**The unwieldy family tree**

About the author

Irmgard Rosina Bauer was born in Munich in 1956. After studying education, she initially devoted herself to raising her four children and supporting her husband in the organization of a delicatessen and wine import company. Also, after the marriage fell apart, she decided against teaching and to continue her self-employment, taking on tasks in marketing and corporate communications for several corporations. Traveling, alone or with her children, even when they are grown, becomes a new focus in her life, about which she has written several books since 2016. With her second husband, the author lives in Munich and the south of France.

Many photos and background information can be found at

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Content ???

Before

The bulky family tree

After - interesting facts about pedigree and co.

Thanks ...

Before

We are all interested in our origins.

All of us?

Well, almost all, because Wolfram's sons in the story I'm going to tell you don't seem to get excited about it and behave rather unwieldy. What could possibly cloud the interest in one's own origins in such a lasting way as it does in this tale? Is it the fear of dealing with oneself? Yes, there is that, too. A lot of fear that advises one not to look closely at one's own history. Something could come to light that would shake your previous world view, that would upset you. Couldn't someone finally invent a suitable pair of glasses for more beneficial recognition, just as they have been in use for a long time for better vision? Glasses have always been developed further, there are contact lenses, laser medicine is advancing all the time - why not think up something technical for the soul soon? Instead of going to Mars, an anxiety sounding machine would be a great thing, I think. One that has no side effects, something like paradise on earth. Can't people finally get that right?

Many families have their "skeletons in the closet" without anyone from the outside ever knowing about it. But how can you ever understand your own person as part of the "family" system if you can't talk about it? Findings from psychology say that such legacies are very often the reason for difficult, psychosomatic illnesses. The family takes on a greater significance for the development of personality in our lives than we would like to admit.

Hordes of professionals give tips in books on how to improve communication between employees and/or managers in companies, between men and women in general, between parents and children, among siblings, in the extended family, and in many more areas. Countless communication seminars sell for very high prices in the personal development training industry, and communication coaches tout their techniques for better togetherness on the Internet and in social media. One would almost think that with so much well-prepared expertise, any conflict could be solved, that even wars between entire nations could be avoided. But I would be naïve if I simply ignored the conflicts that can exist in a family, or if I thought they could all be solved.

There seems to be a great secret between Frauke and Wolfram that is like a flight to Mars in its complexity. What was going on between the two of them? And can some things really not be clarified?

 "Der bulrige Stammbaum" tells the story of a long life journey in which many people get on, travel with, get off, live in different cities and regions of Germany, people who move around and away and reorient themselves. It is not just a travel narrative that takes place between Hanover, Braunschweig, Wolfenbüttel and Munich. It is a modern family saga in short form.

Travel is life,

as life is travel.

Jean Paul (1763-1825)

The unwieldy family tree

I wonder if that man over there was Michael? Or Alexander? They actually had to look very similar, because they were identical. That was clearly visible on the photo that was hanging on Conny's kitchen door by now. It showed Wolfram on the couch, around thirty years old, with long, wild Jimi Hendrix hair, holding in his left and right arms a little boy who could not yet walk.

Conny and Wolfram had retreated into an archway of the arcades to shelter from the cold wind at the Advent market. Conny's red hair was all tucked under a colorful wool cap. There were only a few sausages on the bratwurst grill in front of them. The vendor confidently pointed out that only he sold the specialty typical of Wolfenbüttel: the bratwurst with the twisted ends. The sausages did indeed look hand-twisted, irregularly stuffed, and probably not all of them were the same weight. But that was not what Conny cared about. She didn't feel comfortable here because of other things.

She watched the people passing by, all hooded from the cold. Maybe Michael and Alexander were both here together in the city by pure chance. But immediately her common sense kicked in. Why should they visit the Advent market together on this Wednesday of all days? Only because Conny happened to be in Wolfenbüttel on this day for the first time in her life!

Michael and Alexander had grown up in Wolfenbüttel, their mother Frauke had built a house here with her second husband Henrich.

"With my money!" Wolfram had still said in a grim undertone during the first year he had been together with Conny. Indignant, offended, still upset. For seventeen years he had paid Frauke alimony for his sons. So Frauke had built a house and he, Wolfram, had not.

"You can't build a house with the alimony for two children! You need it for the children!" Conny had countered with conviction. She had also raised several children, and there was not much money left over from her marriage for building a house and other valuable purchases. Of course, she had no experience with the prices in a medium-sized town in Lower Saxony. They were perhaps not comparable with those in Munich, she justified this circumstance to herself.

"I'm curious to see if you'll tackle the subject before you're doddering, Papa," Wienke, his big girl, had said to him before. Conny knew full well that Wienke didn't mean the house.

Wolfram had remarried, two years after Frauke had suggested he move out in favor of Henrich.

"They were saying papa to Henrich even before they learned to say it to me!" His voice was a touch too loud, and he spread his hands helplessly as he rolled a cigarette.

Wolfram's twins had grown up without him. Not because he wanted them to, but because Frauke wouldn't allow any contact. "Only my money she took every month!"

Soon after Frauke separated from Wolfram, he met and fell in love with Sylke, moved to Braunschweig with her, and the two had "three wonderful daughters" in their marriage. Wolfram always spoke very affectionately of Wienke, Leewja and Annieke to Conny. She liked that about him, she appreciated that about him, because she too still felt resentment towards her first husband: for him, it seemed to her, children had been welcome labor in his business.

