

## Verboten: Steve Fuger

They piled into their new-model Volkswagen, it was brown, with indicators that flipped up from the sides of the car, the indicators lit up too. The four of them were off to visit some of the places the father's family had come from, many generations ago. Parents in the front; a suitcase tucked into the space at the very back; the children, aged eight and four years, perpetually demarking their respective territory, on the narrow bench seat in between, until ... the approaching German border point claimed their attention: *Soldiers!* for the four-year old, and a rising apprehension in the older child. She knew what had happened here, she had heard tell of it and had seen photographs in books: just three- and four years before she was born her father had flown Lancaster bombers over Germany and even at her tender age she understood that for many grownups that was a recent memory. This really was not somewhere she thought they ought to be going. Besides, a barrier, which had on it a sign that included the word VERBOTEN, barred the road ahead. Her schwyzerdütsch was fluent, and her Hochdeutsch on a par with her Swiss classmates, so she knew what VERBOTEN, in capital letters, meant. It meant that, indeed, this was not somewhere they ought to be going.

She sat back stiff, still and silent in her seat, eyes wide, as the severely uniformed spectre of a solemn border guard approached the VW's wound-down driver's window.

"Guten Morgen" he said, deeply and darkly.

"Guten Morgen" said her father, in his distinctly breezy Australian accent, and handed out their passports.

The guard examined the passports closely, checked them against the two adults, and the two children in the back, the excited little boy and the scared looking girl.

"Have you been to Germany before?" he asked, in perfect English.

"Er, ... yes?"

*NO! DAD! NO!* the silent voice inside her screamed, *DEFINITELY THE WRONG THING TO SAY, DAD!* and she slid below the VW's window sill, making herself as insignificant a target as possible against stray flak.

The guard nodded. Thoughtfully. Then handed the passports back. He smiled, "Enjoy your visit" he said and raised the barrier with the sign that said VERBOTEN on it.

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