

The Diary
Part I

April 18th, 2007

As I am writing this, I am sitting on a bench in a picnic area. It is located in the ruins of a small castle overlooking the valley below me. Our bicycles and the trailer are parked under the shelter built to protect wanderers from the elements. For better insulation I put our dome tent on a layer of fir branches from the woods outside the ruins. At the deserted playground I can see my wife and daughter playing at the swing. This is the first time we have camped in the open since we left our apartment.

We don't know if we will ever reach our friends and family. If something happens to us, please send the book to the address I wrote on the back.

My name is Siegfried Bach. I am not a descendant of the famous composer. In fact, my family name used to be Heidrich. Always hated this name. My friends call me Siggi. I never really got along with my parents. When we married, I gladly took over my wife's family name.

I am 31 years old, married since last year, teacher, member of Green Peace. My wife Anne is 33, a nurse and I love her very much. I have known Anne three years. Asked her for a date while she patched me up in the ER after this idiot ran his car over my bike at the crossroads. It was not her long blonde hair but her infectious smile and her green sparkling eyes. She can be very serious, though. We are very happy. Our daughter Lisa is five years old, a little princess by appearance and heart. Her father left Anne shortly after Lisa was born. They never heard from him again. As far as I am concerned this is just fine. I love my daughter like my own blood.

Anne's parents are retired. My FIL was a dentist, pretty wealthy. They live in a big mansion in a small town in southern Germany. Since they are retired, they travel a lot with a big RV. My parents died five years ago in a car crash. I don't have any other relatives.

Last year I got my first job at a school in the city of F. . It is not the best school in town. Germans who could afford to move moved years ago. In my class we have more foreigners than Germans. The students speak Turkish, Arabic, Albanian, Greek, Russian, Polish and Swahili. Their knowledge of German is marginal. No way to teach them. It is a shame for a rich country like Germany to treat the poor like that. We should give them the best education we can give as a country. Even if they all seem to be involved in gang activities I consider them to be good kids. As I have been a backpacker and traveller since I was fourteen, I have visited quite a few of their countries of origin which gives me some kind of access to my students. Nevertheless, it is hard.

When we moved to F. last year ago, we rented an apartment from the municipality. It is cheap and close to the school I am working at. The building from the seventies is sixteen floors high. People from many parts of the world live there. We thought it was a good thing to have Lisa grow up in a multicultural environment until we discovered the used needles on the stairways. But then, my contract ends next year and we wanted to move towards Anne's parents anyhow.

We are living in the tenth floor. It consists of four apartments. First comes Mr Dorfmann. He is a notorious alcoholic, living from welfare. Last year he was still living together with his wife which included an almost daily beating. One day she was gone without a word.

Then come the Vucovics. They are refugees from Kosovo. Mr Vucovic works hard as a taxi driver. His wife is working part time for a catering company at the airport. They have two boys in their late teens who seem to be members of one of the many gangs around. At least they don't work. Next apartment is ours.

Finally there are the Kabambas, with two boys and one little daughter. They migrated to Germany from Congo two years ago. As they haven't got their residence status yet they are living on welfare, though Mr Kabamba seems to work some hours in the construction trade.

Besides Dorfmann, who is an idiot, we get along quite nicely. The Vucovics and the Kabambas don't have much to say but they say hello when they meet. Our daughter visits both neighbouring families frequently. One time I saw her involved in a deep German – Congolese conversation. Even though Mrs Kabamba does not speak much German I swear they knew exactly what they were talking about. The Vucovic boys who try to display a tough guy attitude are acting like big brothers when they meet Lisa.

Anne works part time in a hospital. In the fifteen months we are living here she patched up the Vucovic boys twice, knife wounds. There is nothing like a bleeding teen knocking at the door at two o'clock in the morning. When Mr Vucovic learned about the incidents he raised hell. From the sounds I guess he gave his boys a good whacking though it did not help.

When Mrs Kabamba was about to deliver, Anne drove her to the hospital and made sure everything was alright. Yolande, the little girl, is a cutie and Lisa really loves her. No wonder she needs to visit her almost every day.

If it wasn't for Dorfmann we would be a happy little neighbourhood. I never liked how he oggled Anne. He is rude, unkept and a royal pain in the butt. When his wife left him he tried to continue his verbal abuse with the Vucovics until he called Mrs Vucovic a bitch. Mr Vucovic, who is a wirey, small man beat the snot out of the fat, tall Dorfmann. I hate violence but this really settled the issue.

Well, at least this was how we lived before things changed. Everything has become so different.

Anne and Lisa are coming back. I will continue with our story after our frugal dinner. This is a good place to make a rest. Maybe we stay for another day.

It all changed on April 6 th, 2007

I woke up and saw my alarm clock did not work. Neither did the lights nor the radio. The water in the shower was cold and only a small trickle. The elevator was out of order so I had to walk down the dirty stairways to the ground floor. I unchained my bike and rode through the dark streets to the school. Funny thing was I did not see one running car.

The school was dark as well. Salvatore, the janitor, was cussing like only a Sicilian can. The blackout seemed to be everywhere. His transistor radio and car did not work either.