Conny had immediately agreed when he suggested that she visit Wolfenbüttel - despite all his family baggage - which could be reached by bus from Braunschweig in half an hour. His voice sounded like sightseeing tourist-style. "Wolfenbüttel is a historic Guelph city, it also calls itself a Renaissance city. It has a very nice old town center and great old half-timbered houses. And the Herzog August Library is one of the most important and beautiful in Europe!"

Now Conny was treated to a contemplative sight out of the arcades, where they sheltered from the icy winter wind and let the warm haze from the bratwurst grill blow into their faces, which only enhanced the taste of their bratwurst sandwich with medium hot mustard from the large bucket. Only a few people were drawn to the pedestrian zone.

Wolfenbüttel was bigger than she had expected. And more historic. Pretty half-timbered houses lined the streets and squares, full of character, crooked and crooked and crooked. There was even supposed to be a castle in town!

They had already visited the Herzog August Library. There they could marvel at the world-famous Gospels of Henry the Lion - behind glass; the magnificent colors with which it is illustrated impressed them both equally. But Conny had also walked through the special exhibition with great interest and stopped in front of the exhibited family trees of medieval dynasties. She had already learned a lot of interesting facts about them. Wolfram's father spent the thirty years of his retired life doing genealogical research. He devoted himself to this with great passion, thoroughness and care. He knew all the rules necessary for a clear presentation. From him, Conny was already familiar with different representations of family lines: The family tree could be created in the named tree structure. Other advantages included a neatly numbered genealogical chart, just as it covered the wide living room wall in Conny's and Wolfram's shared Munich apartment, set as a large-format copy in a dignified frame. In a large semicircle, starting from the youngest generation, the father with all his known ancestors was neatly entered on the left and the mother with hers on the right, and marked with consecutive numbers. That this principle was named after a certain Kekule, also Conny had already learned from her father-in-law. The oldest known ancestor with Wolfram's family name Schepers had been born in 1599 and carried the considerable ancestor number 2048.

But to these princes, whose family trees were exhibited here in the library of Wolfenbüttel, the correctness of the representation did not seem to have been so important. No, they manipulated it according to their interests. For example, a line that was more significant to the prince was emphasized in a thick, conspicuous line with expansive illustrations, and only a thin, inconspicuous line led to an illegitimate child. And the name of the mother? For the viewers it could be guessed where it was, namely on the part of the parchment scroll for which there was unfortunately no more space on the picture - such a misfortune, however.

Another prince had had a magnificent family tree painted - but it was divided exactly lengthwise in the middle. One half was decorated with ornate names, leaves and flowers. There was then no room for the other half because of the lavish decoration. A clever cover-up of inglorious relatives. Or unloved ones. Or unknown. Or mutually hostile lines.

And Wolfram? He dreamed of being able to continue his father's extensive collection of ancestors. But how would he squeeze all his past into a suitable family tree? Conny was his third wife. He had been married to Frauke for three years, and to Sylke for almost twenty. And his daughter Wienke was twenty when she said the sentence to her dad, "I'm curious whether you'll still tackle this subject with your sons."

Wienke suddenly recognized herself in wonderment in the role of the sacrificing daughter; she drew parallels to her father's life. She had enrolled in Hanover to study "fashion design."

She found a dinky little apartment on the first floor of an older housing complex with a cozy courtyard in the lively trendy neighborhood of Hannover-Linden, surrounded by more such older townhouses, one of which Sönke lived in. He was curious to see who had moved in, and from his first-floor window, as dusk fell and no curtains had yet been drawn, he spotted a young woman to his liking: slender, petite, dressed in colorful, loose-fitting Aladdin pants with a tight-fitting top over her flat breasts. Her thick, black dreadlocks hung far over her shoulders and over the cooking pot she was stirring. Sönke walked down to the courtyard.

"Hi!" he called outside her tilted window. "That smells good!"

"Hi!" she replied, smiling delightedly, and opened the whole sash of the window to better talk to the man, whom she found instantly attractive because of his height, his straight, plump, dark hair, and because of his bewitching smile.

"Would you like to eat with me? I made Indian curry."

She pressed the door opener, he entered and gladly followed her invitation to sit at the small table. Sönke was instantly smitten with Wienke. After all, he had been living deprived for quite some time after his girlfriend Kristina broke up with him, even though they had twins together.

From now on, Wienke was in and out of Sönke's house and he was in and out of hers.

Thorben and Thore were two years old. When they visited Sönke on the other side of the courtyard, Wienke dutifully took care of them. She picked them up from daycare, cooked dinner for all four of them - an Indian curry version without chili - and every now and then presented them with pretty jackets, panties, and little hats that she had discovered at the crafts market, and with particularly beautiful wooden toys that Sönke especially appreciated because he had started his own business as a carpenter. His main client was a kindergarten, for which he had the privilege of planning a special order: he built colorful, mobile, knee-high, creative wooden partitions, the purpose of which was to give the children the opportunity to retreat during childcare hours.

A year later, Wienke gave birth to Lennard. As a matter of course, he was given a crib in Wienke's apartment that Sönke had built, and as a matter of course, Thorben and Thore frequently visited with their dad, and Wienke cooked, cared for, changed diapers, and breastfed, missing lectures and seminars and practical units of her studies more and more often until she didn't go at all.

Every now and then, Wienke would say to her father on the phone or when he visited her: "When are you going to sort things out with your sons, Dad? Do you notice anything? I now have Sönke's twins in my life. Twins! Just like you. But isn't that transference? Am I taking over a workup here that would actually be your job?"

