

Note from the Editor

Whatever the facts of global warming and population growth, for readers of this journal, the world grew colder and emptier in June as news spread of the death of Thomas Winter a month shy of his 43rd birthday after a draining battle with cancer. He was in his adopted home of Ankara, Turkey. Kate Sampsell of Bradley University, Thomas's former colleague in the American Studies Program at Bilkent University in Ankara, prepared a thoughtful account of Thomas's life and accomplishments and the profound effect he had on colleagues and friends. Versions of this have appeared or will appear on H-SHGAPE (of which Thomas had been an editor) and in the society's Newsletter and other professional venues. A familiar personality in our society, Thomas was a member of the SHGAPE Council and a valued supporter of this journal.

Through mutual friends, I had heard a great deal about Thomas several years before meeting him. Like many colleagues in this age of electronic communication, we used email exchanges to develop a friendship that began with intermittent meetings at conferences. In the main, we discussed intellectual matters, complained about politics, and tried to divine the direction of the tumultuous events of the past few years. From his perspective in Ankara, Thomas correctly forecast the messy aftermath of a U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. He also insisted that I pay attention to John Kerry's candidacy when most in the U.S. had written Kerry off. Thomas talked little about himself and less about his illness, until it began interfering with his communications and professional commitments. Also, having devoted himself to life in Turkey and to the study of the United States, Thomas resisted my efforts to engage him on the political and academic affairs of his native Germany. In the course of questioning me about my background, he gradually let out ways that he, too, embodied the storms of the twentieth century. In answer to a comment of mine about the effects on German political culture of the wartime generation's reluctance to discuss its experiences, Thomas remarked, "Interestingly, the men (my grandfather and granduncle) brought it up—the women esp. my grandmother constantly interfered. Add. data: both men were at Stalingrad—my grandfather made it back in what must have been a harrowing retreat, my granduncle became a prisoner of war and returned from Siberia in 1954. Then, my grandmother had her experience, too: she went to Danzig to see her husband on his retreat. She came back with either the *Admiral Hipper* or the *Wilhelm Gustloff* (the *Gustloff* with 10,000 passengers was torpedoed by a Russian sub). Interesting way of dealing with their memories."

When I replied with a comment on what might have gone on in the minds of his granduncle and other German POWs held for a decade in the Soviet Union, Thomas added, "I think what went through their minds is just the will to survive. My g-uncle (d. 1998) was finally released in 54—he was ill and I

suspect esp. after the 53 uprising in E-Germany it was more beneficial to send them home than to keep them in logging camps and salt mines. Whenever somebody says that 'back to the salt mines' thing, you can imagine what I say."

After I recounted my family's journey from the Ukraine and (mis)adventures in Boston, he responded, "My maternal great grandmother's maiden name was Meerkatz. Since she was merely half Jewish she only lost her second hand clothing store under the 1935 Nuremberg laws. But nobody knows that much more. My grandmother always sought to deny that there was any 'Jewish blood' in the family, which was probably a smart thing in the Nazi era. In addition she was the daughter of a second son of a Prussian landowner and it was probably a prestige issue (he was a professional soldier and slapped my grandmother's sister, whose husband, who was SS, had not come back from Russia, when she said that Hitler was not all that bad. I never met the man. Interesting guy)." I then remarked on a recent book that caught my attention on half- and quarter-Jewish soldiers in the World War II German army. Thomas noted that his grandfather who fought at Stalingrad was among them and added, "It was always emphasized that he was just a cook, i.e. no participation in atrocities. Late in his life, as I heard from my mom, he spilled some stories that were less pleasant. He himself—a gregarious man—liked to talk about how they hung out with the Russian civilian population. I have no doubt that that was true as are his stories about helping civilians, but I have no doubt that under order he pulled the trigger. I almost feel that by comparison my burden is easy right now." That last comment, made while Thomas was undergoing excruciating treatments for a fatal illness, typified his stance on the world. When his illness took its downturn, Thomas was attempting to arrange an academic visit for me to his adopted Ankara, where we intended to talk ideas and politics all over town until late in the night. Should this trip now materialize, I promise to hold the same conversations with his spirit.

Alan Lessoff