At that time I felt a cold knot in my guts. It looked like an EMP but this could not be! I biked back in a

rush and tried to start our trusty Renault Kangoo minivan. It was dead and so was the radio. At that time, I started to believe what I already knew in my heart. This was going to be serious.

Doubting our neighbours would all react peacefully, I carried our bikes and the bicycle trailer up the damn stairway and parked them on our small balcony. Then I drained about ten liters of water in a collapsible container we use for camping. This was all what was left in the pipes.

Before I could do anything Anne flushed down the contents of our water toilet. She did not like what I told her. Anne needs a hot shower and a cup of coffee in the morning. Then she grabbed a wash cloth and a liter of water and scrubbed herself clean. As a nurse she knows how to do this. Good girl!

During the last few years we had spent our holidays camping, due to our financial situation. We bought sufficient equipment both for camping on campgrounds and while biking or canoeing. I pulled out the plastic box from under our bed and set up our two flame butane stove. When Anne was dressed I had her cup of coffee ready. Maybe this was the last coffee for a long time, I thought. We need to use our resources very carefully.

We spent much of the day hanging around trying to figure out what happened. A rumor said it were the Russians who dropped the bomb. Now Russia saw a change in government last year but would they take on the EU and NATO? We did not know right now.

As the toilets ceased working a smell crept through the building. When I was on the balcony I saw Dorfmann urinating from his. He grinned at me and walked back. Fat unwashed idiot.

April 7 th, 2007

This morning we went for a walk around the block. We saw a lot more people than usual. Everybody seemed to be anxious. Nobody knew anything from sure. Mr Kabamba was very worried. He pulled some pieces of iron pipe out of his storage compartment in the basement. Borrowing my hacksaw he cut several lengths of about 60cm, with one end at an angle which gave him a pointed end. When he gave me the hacksaw back, he handed me one piece of pipe. "Bettah be safe dan sohrry", he said in his deep heavily accented voice. I put the club behind the door. I guess Mr Kabamba knows more about life than I ever will learn.

It seems several apartment dwellers simply dropped the trash out of their windows. We saw several broken plastic bags on the lawn. Thank god it is April and not July. Still the rubbish stinks. Some dogs without collars and tags are snooping through the refuse. The municipality should pick it up really fast.

Speaking of the municipalilty, I wonder when will they finally restore the power and water supply? If the telephones were working, I would give them a hard time. Don't have much water left.

Mrs Kabamba is cooking on the balcony. She filled a pan with dry sand from the playground and soaked it with gasoline. Voila! Instant burner. Three stones hold the pot at a distance over the fire. It seems she only uses one pot out of her kitchen utensils to cook on the open flames, though, as the pot blackens and warps. Where did they get the gasoline from? They don't even own a car.

When we came back from our walk, we saw people milling at the parking lot. The first working car in two days! Someone visited relatives in a town 200 kilometers away. He says the news says almost every big city in Germany and Eastern Europe seems to be affected. Other stretches of the country still seem to be

in working order. Military is calling up the reserves. The Baltic states are cut off from Poland, heavy fighting in Poland, Rumania and Bulgaria. The new communist government in Russia seems to want back what once belonged to the Soviet Union.

Where do we get fresh water from? This is a bigger issue for us. Food is going low, too. Due to the low distances to food stores we prefer to buy fresh produce. Food storage seemed to be so unnecessary. Now I wished we had several cases of bottled water and canned food which could be prepared with a small amount of energy.

April 8th, 2007

Early this morning, Mr Kabamba knocked at our door. "Dere is something going on at the Aldi's", he said, "you want to come with me?" He told me to bring our backpacks. Mr Vukovic was already waiting in front of the house, a wheelbarrow in front of him. When I asked him, he grinned. "Found it at a construction site this morning," he said, "the material container was already pried open. Guess what those folks took first? Crowbars and pickaxes."

We walked down to the supermarket where a crowd already gathered in the parking lot. Some people with crowbars and iron pipes smashed in the safety glass at the entrance. I felt uneasy but we all needed the food.

It did not take very long until we stormed into the building. Amazing how many people first jumped on the sweets, snacks and liquors. The three of us worked as a team, gathering bottled water, toilet paper, rice, salt, olive oil, noodles, flour, canned veggies and fish. Did a good job though we had to keep off our neighbours who were busy emptying the pallets themselves..

The hardest part was when we came out of the store. The latecomers were trying to take our food. I have never used violence on anyone in my life but this time I had to resort to my fists. A woman bit me in my arm. It still hurts. Maybe I broke her nose when I tried to get her off. Kabamba and Vucovic were better prepared. Vucovic had what looked like a short piece of heavy cable and Kabamba one of his iron clubs. They really put up a good fight. We brawled our way out and made it home with some minor scratches and all our food.

It was hard to carry all our goods up to our floor. Anne gave me the scolding of my life. Not because we stole – what else should we have done to feed our families – but because of my black eye and the bite wound in my arm. My jacket also suffered. The arm is almost ripped off. My wife tended my wounds and left with her first aid kit to our neighbours. Vucovic has several bruises on his arms when he blocked off the hits from the guys outside the store. Kabamba is ok besides a gash on his cheek We divided the food between the three of us. Anne gave some of the food back to our neighbours as they are more persons than the three of us.