More and more often Wienke had the feeling that Kristina, the mother of the twins Thorben and Thore, was watching her, Wienke, suspiciously. And she sensed her beloved Sönke at odds: on the one hand, he wanted to support Wienke with their joint son Lennard, but on the other hand, he also wanted to support Kristina, who, after all, still had a third child to care for in her household. This was Ole, seven years old. Kristina was also Ole's mother. His father had left Kristina soon after Ole's birth. He paid the required child support, but he went about his work and only brought Ole to live with him and his new wife now and then on weekends.

Sönke took on the role of surrogate father for Ole, or at least he was heavily involved in organizing the children's visitation.

Then Wienke and Sönke spent two weeks on vacation in Italy, while Lennard and the twins were allowed to stay with Kristina or their grandmother. On the way back, they planned to spend two more days with Conny and Wolfram in Munich.

"When the twins have been with me and I bring them back, Kristina is very cool and seems done. As if she were jealous of our relationship as Sönke's first wife," Wienke said abruptly as the four took a walk together along the Isar River. "I wonder if that's because of me?" she asked the group, looking at Sönke.

"No, I have the same impression," he confirmed. "At the same time, Kristina also has a new boyfriend. I like Erik, he's a nice guy."

"You know, I watch the interactions between Sönke and Kristina very closely," she then said only to Conny when the two men were out of earshot for a moment. "My heart rarely deceives me."

Wienke spontaneously decided to stay alone with Papa and Conny in Munich for another week. With a little distance, she could gain clarity about her feelings, she said. In fact, after a week, she voiced a conclusion to Conny.

"I actually don't get along with Sönke. He thinks so differently from me. Has only his carpentry and his projects in mind, even on weekends and even on vacation. That's so important to him, he mostly just talks about it. I hardly had anything from him in Italy. Actually, he does not fulfill my desires. His fluff for his work really gets on my nerves and costs me a lot of energy and organization. Yet I too would have been born to be an artist!" At this, she laughed bashfully at Conny heartily. "Why should I actually support him and not he me? I often ask myself that. Between the two of us it crises more and more violently. We love each other and don't love each other. We hate each other and fight and love each other again. And there's Kristina, too!" Her brow furrowed anxiously. "I'm going to take up my studies again. Mom and Sönke's mom will take Lennard to kindergarten and pick him up on certain days. I've already talked to them on the phone." The corners of Wienke's mouth showed a mischievous smile. "I'm really looking forward to my new life!"

Soon, another year had passed. Kristina had had another child by her new boyfriend Erik. Yaris was her fourth. The boy showed clear symptoms of Down syndrome at birth.

Wienke and Sönke had also brought home a surprise from their last vacation in Italy: three months ago, she had given birth to their second child, a boy they named Faik. Wienke did not take up her planned studies this time either. Soon, however, the two realized that Faik could not mend their relationship.

Sönke moved back in with Kristina. His dark hair began to thicken. He was now 34 years old and took care of Kristina, of Ole, who was now ten years old, of Thorben and Thore, who had been his and Kristina's children for seven years; and in the household he had once again established with Kristina also lived the Down boy Yaris, whose father was Erik.

Sönke had given up his self-employment and the financial uncertainties that came with it and had taken a job in a carpentry business, where he regularly received a reliable transfer at the end of the month.

And Wienke?

Had reason to say, "I knew it right away!"

She was now twenty-seven years old, still delicate and dainty and pretty, tended her dreadlocks, which by now reached her hips, and when her two boys were at Sönke and Kristina's on weekends and she herself went out with friends, young men flocked around her. Now and then a relationship lasting several weeks resulted with a man who wore dreadlocks and wide, colorful bloomers just like she did. None of them, however, could stand up to her claim of being a partner and father to her two children.

The legally obligatory alimony for Lennard, Faik and Wienke was not high, Sönke's salary was not enough for everything. Wienke applied for Hartz IV. She lived very modestly and made ends meet. Wienke loved her children more than anything and showed a lot of willpower with all the necessary organization, but sometimes it was just too much for her and she was getting desperate. Then her mother Sylke supported her in the household and took the children off her hands for days at a time.

And Wolfram, Wienke's father?

As much as he had gladly and wholeheartedly decided to move to Conny in Munich, to get involved with the huge, unmanageable city, to start a new life together with Conny and to read her every wish from her eyes, he missed his three daughters on the other hand, who had preferred to stay in their familiar surroundings in the north of Germany, including the closeness to their mother Sylke. Wolfram visited the three of them every four to six weeks, if possible. To do this, he joined up with them early on, because each of them would be disappointed if Dad arrived and they might have made another appointment with friends just then.

Now Wolfram and Conny were standing under the arbors in the pedestrian zone of Wolfenbüttel. Both of them were lost in their thoughts.

Conny still found it completely incomprehensible that over so many years the parties, as she called it in her mind, had not come closer. Whatever might have happened, she didn't know everything and didn't need to know everything about her husband's past life - but in dealing with difficult people, she had always found that time smoothed the waters and healed wounds. Here, too, time could not pass without leaving a trace! Something had to happen in the hearts!

There, didn't the young man over there look a little like Wolfram? The stature could also fit: slim and not particularly tall, strong, dark curls, light blue eyes.

Walk up and approach him? Like this: Hello, are you Michael or Alexander?

