nazi army, almost a rival of the supposed-to-be-apolitical *Wehrmacht*, had not only pure-German divisions and smaller units but foreign divisions as well: Dutch, Scandinavian, French, Belgian, Slavic, and so on, even a Muslim force. I knew that the leader of the Belgian division was a powerful Walloon fascist named Léon Degrelle; I learned that his memoirs had been published by an extreme right-wing press in California (which published KKK screeds as well). I ordered it, received it, read it, or tried to, and also for years was kept abreast of the goods available from this fascist press (there's nothing else to call it), whose specialty was really Holocaust denial. My friend and colleague [James Como](#), familiar to readers of *NER*, used to kid me that the mailman must be very curious about me. Well, I recently ordered and got—you can get *anything* from Amazon!—a couple of disturbing little books.

I'll continue but with no transition: When I first knew Horst I assure you that Google would have had no idea who he was had Google then existed, but now it has ideas sufficient that a website is available, as well as, I was stunned to see a few months ago, an obituary. My sense of loss was limitless. (We seldom really mean *limitless*, Thank God, or we could not live, but I'll keep the word nonetheless.) But my sense of loss was multiplied by compassion for my old friend: so much he had to bear that he never spoke of. The obit mentioned Horst's father, as obits will do, so I casually looked up the opera singer . . . only to discover *Vater* was no such thing. Before his death on the Russian front in 1941, he had been a lecturer, with a Ph.D., in a *Gymnasium*. But that's not all.

Horst's father had authored several small books, had been a politician successful enough to sit in the *Reichstag*, and had been an early member of the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, and not a minor Nazi at that. I cannot help but wonder if my friend Jaspar, who had a relative involved in the July 1944 Plot against Hitler, knew. But I will give Papa Georg this, in the spirit of giving the devil his due, he did not seek safety in politics, but put his body where his mouth was and put on the soldier's uniform in which he died. Where his mouth was? I mean his small books were propaganda tracts, justifications of National Socialism—one of which I own, which came to me packaged with a helpful little primer by Joseph Goebbels.

I don't imagine the reader wants a book review. Don't worry. The book I own of Papa Georg's is from the "SS Viewpoint Book Series," small books (50-60 pages) published by the SS in the 1930s ("Translated from the Third Reich Original" says the cover of each), my possession *Discipline and Order: Foundations of National Socialist Ethics*. I take it on faith that Amazon makes this series available for scholarly reasons (and I thank Amazon!) as I can't imagine this is a big money maker. But I'm non-plussed by the apparent publisher, RJG Enterprises, since some of the ads inside look as if conceived by Julius Streicher. And I'm more puzzled by The Landpost Press (of Valley Forge no less!) for their "Rheingold Translation" of Goebbels' *The "Nazi-Sozi" Questions and Answers for National Socialists*, which *Herr Doktor* offered Germans in 1931. Just under a flattering photo of Goebbels on the back cover, some wit (I hope) at Amazon has stuck a post-it with the message "Free Gift."

No review, but a comment or two. Years ago I read Goebbels' perfectly dreadful novel *Michael*—but "*Nazi-Sozi*" is worse, an embarrassingly amateurish approximation of "thought." If Goebbels had had enough brains to get a Ph.D. in the 1920s, he'd misplaced them by the '30s. So it's small



tribute to say that Papa Georg was his intellectual superior, but not by much. The little tract on Nazi ethics concludes with "we believe in the National Socialist folk comrade of the future. Germany will not die because [we] know ourselves one with the eternal, which wanted a German folk and allowed its development, hence our fatherland will be eternal, because we want it."

It's perfectly obvious why Horst reinvented his father as an opera singer with career cut short by war. And maybe it's possible, if not quite obvious, that the truth explains why Jaspar and Horst, my two great friends, were not friends themselves, in fact rather disliked one another. If that is the case, I admire Jaspar all the more for not spilling any beans, and I admire Horst all the more for bearing up under terrible pressure, as he never spoke an ill word to me of Jaspar, *der Schauspieler* (actor) as he always called him.

But now, enough—*genug!*—of this. I am going to tell the reader "Horst's" real name—and then I'll explain why I am abandoning my resolve to keep it secret.

Hartmut Usadel, had problems with being a German. Not only did I never hear him refer to himself as a German, *ein Deutscher, un alemán*, but always *ein Preusse* . . . long before he became a Spanish citizen in 1980 he even pronounced his name as if it were Spanish. "Oo-sa-dell," he'd say. He never found it funny when I'd say, "Oh, come off it, *Oo-zahdle!*"

I invented "Horst" in order not to embarrass the memory of Hartmut Usadel by bringing up his actual lineage, that his father was a prominent-enough Nazi to have his little books, ten of them, published by the SS, and to have been an active Nazi long before Hitler came to power—the memory of my delightful friend who, if he had any politics at all, was a natural anarchist. Had my father been a gangster I'd hate it to be known—this lovely man whom I still miss, who taught me when a child to imitate his tobacco-auctioneering, "Going,

going, gone . . . sold to Liggett 'n' Myers!" I hate it that Hartmut probably had no such innocently uncomplicated memories.

But I now dispense with "Horst" for *Hartmut, Hartmut Usadel*, because to keep him disguised diminishes him.

And his was a very special human life. If you've spent much time around artists, as I have, you'll know that they are not often especially generous, too focused on their own achievement. But Hartmut was lavish with his appreciation. He and his wife Adrienne noticed at the *poste restante* a magazine with my name and a title in the cover, and he was pleased at the arrival of my "story." Not a story, I corrected him, but an essay, *ein Aufsatz*—which correction he dismissed with a grunt: I wrote stories, *Erzaehlungen*, was therefore an artist, and that was that. A mutual friend was an Australian "exile" in S'Arracó, a novelist, whose fiction Hartmut had not actually read before passing judgment: "He writes; that's what matters." It was the most natural thing in the world that Hartmut would become the impresario I called him earlier: cofounder of and spirit behind an arts center in Andraitx for poetry readings and the display of works of art by *other* artists.

And there's another reason that I retire the fictional "Horst" for the actual Hartmut. I never admired him quite as much before—although my admiration before was *grande*—as I do now, now when I am moved to such an extreme knowing (or at least imagining) how much he must have gone through, and how large his achievement was given how little fate would have expected of him.

There is another reason, an even better one, for saying out loud, *My friend was Hartmut Usadel, wonderful painter!* Why should I keep his art secret and thus un-seeable, un-visitabile? Why should I not pay respect to him by encouraging others to [look](#) him up and enjoy his art?

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Samuel Hux is Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at York College of the City University of New York. He has published in *Dissent*, *The New Republic*, *Saturday Review*, *Moment*, *Antioch Review*, *Commonweal*, *New Oxford Review*, *Midstream*, *Commentary*, *Modern Age*, *Worldview*, *The New Criterion* and many others.

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