What a day! It was scary and exciting at the same time. Anne and Lisa seem to kind of appreciate what we did. I am feeling like a hunter coming back from the hunt. Stupid feeling.

Spend the evening on the balcony, looking over the housing area. Fires are burning in front of some houses. People seem to be on the move constantly. What will the future bring?

April 9th, 2007

We have not seen Dorfmann for more than a day. First I thought I'd leave him alone. Finally I went to his door and knocked. Nothing. From our balcony I could see the door to his balcony was open. This looked so strange I decided to risk a look. I am no stranger to climbing because I went mountaineering several years after highschool. Lisa looked quite interested as I climbed from one balustrade to the next. Told her this was only for adults.

I knocked at the door and called for Dorfmann but nobody responded. I went in, prepared to see our neighbour sleeping in his vomit. Found him in the small bathroom. He must have slipped and broken his neck. Still held a bottle of cheap liquor in his hand. Trying to feel his pulse I touched his arm but felt nothing but his stiff and cold body. Never touched a dead person before.

The closest police station is more than 20 minutes by bike away. When I reported the death they let me write my statement on a sheet of paper and noted my ID card number. I asked when they would pick up Dorfmann, but the cops only gave me a tired laugh. "You better take care of your dead neighbour yourself", said a policeman, "we have no means to help." First, I couldn't believe but finally I rode home.

Vucovic and Kabamba were less than happy but we decided to bury Dorfmann just behind the building. "He is bothering us even in his death", complained Vucovic when we wrapped silent form in one of his cheap carpets. Finally we dragged and carried Dorfmann down. We were pretty much shot when we arrived at the ground floor.

Our neighbours did not like the idea of a grave behind the house and after some discussion they helped us carry him over to a vacant lot. Nobody had a spade or a pickaxe (or wanted to bring it) so we placed Dorfmann in a shallow hole and covered him with dirt, using boards and buckets. Then we piled up a bunch of rubble to protect him from the dogs. Nobody wanted to say a prayer so we just stood there silently for a minute before we walked home.

When we crossed the lawn, I noticed how interested Kabamba watched the dogs. Now I am sitting on my couch, tired and dirty. I would sell some fingers for a hot shower!

Anne does not talk very much. She gave me a big hug and treated me with a dose of my favorite spirit, Grappa. I would like to know what she's thinking about. Well, usually I don't have to wait long to find out. We don't eat much as preparing food needs a lot of water. We make soups and tea. Lisa had her last cup of her beloved cocoa two days ago. Anne and I don't drink coffee anymore as coffee tends to drain water out of the body. Salt is used quite sparingly, too.

Played some time with Lisa. If we only had access to fresh water. The toilet stinks. I rode the bicycle with trailer to the small river which is running through the area. It does not smell well but much better than our toilet. Found two 30 litre containers at the deserted and looted petrol station. They seem to have contained detergents before. Filled both about half way (the trailer is rated for 40 kg only) and hauled them home. Dunking the containers into the river was difficult as they tend to float. Next time will use a small bucket to scoop and fill the water into the containers. Flushed the toilet. Less smell.

None of our neighbours seemed to care though they watched me kind of interested. Some guys from the third floor asked me where I got the containers from, where I collected the water and how hard it was hauling the stuff up to the tenth floor, that was all.

April 10th, 2007

Just came back from my next trip to the river when Kabamba knocked at the door. "You want some fresh meat?", he asked. Since he invited me for the looting at the supermarket, I am feeling kind of fascinated and frightened about this man. It sounded interesting, so I agreed. We walked down the stairways. The black man carried a broomhandle and a small coil of thin rope.

Once we arrived where the dogs were feeding from the trash, Kabamba tied the rope in a loop and hung it loosely from the end of the handle. We walked calmly to the dogs and without further hurry, the Congolese put the loop around the neck of a dog. There was a kind of struggle but the dog was caught. We pulled our victim into the building and marched it up the stairway, only interrupted by several bite attacks from the dog. "Why are we doing this?", I asked. My mentor turned around, giving me a questioning look. "Fresh meat is good!", he said.

"No, why didn't you kill the dog on the lawn? It would have been much easier to process it out of the house and only carry up the meat," I said. Kabamba gave me a flashing smile with his white, strong teeth. "Do you think our neighbours would approve of this? In this country, dogs are treated like children." He was right, of course. Most dogs were pets in town.

Finally we arrived at our floor. Kabamba handed me the rope and took one of his iron pipes from behind the door. Without hesitation he whacked the howling dog several times until it lay silent on the ground. I was about to throw up!

We carried the dog through the apartment to the balcony. I watched in horror how Kabamba hung the dog by its hind legs to some hooks attached to the ceiling and cut the throat. I was amazed about the amount of blood which flowed in the little plastic basin which looked a lot like it had been used to bathe babies. Then the Congolese skinned and gutted the dog. "You come over with Missus Anne and the little princess for dinner", Kabamba invited us but I told him we don't eat dog meat. Never thought I'd learn so much in one day.