No, she didn't have the courage either. Just like that - that was uncomfortable for her, too. After all, she had the excuse: It's not my life. Was she also a coward? Like all the others involved? A system had been established that was stable in itself, with all its groaning rough edges, but it held. So why change anything? Never change a running system, a rule of thumb from the computer industry, did it not also fit here, in this life? Or did it need to be rethought, as it sometimes does there, too?

Wolfram, meanwhile, maintained his position as a victim:

After all, it had been Frauke's fault. Frauke had finally kicked me out! Michael and Alexander had just begun to speak when they already addressed Henrich as Papa.

Frauke finally made sure that the boys couldn't build up a relationship with me.

After all, Frauke kept my twin sons away from me.

After all, Frauke only took my money every month and built a house from it.

Frauke finally inoculated the twins against me and gave me no chance at all.

I always tried to get in touch with the boys, but all I got from Frauke was rejection.

Frauke had a daughter with Henrich. Only a few months after our separation.

In the meantime, a few more bratwursts had been sold to passers-by, but the grill master had not put on any more. Conny and Wolfram were still standing in the same place under the arcades. The weather did not invite them to stroll through the pedestrian zone. The few passers-by, who could be counted on one hand, masked themselves behind the turned-up collars and hoods of their coats pulled deep into their faces.

So Frauke still lived here in Wolfenbüttel. And Michael and Alexander, Conny thought. Without her prompting, Wolfram put his thoughts into words.

"Frauke was always goading them on. Back when they were both nineteen, they even filed a lawsuit against me, I've told you that before. They demanded that I continue to pay alimony, even though they were already of age and had already completed an education, so they were earning money themselves. Michael and Alexander couldn't accept that the judge agreed with me."

"And then? What did you do? The sons filed a lawsuit against the father! For me, that's a

Horrible idea!"

"For me, too," Wolfram continued, digging the tobacco pouch out of his jacket pocket. Then he fell silent again.

"I can still remember the ominous letter from Alexander. What was there about the Schufa entry? Care to tell me?"

Wolfram rolled a cigarette and lit it awkwardly behind his hand. Highly concentrated, he took a drag. Then he began.

"Through a friend from the area here, who was part of the examining board of the Lower Saxony Chamber of Crafts, I had learned that both of them had passed their journeyman's exams."

There followed a long pause, as if Wolfram were diving into another world. Then he continued.

"I went to Wolfenbüttel for the graduation ceremony and the exhibition of the examination pieces. However, I could not leave my workplace in time due to increased workload, so I was late for the festivities. Very unfortunate, but that was the way it was."

The cigarette was finished, and he spread the tobacco on the nearest cigarette paper as slowly and awkwardly as if it were his first roll-up. He brought it to his mouth to moisten it with saliva. Conny wondered if it was the cold that made his fingers tremble so.

"So by now they were of age and earning their own money. That it was now time to stop my alimony payments, I felt I owed to my wife Sylke and my three daughters. But I couldn't just do that, because alimony payments can only be stopped by a decision of the family court. I tried to get a legal title and got an appointment. By the way, her mother Frauke was then also present at the hearing."

He had made sure that the wind did not blow the smoke from his cigarette, which had already shrunk to a stub, into Conny's face. For a long time he looked after him.

"The costs of these proceedings were imposed on Michael and Alexander. But they did not meet this payment obligation for several months. At some point, at least Michael transferred the accrued amount. On the remittance slip, the subject line was 'servitude contribution.'"

Wolfram pulled hard on his cigarette and looked far out over the marketplace, as if the houses did not limit his view.

"So I had to call in the bailiff from Alexander, who by virtue of his office seized his wages, in order to get my money from him, too. The Schufa entry didn't come from me, but was a legal consequence of this court-ordered garnishment, so he was bound to the process."

Conny looked into Wolfram's face. Was it the coldness that made it look so wan?

"So you were proven right in all your efforts, do I understand correctly?" inquired Conny.

Slowly he continued to speak.

"Yes, the court proved me right in everything."

He let a long pause pass until he continued.

"Looking through the court documents from the boys' lawyer, I kept discovering passages of text that still triggered strong negative feelings in me, even after years. Either the facts were wrong or at least they were presented in a highly distorted way. They hurt me deeply. I didn't want to expose myself to this anymore and threw everything away, including my own notes, as part of a move. That's why I don't remember some of the details very well."

He rolled a cigarette.

Conny had never understood families not getting together. She didn't know that. A family sticks together, that had been the credo in her own family, in joy and in sorrow. In Munich, when they were already living together, she had persuaded Wolfram to write another letter to the one son whose address he knew. She had suggested that he put a recent photo of him in the letter and had chosen it with him.

She had seen how Wolfram trembled when he put the letter in the mailbox. How he suffered. He wanted to! He had two sons and wanted to be good with them, too. Wanted them and him to find a way out of this tricky situation. Conny watched how the confirmation photo, which was probably the last one Frauke had sent, changed position on Wolfram's desk. Sometimes left, sometimes right, sometimes up, sometimes down. And there was another photo, cut out of the newspaper and pressed into a frame. It showed a young man graduating from the carpenters' guild who looked incredibly like Wolfram - and had the last name Udolph.

It was on a weekend, six weeks later.

Conny watched Wolfram step out onto the patio, rolling one cigarette after another, every half hour it felt like. At noon, he wasn't hungry for the roast and the bread dumplings whose scent drifted through the house. He was pale as he made himself a cup of coffee in the kitchen.

"Do you have any news?"

Wolfram just nodded.

"Come with me," he said, and she followed him to his desk, where he had a letter he gave her. She pulled out the letter and read:

Dear Mr. Schepers,

I ask you to cease all correspondence with me with immediate effect. I see no reason for any contact with you.

Incidentally, I would ask you to have the Schufa entry that was made against me at the time deleted.

Alexander Udolph

"That's incomprehensible to me!" said Conny. "Still so hardened after so long. What was going on there?"

"Frauke gave her a lasting inoculation against me," was his answer again and again.

"That was all so long ago. Do you still need the Schufa entry?"

"No, you're right. I can have the Schufa entry deleted. I wasn't even aware that it still existed."

Only slowly did Wolfram recover from the letter. Even weeks later, Conny could see the distress in his crouched posture.

"Did you have the entry deleted?"

"Yes, I did. Thank you for your sympathy," he said, hugging his wife tightly.

Wolfram celebrated his sixtieth birthday with his immediate family in Munich. So with Conny's children, and Wolfram's three daughters had also taken the long journey and the costs, which were high for them as high school students, students or Hartz IV recipients, to attend Dad's birthday. Since Wolfram and Connie's wedding two years earlier, their children from the south and north of the republic had not seen each other. Now they brought their partners, a grandson was running around, and there was a happy-go-lucky mood in the house.

Take a family photo with all of them? Sure! It pictured the fourteen young people plus child, in the middle of them enthroned a beaming Wolfram. He held his Conny tightly in his arms.

"Send the photo to your sons!" Conny couldn't help it, she had to hang on!

"A good idea!" said Wolfram, and the following week he had a printout made, which he put in a pretty card and sent to the address he knew.

Conny feared bad things, but the letter never came back.

The subject remained an issue. When Conny visited his daughters in the north together with Wolfram, which she managed to do on average every two years in addition to her work, she always brought it up. Because it was so incomprehensible to her that there was no rapprochement from either side.

What possibilities were there for a solution?

Just go there and ring the doorbell. The postal address was known.

Or set up a blind date.

Or the girls got together and ventured out for a spontaneous visit.

Or one of Conny's sons drove up north and made non-binding contact.

Or Wolfram invited his sons to Munich for a weekend, train ticket and hotel booking included. Or to the nearer North Sea, which Conny and Wolfram both loved and where they liked to hang out for a few days when they were together in the north.

Surely the story would be resolved in an appropriate Hollywood movie with one of these ideas.

Then hope sprouted again in reality:

Another five years had passed, and Wolfram's youngest daughter Annieke had also graduated from high school in the meantime and decided to pursue a degree in business law offered at the Ostfalia University of Applied Sciences in Wolfenbüttel.

Wolfenbüttel! The city full of family mystique. Couldn't something finally be cleared up?

Annieke lived near her mother Sylke and her new husband Pietje in Braunschweig and commuted daily from Braunschweig to Wolfenbüttel.

"I met Kathi at a party," Annieke told me when Conny was visiting with Wolfram. "She's in a clique with my half-brother Alexander. I could get in touch sometime, he must have said to her."

"That sounds great!" responded Conny enthusiastically. It seemed like a door was finally opening. Young people could talk to each other in a completely different way! They were more relaxed, more open, they could simply introduce themselves to each other at the bar, chat with each other - and then we'd see.

Back in Munich, Conny and Wolfram simply lived their lives.

Conny worked, Wolfram spent his last year as an electrical engineer before retirement, Conny's children graduated from university in Munich, moved to a job or a girlfriend or boyfriend. After the first grandchild, others saw the light of day, and Conny and Wolfram learned to be happier and happier filling the roles of grandma and grandpa, respectively.

Annieke had finished her studies in Wolfenbüttel and found the perfect job at Volkswagen in Wolfsburg.

"Did you ever get a chance to meet Alexander?" asked Conny when she called to wish her a happy birthday, as she did every year. "Oh no, that didn't happen," she answered evasively.

"Ah," was all Conny said, trying not to let resignation ring in her voice. What should she be more concerned about in this matter than the people involved themselves? After all, it really wasn't her business to deal with the legacy of her husband and his ex-families.

One day, Leewja, Wolfram's middle daughter, found her half-brother Michael on Stayfriends and passed this find on as a tip to her dad. He immediately signed up as a premium member on the social network.

"Michael also plays in a band, just like I did when I was a student," Wolfram's desk would say enthusiastically when he visited Stayfriends again. Or:

"Michael owns a canoe, just like me!" Or:

"Michael was on my profile page yesterday."

"I wonder if Michael and Alexander already have kids, too?" asked Wolfram sometimes.

And then he was happy about a cross connection: Maiken Udolph. All her details on Stayfriends indicated that she was Michael's wife. And there was something else to see that excited him: she had a child of about eight with her in her profile photo.

"So I'm a grandpa again," Wolfram rejoiced.

"Then why don't you send your grandson a little present!" suggested Conny.

Wolfram's face darkened. He remained silent.

"You know," he then said, "for many years, my parents put a monetary gift in the envelope of congratulations to Michael and Alexander for every birthday and Christmas, yes, to each grandson individually. They wanted to acknowledge them, to show them that they also had grandparents. Never, never came there a thank you, not even once. That offended my parents very much."

Conny knew nothing more to say about it.

"As a dad, did you ever send your sons a present for their birthdays?"