Even though we have drinking water from looting the supermarket, we use it with great care. Washing is done sparingly. My hairs are greasy and I kind of smell. I asked Anne to cut my hairs very short. Fortunately, my wireless haircutter had enough juice left for this task. My ladies have ponytails but I guess Anne would love to wash her hairs! Don't know about Lisa. I guess she can live with it. ;-)

Woke up at night because the rain was falling. Strung a poncho at the balcony and collected some water, about two litres, for the kitchen. Better than nothing.

April 11th, 2007

We had our breakfast when Anne pointed her spoon at me. "When do you think you will stop having fun with your third world neighbours?", she asked. I was amazed. "Liebling, I am trying to feed my family", I answered. "You are playing, darling", she said, "I never saw you having so much fun." Anne pointed this

damn spoon at me again. "Do you think we will return to normal life soon? Do you want to live in this ... this madhouse? Do you never think of the alternatives, Mr Teacher?" I guess you will tell me soon, I thought, but kept my mouth shut.

Finally putting down her spoon, Anne said "I want to return home, Siggie. My parents live in a rural and peaceful environment. I don't think we need to eat dogs there. Not to mention we have our own small apartment in my parents house." This is true, of course. We even keep some clothes there in order not to waste time on packing when we decide to go for a visit.

"Do you already know how we will get there?", I asked, "The trains won't work, our car does not run, your parents are travelling in Greece as far as I know and can't pick us up." My wife gave me her sweetest smile. "Why just don't you make a plan? You are the man in the household." With that she turned her attention to Lisa who was just putting her fifth spoon of sugar in her cup of tea.

Spent the morning going over the road maps of Germany. We are talking of a distance of about twohundred kilometers as the crow flies. If we drive the highways, we would talk about fourhundred kilometers. We usually drive the distance in about four hours. Walking is out of question. For us, riding the bikes is the only way to travel.

I spent about two hours to plan our trip. Then I went back to our water problem. Made a crude water filter out of a towel (step 1), a layer of charcoal (step 2) and a coffee filter (step 3). The water smelled somewhat better. Treated the filtered water with a drop of potassium iodide per litre and let it set. Boiled some water and drank two cups. I wonder what will happen. The rest of the water we keep in plastic water bottles we already emptied.

Vucovic knocked and asked if it would be o.k. for us if his boys moved in Dorfmann's apartment. It seems they want to bring some friends along. I have no objections but suggested we make an inventory of Dorfmann's belongings.

Did not find much useful. Dorfmann's stash of liquor was amazing. We split it between the three families of us as trading goods. The porn magazines we threw away. In the kitchen drawer I found some twine and a Swiss Army Knife. Kept it. An interesting find in the sleeping room. A Diana 4.5 mm air pistol, a Roehm 9mm tear gas revolver with 17 rounds, a machete, two bayonets of some kind and a battered 4.5 mm air rifle. Kabamba and Vucovic got in a sort of argument but finally we decided Kabamba gets the machete and the air pistol. Vucovic wanted the revolver and got the bayonets as well. I wanted nothing but they made me keep the air rifle.

I tried it out in Dorfmann's hallway. Did not shoot too bad. Split the pellets between Kabamba and me, about half a tin for each. Put my pellets in two 35 mm film containers.

At dawn, Kabamba came up with four rats in a plastic bag. Seems he shot them with his new toy. Yikes! He was happy. Guten Appetit, Mr Kabamba.

Planned our equipment for the trip. Read a story to Lisa and played cards with Anne.

April 12th, 2007

Hauled and filtered water. When I read my list of equipment to Anne she told me she wanted to bring

some of her med stuff, like books, drugs and first aid kit and family things like photos, documents and letters. Lisa will bring her dearest toys and a small ball, three books, paper and drawing pencils. Need to rewrite my packing list.

Started to check the trailer and bikes. I hope nothing happens as we don't have much spare parts. I have a basic set of tools and can fix a flat. Maybe we can buy spares on the way, if needed. Have to be VERY carefully.

Then I assembled our camping gear. Tent, ground pads, sleeping bags, cooking utensils. This stuff is heavy! Weighed everything on the bathroom scale and noted the weights on the pack list. When I was done with the general stuff, I packed it tightly and put it at the balcony. Then I went through Anne's gear, then Lisa's things and finally mine.

Basically it is two sets of zip pants, two sweaters, coat, fleece jacket and fleece pants, three pairs of socks and three sets of underwear, caps, gloves, hiking boots and many other things. Decided to take one pair of working gloves and some heavy duty hand cleaner with me. They will come in handy after repairing stuff or working in the camp.

If we need to part from our bikes, we have two rucksacks to carry a basic load. In this case I intend to push Lisa's trailer. We can mount a front wheel to the trailer and use it like a pushcart.

It is a lot of stuff and I am trying to keep things simple and the weight low. Everybody has his a little comfort stuff. Lisa got her toys, Anne her family stuff and I have a boyscout handbook which deals nicely about woodcraft without becoming esoteric. Uh, took a small flask of Grappa with me, for some comfort after a long hard day.

Vucovic asked me what we are going to do. When I told him he nodded. "You don't belong here, Mr Sigg", he said, "this is going to be a jungle." I asked him if he wanted the air rifle but he declined. Said maybe I could make use of it on the way or trade it for food. Wrapped the thing in a trash bag and wound some twine around to keep everything tight.