"Of course, when they were little, I always sent them new toys by mail!" His voice sounded upset and defiant. "But I know from friends that my gifts didn't arrive properly. Frauke must have told my sons that my toys were from their uncle and aunt."

Conny shook her head inwardly. What had that been all about? Wolfram must have hurt Frauke badly, too, that she was so irreversibly dismissive.

She now regarded her earlier involvement as interference. Again and again she told herself: This was not her life, but his. She just had to be careful not to let it drag her down and spoil her mood. How often did she have to defend herself against her own mother and father, who always wanted only her best - and in their way.

She was grateful to Wolfram for setting the example for her: he never interfered in his daughters' affairs. Still drove to visit them four or five times a year, spent pleasant hours with them - individually or usually, if it could be arranged, together. None of them held back and they told him very much very openly from their lives, from their everyday life. Wolfram was always a patient listener. Then he went back to her, Conny, home. Without then making a judgment about the life of the daughters. Sometimes Conny would even have wished for more interference from him. "You can't just accept everything," she said. "Sometimes, as parents, you have to say something!"

Wolfram, however, sought harmony. Digging into problems wasn't his thing.

"I didn't learn to talk about my feelings until late," he once explained to Conny in one of those frequent situations when she wanted to hear more opinion from him. "And I'm still not good at it. I'm only a man," he said, laughing.

And Conny had learned that there were great advantages to one not always and immediately making his opinion known about everything and everyone, if he was thoughtful - and left being impulsive to her. So they avoided a lot of arguments over the years. For they would have had plenty of opportunities to do so, had it been up to her. So often they could have disagreed. But he was always able to restrain himself and thus cool down her passion and excitement, with which she usually reacted to events, more and more often.

"Dad, I have to take leave in time," reminded his daughter Leewja, who had graduated as an architect and had recently started working in a planning office in Salzgitter. It was another one of those years when Wolfram had gone up north with Conny to visit. "You're having your seventieth at the end of the year. Are you having a party or something?"

Wolfram was as surprised as Conny. He was increasingly enjoying being a pensioner, not having to plan anything. And Conny didn't have that number in the back of her now gray-haired mind either. She herself had just turned sixty-two.

Seventy! Yes of course one had to organize there a celebration or so. Maybe even celebrate in the north?

Bridging the seven hundred kilometers for her children in Munich and his children in the north was not easy, because all of them were now involved in working life. Of course, this had to be planned if everyone was to be there! Weekends, overnight stays, the grandchildren, food for everyone ... Wolfram and Conny had already moved a few years earlier from the large house, which the children no longer needed, to a smaller apartment in the middle of the city. There, a big celebration was not possible.

That's when he remembered Pietje. He had been married to Sylke for fifteen years. Wolfram and he, as well as Sylke as his ex-wife and as the mother of his three daughters, maintained an open, casual conversational relationship. Pietje, he was in that winter sports club! And he had access to that big hut in the Harz mountains, what was its name again?

Wolfram immediately called Pietje. He actually found a date on one of the coveted Advent weekends that was still free, and reserved the hut for the birthday party. The two men arranged the organization by phone and e-mail among themselves, arrival, departure, number of people, equipment features, room size for the overnight stays - everything perfect. Yes, the guests could arrive already on Thursday or Friday, Wolfram and Conny would take care of the food. On Saturday they could all go on a hike together to the popular Brocken. There all, who had not seen each other for a long time, could have a good chat and in the evening still make music, play games or simply exchange the homemade South German mulled wine and the North German Glögg from the kettles back and forth. And on Sunday still have breakfast together and say goodbye, each according to his gusto or distance to home, for the way home. Yes, Wolfram meticulously worked out the invitation with this information.

"And you'll send the invitation out to your sons, too, won't you?"

Conny immediately bit her tongue. Again, she was interfering.

But Wolfram reacted calmly, as usual: "Yes, that's a good idea. After all, I'm turning seventy. And before I get doddery - maybe they'll take heart."

He wasn't doddering yet, Conny thought, but his still very full hair had turned completely white.

Wienke stopped talking to her father a long time ago: When are you going to sort this out with your sons? She had taken her life into her own hands. Lennard was eleven by now, and although Sönke's attitude was "My children don't have to become academics!" she sent her son to high school. Also because he wanted to.

There he was now in the fifth grade. Faik was still in elementary school, in the third grade. Ole, stepbrother and the oldest of them all, had started an apprenticeship as an industrial clerk. The twins Thorben and Thore were in junior high school, and Yaris went to special education. The boys' visiting hours with Sönke and Kristina had become more or less regular, which made for relaxation in the families. Even if Wienke still let out a sigh now and then. For example, Sönke still hadn't managed to get keys for the boys so that they could come straight to his house after school. "No, instead they still have to go to grandma's first to get the key. I just can't get things like that done with him!" She let resignation show in her shoulder shrug, but at the same time she added a small smile.

Wienke had learned that life wasn't perfect and that if she didn't take care of herself, no one would do it for her. So she took part in coaching courses offered by the employment office for mothers starting out again - and had the courage to tackle her old desire once more. She had refrained from studying fashion design. "You have to be younger for that," she said. She enrolled at the University of Hanover to study cultural studies. It would cost her a lot of organization, but she had fought with Sönke to get him to free up her time, and she also had Sönke's mother's promise to support her grandchildren. And her own mother was definitely going to give her a hand when she set out on her new path.

Wolfram had also started another attempt this year to bring order into his life and to establish contact with his sons. He wrote to Maiken, Michael's wife, on Stayfriends. He introduced himself, described his view of things, told of his desire to get to know his sons, and showed his effort to get in touch with them.