At night we heard shots. It sounded and looked like fireworks. Vucovic looked at it and said "Tracers and anti-aircraft missiles. It is like in Kosovo, when NATO attacked the Serbs from the air." He sighed. "I guess someone is after the bridges." Shortly after we noticed some heavy explosions from downtown, where the bridges cross the river.

As we were talking, two jet fighters shrieked over our neighbourhood. We never found out what nationality they were. It scared the hell out of me.

We need to get out SOON!

April 13th, 2007

We didn't do much today. I hauled water. We read and enjoyed the comfort and safety of our apartment for the last time. Made two stacks of things for our neighbours, food, toilet paper and Dorfmann's booze. Anne threw in some bandaids.

Mr Kabamba needed Anne's attention. Someone attacked him while he drained the fuel out of a car. Anne

dug out her first aid kit from out luggage and treated Kabamba's wounds, mostly bruises and two shallow cuts in his arm.

At night anti-aircraft gunfire again. I can't sleep. I am looking over our planned route. Good to have an LED torch. Hope I didn't miss something. Our equipment is good. We did several trips in a similar setup. Tomorrow morning we will leave early, at 7 a.m. in the morning.

April 14th, 2007

Our neighbours were up early to say us goodbye. They helped us carry the bikes and luggage down the 10 floors. Shed some tears. Many hugs. Lisa cried when she kissed her beloved Yolande goodbye. We sat her in the trailer and she hugged her doll sadly.

We have been a good team together. I wish them all the luck. We rode down the street. When I looked back for the last time, I saw our friends still waving. Finally we drove around the corner and out of sight.

We did not make it more than three blocks when we saw the improvised roadblock of cars. Burning tires gave some light. Spotted some teens, most probably a gang. We did not try to push our luck and turned on the spot.

When we passed the school I had been working at, we pulled in the schoolyard. Parked in a secluded spot, in fact the small garden in front of the teacher's room, where my colleagues used to smoke. Mapped a new route through the industrial areas. Will take us longer but keep us away from any not so nice neighbourhoods.

I went to look for Salvatore, the janitor. The window of his apartment was broken. Nobody to see. We left in a hurry.

Made it through the industrial areas. People are everywhere, many are pushing shopping carts. They are looking for things to loot. Twice we turned around because we saw what we considered gangs. Once we had to hide in a trash container because some guys on bikes were following us fast. Don't ask me how bad I felt! Thank God we could hide the bikes in a rundown takeaway building closeby.

We must have made about forty kilometers this day, but only twenty towards our destination. In late afternoon, we found a pretty good spot between some containers. I collected cardboards and built a layer under the tent, for additional insulation and to keep us away from the gravel. Tied the green 2 x 3 m tarp to a container which gives us a kind of awning where we can keep the bikes and trailer out of the elements.

No fire, though it would be a boost to our morale. We try to play things down in front of Lisa. Thank God she is still small.

Cold, rainy night. Again, I could collect some rainwater. I stood watch for some time, the LED torch and the club at hand. When it started to rain, I crawled into my sleeping bag. Don't think we will see unwanted visitors tonight.

Tomorrow we will leave the city limits if everything goes well.

Part II

The Diary Part 2

April 15th, 2007

Heavy, cold rain. The tarp is worth its weight in gold! It gives us the much needed living space outside the tent.

When I was out of the tent this night to relieve myself, it was snowing! Lisa does well, we keep her warm in her sleeping bag. Good thing we were not cheap when we bought one for her. She sleeps between the two of us. In the trailer, she also stays warm in her sleeping bag. Sometime she just dozes, sometime she reads a book or plays with her toy pets.

We have pretty good rain gear but the rain is too strong. During a rest we find an unused open shelter for sheep on a small, overgrown pasture behind a woods. After only twenty kilometres and a three hours drive, we pitch up camp again. Our tent is standing in the shelter, on the hard packed soil. I string a tent line under the roof as a clothesline. Anne and I are soaking wet. We change into our fleece clothes and sneakers. Wish I had a second cap and a second pair of gloves.

Anne is shivering. I send her into the tent with a cup of hot tea. Lisa is doing pretty well. It is hard to keep her occupied during the day.

Only one meal for us adults this day. Who knows how long the food has to last us. We drink as much hot tea as possible. (Same tea bag every time.)

April 16th, 2007

I made a small pit fire to save fuel. Fortunately, part of the structure is broken down, which gives us a good supply of dry wood. The Trangia pot blackens pretty bad. Must find a pot just for use on the campfire only.

The rain dies down in the afternoon. We will stay put for today, the sun will go down too soon. My clothes are almost dry and we go for a little walk. Find some shrunk apples on trees which we collect. We also save some rusty wire from the fence. You can use wire for almost anything.

Food of today: boullion with some rice, apple compot.

April 17th, 2007

When we were almost geared up, I noticed two pigeons on an oak tree not far away from us, how they were enjoying the early morning sun. Killed one with the airgun, the other one got away. Put it in a cloth shopping bag, which is now officially our scrounging bag.