Maiken did not answer. But she always called his messages, he could see that. That gave him courage. After all, this was not a rejection!

So he dared to put Conny's suggestion into action: To propose a meeting to Maiken. A blind date, on a Tuesday afternoon at 3 p.m. in Wolfenbüttel at the Café am Stadtmarkt. She didn't have to accept, he wrote to her. But he would sit in the café and wait for her. Would she dare to do that?

He arranged a week of visits with his daughters and on that Tuesday was at Leewja's in Braunschweig, from where a bus went to Wolfenbüttel every hour.

Conny banged with him in Munich, where she was pursuing her work. Shortly before, Wolfram had called her full of anxiety. "What if she doesn't come?"

"Then you've tried. I'm very sure that your news didn't leave Maiken cold. Sure as death, it has sparked a conversation in the family. We can assume from the Stayfriends profile that they have an eight-year-old child together. At that age, a child already vehemently asks why she can't meet her grandfather. If Michael is cross, she will at least respond briefly. We cannot know in what circumstances this family lives and relates to each other. Maybe Maiken will ask some questions to her mother-in-law Frauke. Your message may cause so much confusion that there is unrest. And do you want to know what I think about it? I would like it if there is even a fight! Finally a feeling! At least it'll get some movement in this messed up story!" Conny's face had grown hot and her hands sweaty. She clenched the hand that wasn't holding the cell phone into a fist and pounded it on the table.

Wolfram listened quietly, saying only, "You're right. Still, I'm scared."

Conny's voice softened again. "Of course, I understand that all too well. I'll stand by you. But not doing anything - look, it didn't make anything better over the four decades."

But neither did her interference, she thought contritely to herself. Once again she had stuck her nose into his business, she scolded herself. In the end, she might have been the cause of even more incrustation. But on the other hand, she knew that she wanted to be that kind of cause. Doing nothing, again, she couldn't live with that. She always wanted to do something. To move things forward, to bring them to an end. Yes, she always wanted to find a solution, there had to be a solution! But she had not been able to solve many a dispute in her own family over the years. Maybe it was not possible after all ...

Wolfram sounded toneless when he called Conny later: "I waited for an hour. Then I took the bus back to Braunschweig to my Leewja. She gave me her key. We'll cook something good for ourselves tonight, I'll go shopping. Tonight I can stay in her apartment."

The big birthday party had approached.

Conny caught herself again and again furtively keeping an eye on the door during the days at the cabin in the Harz mountains. Maybe at least one of them would show up? She would have liked to know to what extent they looked like Wolfram.

Wolfram also hoped. Whether Michael or Alexander or both ... For his seventieth birthday! My God, he wasn't getting any younger!

During the three-day festivities, it was again Conny who addressed Wolfram's daughters about "his sons": "Wolfram invited them, but again no word came."

"I can't understand that!" said Wienke. "Now that I'm a mother of two sons myself, I would definitely be interested in them meeting their father. And my boys, after all, already want to know everything themselves."

"Well, it was a different time then," Conny replied, remembering her own divorce story more than twenty years ago. "People couldn't deal with breakups as openly as they do today, I think. There was only hop or top. And according to Wolfram's story, I think Frauke is very strict about it anyway: either - or. There is nothing in between for her. But everyone develops in life, with circumstances and experiences. I don't understand it either!" She shrugged her shoulders in perplexity.

Then Wienke's mother Sylke sat down. She had heard what it was all about.

"Frauke once visited us, that is Wolfram and I, with the twins when they were still quite small," she recounted. "She was very smartly dressed up, acted snooty and cool, and seemed to be performing a chore. After half an hour, she put the twins back in the car, closed the door and left. She didn't even give us a chance to say goodbye to the two of them sweetly. Just drove away, without a wave, without anything."

Sylke looked at Conny pityingly. It was clear to her - and to Conny, too - that now she had this problem on her hands, because Wolfram was still struggling with it.

Wienke had been sitting quietly by the side the whole time. Now she bent forward with a jerk. She rested her elbows on her knees and rested her chin on her clasped hands so that she could look her mother directly in the eye.

"At first, yes, I believed in a transmission story. Dad's twins and all that. But today I know it all gave me the strength to go through with my own story and find my peace of mind. The way Michael and Alexander deal with Dad, that's the way I never want my sons to deal with Sönke! I don't talk bad about him in front of them. I want my children to appreciate their father, not despise and reject him. That is immensely important to me. For their sake, and because we have to continue to coordinate all the time, I have even given up my resentment of Kristina. In the meantime, our relationship has developed into a friendship. The same question is on our minds: How can we get Sönke where we want him? Sylke laughed, too.

But Leewja, the middle of the three sisters, shook her head.

"You know," she turned to Conny, "I'm not so sure I want contact with them anymore. I wonder if I wouldn't be snotty if I met Michael and Alexander. They're on a very high horse. I was still a child back then, but I saw very clearly how my parents had to save money and couldn't afford many vacations. We were three children, and every month Dad had to pay Frauke a thousand marks, and he never got anything from his sons! Dad always worked a lot, took on several side jobs in addition to his job, so that he could get everything together. We children would have liked to spend more time with him. And we never got to see our half-brothers, Dad always had to pay. Frauke must have taken an extreme dislike to us and to Dad. Papa paid for almost two decades and was only allowed to see his boys very rarely. When the boys were nineteen and then wanted to sue for their share of Papa's side job income in court, the judge agreed with Papa: No, the side job was his own commitment! And that did not have to be used for the maintenance payment to his sons. He was allowed to keep it for himself and his family. And the sons had now finished their education and had their own income.