Even though most probably nobody will care, I made sure to leave the place as much as we found it. Cleaned up, covered the fire pit with loose earth etc. – take only photos, leave only footprints. GRIN!

Later we passed a small town, I located a recycling container. Managed to salvage three tin cans, one 1 litre, two 0.5 litre cans. We are getting rich! The few people looked at me kind of curious when I went dumpster diving.

We stopped at a farm to ask where we could find clear water. The farmers were pretty nice. Offered us all the milk we could drink. They don't have much means to sell their produce now, even though some people come by bike to buy some. However, they have more milk than they can feed to the pigs.

This evening we made camp in a secluded piece of woods, behind a stack of firewood. We had filled two 1 litre pop bottles with milk which we now heat on the campfire. AHHHH! Have to save some for breakfast.

Using a coarse stone and sand, I cleaned and deburred the tin cans thoroughly and made hangers from the wire we salvaged. Skinned and gutted the pigeon and boiled it on the fire. Tasted, well, not too good, but so what.

Almost saw no car traffic, mostly some military vehicles. Maybe they are protected from EMP. Here and there some folks by bike or by foot. Some pull small hand carts.

BTW, made fifty kilometers this day.

April 18th, 2007

Broke camp and went on our way, up the bike trail along the river Main. Filled our water bottles at a spring along the way which gives us two days worth of water.

During the late morning, we passed a family which was resting at a bench close to the river. When we came closer we saw one of their cheap bikes was broken down. The frame was totalled. I guess they overloaded it.

Had a strange feeling when we came closer. The man in his late forties was looking at us in some kind of despair. I just nodded a "Guten Tag" in his direction when he made this kind of snorting sound. Before I could do anything, he charged like a mad bull. I slipped the iron pipe on top of my luggage out from behind the bungee cords and let the bike fall between my legs. Thank god, the trailer hitch is cardanic and the trailer with Lisa stayed upright.

The guy ran into the pointed end of the pipe which made a nasty wound. We both fell to the ground and struggled to get on our feet again. I was faster and swung the pipe downwards, hitting the badguy at the upper arm. He screamed in pain. Now I had a better stand and gave him three more blows until he fell to the ground, silently.

Just when I thought it was over, his wife jumped me, screaming all kind of verbal garbage. It was not difficult to push her away but she kept on going. Finally Anne ended the scene, with a blast from her can of pepper spray she usually keeps in the purse.

I got a whiff of the pepper spray, too. Finally, I lifted my bike and went to bike away as fast as possible. Suddenly, I felt all the pains from the struggle. Lisa was screaming, the kids from the other guy were crying, Anne was cussing, I was shocked. It was quite a scene. Looking back I saw the man curled up in a fetal position. I hope I didn't hurt him too much but I hope I hurt him much

We pedaled like mad to get away from the place. Then we stopped in a secluded space and rested. With shaking hands, Anne pulled the bottle of Grappa out of her saddle bag and took a good swig. Then she handed me the bottle. We decided to get off the bike trail on small roads to stay out of harms way. I hope it works.

Pushing the heavy bike with trailer out of the valley nearly killed me. Towing a trailer on the flat is one thing. Going uphill is VERY different.

Anne's luggage weighs about 40 kg. My bike is loaded with about the same plus I am towing the trailer which weighs about 50 kg loaded. Combined with the slim diet we enjoy I am losing weight pretty easily.

Found a good camping spot in the ruins of an old castle. A spring runs just about 100 meters away. Good, fresh water. A good place to bring the diary up to date. Maybe we stay another day.

April 19th, 2007

Five days on the run. We needed the rest. I checked the bikes and luggage and did some minor repairs. Anne did the laundry. When it was warm enough, we first scrubbed Lisa down, then came Anne and finally it was my turn. Heating the water on the campfire was a real bummer.

A good day. We relaxed and Lisa could play within eyesight. Anne and me took turns in playing with our daughter which gave one partner the opportunity to take a nap in between. Luxury. Carved a toy ship out of bark for Lisa and we let it drift down the small creek. What a nice distraction after all those days.

Spoke with Anne. We will make every sixth day our big wash day. Until today, we washed ourselves every evening, when our camp chores were done. We will try out how it is to scrub us down while the sun is warming us.

Until today we made about 180 kilometres, which is not very much compared to what Anne and me made on other occasions. However, the weight of our luggage is much higher than before and we are pretty weak. Going off the preplanned route did not have much impact on the distance but it sure made the trip harder as the route is not as suited for bike travel as the one I selected first. Tomorrow we will have done half of the distance.

Good thing is I don't feel my butt so much anymore. It was pretty tender during the first days of our journey.

April 20th, 2007

Had a good start. About noon, the weather went bad. Cold rain, strong winds. When it was too bad, I strung the tarp between some trees as a shelter. While Anne was keeping Lisa occupied I made a short walk. Saw a small village not far away. Funny enough they seem to have electricity. The cars are running, too. Maybe they were far enough away to be not affected from EMP.

When the rain slowed down, we rode into the village. Not too many people on the streets. We asked for some clean water at the church. The pastor offered us to stay in the assembly hall which they turned into some kind of shelter. Water toilets, hot showers! We decided to stay for a night.

Got a hot soup, bread and tea for dinner. Really enjoyed that. We are four groups in the shelter. Besides us, another family of four with a handcart and cheap backpacks. An elderly couple on bikes. They have pretty good equipment and expensive bikes. The Western Riders are the most colourful group.

From all the groups the family with the handcart seems to do the worst. Their boots are not made for hiking and they can expect them to fall apart in some days. I told the pastor and he will try to find them donated boots until they leave. The kids are in bad shape. They seem to have lived on a diet of chocolate and chips as they are still quite fat. I talked with the father which told me they are on the road since ten days and made about 130 kilometers! Not much, if you ask me. As their destination is still about 300 kilometers away, they have ways to go. Hope they make it.

The couple is doing well. They were coming back from a holiday trip from Spain when the bomb fried the electronics of their RV. Simply took their bikes from the rack and kept on pushing. Their speed is about 100 kilometers per day, but they are fit and travel light. In three days, they will be at home.

Lisa is fascinated from the riders. They were members of a riding club which rode cowboy style. After the crunch, many owners did not check anymore at the horses. So they took what horses there were and started their trek to a farm of friends. Four men and three women, they are quite a sight with their wide brimmed hats and raincoats. The women are looking pretty good in their outfit, might I add. We only see five of them as two are always staying with the horses the pastor put up in an open shelter at a pasture.

Only a small horsewagon with rubber wheels stays in front of the shelter. Covered by a poly tarp, it contains their camping equipment and food. Usually they sleep in a canvas teepee around the fire. I chatted a bit with one of the guys. In fact they must have crossed through our neighbourhood some days before we left. Told us hair raising stories from hungry cityfolk trying to steal the horses.

I noticed the round wooden grip of a pistol protruding from his pants pocket. When I asked, he pulled out a small pistol. "This is a .45 Philadelphia derringer. It is a muzzle loader", he explained to me. It seems he loaded it with a lead ball and a charge of cut-off match heads! To prevent accidental discharge, he keeps a piece of leather between the hammer and the little cap. I did not know these gun are free for sale to adults in Germany. It would be nice to own one.

It seems to be difficult to feed the horses because they don't have much to offer besides fresh green grass which is just starting to grow. Due to their experiences, they try to stay off the beaten paths as much as possible. Had good luck using several sections of the many long distance hiking trails in Germany. A farm of friends in Bavaria is their destination. Good luck, they have a long way to go.

April 21st, 2007

The first ones to leave is the couple on bikes. A short "Gute Fahrt" and they hit the road at dusk. Next are the riders.

The guardians bring the ponies from the pasture. We notice everybody seems to have tucked an axe handle to the saddle. The guy last evening told me they drilled the heads of the handles and filled them with molten lead from car rims. After all the riders mounted their horses, the driver of the wagon hands out poles of almost 2.5 metres length. When I saw them last evening, I thought of tent poles, but they are makeshift lances. This should keep the hungry masses away.

It is quite a sight to watch the small group move out of the village. Three riders take the lead, then comes the wagon. Three riders make the rear, leading several extra horses at the reins. The lances point up into the blue sky. Some of the riders tied buzzard feathers to the tip of their lances. A romantic sight. Lisa waves them good bye until they disappear behind some houses. Why do horses make things so much more romantic?

We moved out too, gratefully thanking our hosts.

The family with the handcart will stay another day. I hope the pastor can help out with some kind of well suited footgear.

Smooth ride today. Made camp in an abandoned quarry. When it is dark enough, I will light the campfire. No need for a smoke column to signal our presence.

April 22nd, 2007

Had a good start. When we passed a small town and asked for water, we got in an argument with some of the locals. It seems they don't like people passing through. "Why don't you go back home" was the nicest sentence we heard. Who knows what happened.

We left. It makes no sense to argue with idiots. A car full of drunk juveniles was following us for several minutes. They were doing every possible nonsense to intimidate us. Lisa was very scared to say at least. Finally we dove into a small trail leading down a steep hill, followed by a hail of empty beer bottles. Then they left. The first time I wished I had an AK 47!

Besides that, another smooth ride. If we continue at this pace we will be at Anne's parents place in three days.

We were lucky and found a rock overhang not far from the road. It makes a good shelter itself. Quite a few trouts in the clear creek not far away. I checked in the boyscout manual and made a fishing pole with a hook from a safety pin. Didn't catch anything. I think I saw some fish holding their bellies from laughing. ;-)

April 23rd, 2007

We had to follow the National Road for some hours. Many people on the move. Travelling among so many others can be depressing. We seem to be in another EMP zone. Not many cars to see.

When we passed a small town, we saw signs directing people to a refugee camp. We had no intentions to stay there but we had a look. A school had been used to accommodate the people. Heavy mesh wire fence around the place and police checking who was going in and out. A lot of bicycles parked in a gated lot. Somewhere else, Red Cross workers were cooking in a field kitchen. Refugees lined up in front of a tent with a red cross sign on it. The place looked crowded. NO THANKS! We rather stay among ourselves.

After three hours, we turn off into a small side road. Another four kilometres over a flat and then downwards into a small valley and we reach a small village of eight houses. Friends of us live there. Four couples who bought an old farm house from the 18th century. Kind of a commune.

Usually they are a relaxed, friendly bunch. This time they blocked the entrances to the farm with their cars. The windows of the ground floor were nailed shut with boards.

We sat in the kitchen, a warm fire glowing in the old iron stove, when our friends told us their story. A week ago, a band of bikers took the offturn from the National Road and stayed overnight in the village. It seems it was a horrible night. Women and kids hid in a woods while the men who tried to keep the situation under control were beaten up severely. Next morning the bikers left after they funneled the gas out of the cars. Unlike the other villagers who lost more food due to thefts, our friends are better off. Bikers don't seem to appreciate hardcore "Bio"-food. Maybe they can't cook.

As a result, the villagers removed every road sign announcing their presence. Our friends armed themselves with knives and bats. It is weird to see those harmless folks walking guard around the farm. Good thing they have dogs to announce the presence of intruders (the dogs are pretty tame, though).

We were invited to stay and live with our friends. They say safety comes in numbers. Nevertheless we first want to drop by Anne's folks place and check the situation. I took the watch shift from three to six in the morning. Anne and Lisa know where to hide on the farm and where the escape routes to the woods are. The plan is the men hold out until the women and kids go into hiding.

April 24th, 2007

We left most of our luggage at the farm, including this worthless airgun. Our friend Harry was quite happy though. He wants to harvest some doves which are sitting at the rooftop of the barn. The airgun might help him. Funny thing. He has been active in the peace movement for decades and is happy about a gun! I think I would be happy about a real one, either.

Fast ride. Spend the night in a thicket 500 meters off the county road. No campfire tonight.

April 25th, 2007

Finally! Reached the in-laws house on afternoon. Too bad, they are not at home. We don't have any news where they are.

Even though the house and garden are big for real estate in Germany, they don't have much practical use. The garden is full of expensive trees and plants, not one small kitchen plot. In the current situation we have no need for the pool, the sauna, the bar and the luxurious rooms. Besides an open chimney there is no means of alternative heating.

The basement is full foreign wines but it lacks food. The freezer ceased to work and the contents are spoiled. Took me two hours to bury the waste in the garden.

Anne payed the mayor, whom she knows, a visit. In his estimation it will take them one month to restore the basic services. With the country at war we cannot expect to get back to normal this year.

This made it. Tomorrow we will return to our friends. At least they have enough food and the means to produce more.

We are going through the house, inventoring the items we want to take with us. Basically clothes, shoes and boots, Anne's medical books and equipment she kept here and tools. My FIL has a lot of fancy powertools he seldom uses, but not many handtools we could need.

Browsing through the cabinet in the workshop I found several boxes of ammunition. They are marked ".22 Long Rifle". Anne says her Dad did not own a gun but I started the search. Found a pistol in the office. "Beretta" is the brand and it seems to fire the small cartridges.

April 26th, 2007

I left my family at the in-laws place and biked back to our friends in one day. They were glad we intended to stay. I don't have much experiences in living off the country but I will try to pull my weight.

Our friends have a horse wagon which they rented to tourists for camping trips from farm to farm. It has a canopy and actually sleeps four persons. We will use it to retrieve what little we have from my in-laws place. It took us two days riding on the wagon to get to Anne and Lisa.

It was quite sight when we sheltered the horses in the huge garage besides the expensive cars. Now what is more useful, a dead Porsche or a slow horse wagon, hmm?

April 28th, 2007

All our belongings are packed. Tomorrow we will head back to our friends. Anne left a note should her parents come home. Lisa is very happy. She is going to ride in the wagon with our friend Harry who knows how to handle the horses. Anne and I ride the empty bikes.

This trip gives me many opportunities to think of the future. I don't know what will be but I never will lack the will and means to protect my family anymore. Besides we need to learn everything about gardening and farming.

Took a different route in order not to draw unwanted attention at our little caravan. It was nice to sleep out under the stars. Anne and Lisa preferred our tent and Harry slept in the wagon. I love the smell of a good campfire.

May 2nd, 2007

Back at the farm. It was a joy ride. We have our own big sleeping room for the three of us. Big excitement about the gun. None of us has ever touched a real gun in his whole life. Anne suggested I carry it but I gave it to her. I want her to have the best protection possible. Knowing my wife, I have no doubts she will do everything to protect her daughter (and me J).

Yesterday we blocked part of the access routes into the village with some old cars from behind a farm house. We were glad to have the horses to pull the wrecks. Our neighbours helped us fill the interior of the cars with earth to give them more resistance against an impact. Amazing what dedicated individuals can do if they are not afraid from hard labour.

Even though the blackout affects us, we are doing well. Our friends were deep into alternative living. Solar panels, woodstoves, compost toilet, a old well in the basement, a barn with livestock and potatoes, apples, wheat, honey and many other things. We will survive.

This is the last entry concerning our escape. Our journey is over. We will have to see what the future brings. Good thing is we have been through more than we could imagine and found out we can handle it.

Sometimes I wonder how the Kabambas and the Vucovics are doing. My gut feelings tell me they will survive well.