The meeting in court was the first and last between dad and his sons since their childhood days. They never showed up or contacted him of their own accord. And when Dad did contact one of them, from whom he had a current address, twice by mail, each time he received an extremely negative response. No, they want nothing to do with Mr. Schepers.

Everything always went cold and dismissive! It hurt me unbelievably when Papa wanted to meet Maiken in the café in Wolfenbüttel the other day. I thought that was extremely brave of him. He arrived at my home a wreck. Collapsed, pale, exhausted. I felt so sorry for him. Then I cooked him something good. No, they're not worth it!"

A frown line had formed between her brown eyes. Her voice rose even more, and she repeated:

"They're not worth it! In the end, they're assholes, and then I have the certainty, those assholes are my half-brothers that I've been worrying about so much!"

Wolfram had been a pensioner for several years now and had enough time to deal intensively and with pleasure with the genealogical preliminary work of his father. There was a lot of material. Hundreds of black and white photos from eighteen hundred something over the turn of the century to World War II. Documents of his father's flight and expulsion from Alsace, of the alternating Germanization and Frenchization there after each of the two world wars, of the family's burned-down business and residential buildings, of delivery bills from his great-grandfather's factory, of the deaths of several aunts from the Spanish flu or from simple inflammation in the nineteen-twenties because penicillin had not yet been discovered. A meticulously prepared genealogical chart hung in large format on the living room wall.

Wolfram had combined these documents with contemporary historical and political information and turned them into a book. Again he thought of Michael and Alexander. His father had already neatly entered the names of his grandsons in the genealogical table. With the foreign surname: Udolph. Because Wolfram Schepers had taken on Frauke's last name when he married. At that time, when this innovation of the name law came up in the seventies, his father had had great difficulties with it and had shown the greatest incomprehension, Wolfram recalled. It was only after the divorce that he adopted his original surname Schepers again. In Wolfram's richly illustrated book, similarities would be discovered in the photos of the relatives. Surely that would interest his sons. He wanted to have this book printed by mid-December and send it to them by mail for Christmas. He shared this plan with Conny - and of course she liked it!

She had taken plenty of photos of everyone present at his seventieth birthday party at the cabin, of Wolfram, and of Lennard and Faik. She had also shot videos of his daughters as they sang songs for Wolfram in three-part harmony, accompanied by Annieke on the guitar. Yes, he had sung a lot with them and had rehearsed a great repertoire with them when they were younger, when they still lived in a family in the same home: "Donna Donna" after Joan Baez. "Sunny Afternoon" by the Kinks, a little Beatles, a little Stones. How perfectly they matched each other, all three knew the lyrics by heart! Conny sank into pleasure when Wolfram finally played the guitar again. In addition the clear and sure voices of his girls.

Conny could burn their videos on DVD and send them to Michael and Alexander and their families together with the book. They would surely watch that with

with interest! Even if with concealed interest. Their hopes had already been dampened several times.

Back home in Munich on Tuesday after the party, Wolfram checked his mail on the PC, whereupon he abruptly got up, rolled himself an excited cigarette and went out onto the balcony. Conny followed him. She stood next to him and waited while she looked at his yellow-darkened fingers, between which he held the cigarette. Suddenly he told her: "Michael has closed the access to Stayfriends for me. I'm no longer allowed to view his account."

There were barely two weeks left until Christmas. The Christmas markets in Munich were bustling, especially since it had snowed and the wooden stands, richly decorated with all kinds of Christmas tree ornaments, handicrafts, Nativity figurines or warm knitted socks and hats, seemed to be covered in sugar on their roofs. Conny and Wolfram squeezed in among the many visitors. At one of the numerous bratwurst stands on Marienplatz, they each bought a bratwurst in a bun and squeezed medium hot mustard into it from the large bucket. Conny remembered the Christmas market visit in Wolfenbüttel. No, she certainly didn't need to look out for Michaels and Alexanders here in Munich. Maybe it wasn't a good idea to send them the photos and videos of the birthday party after all. She should just leave them alone. Maybe they had found their peace. Peace! What was that again? Letting the other lead his life. Conny took a deep breath. Relaxed her forehead wrinkles. And just let herself go with it: Michael and Alexander would turn forty next year. They were really grown up and knew what they were doing. Letting go - that, too, could bring about peace.

Wolfram had been complaining about pain in his lungs for months. His visit to the doctor and his evasive statements did not bode well.

On their stroll through the city center, Conny and Wolfram first came across the Pink Christmas on Stephansplatz, which they had already heard a lot about. Here, in addition to an unusual Christmas ambience, the stand operators offered a new mulled cider made from pear juice, which tasted great to the two. Perhaps they also had to adjust to something new, even to something new and terrible. Adopt a different attitude. One with which they could find peace, she and Wolfram. Without fear of rejection.

"I sometimes think about burial at sea. I love the North Sea. And so do you. And I'd be a little close to my daughters up north, too."

Now it was out. Of course, Conny had already thought about his possible end, too. Sometimes a little humor helped get over deadly serious situations, she had learned, and she twisted her face into a cautious grin as she looked at him.

"You could have yourself buried in the cemetery forest of Wolfenbüttel. Then at least your sons can visit you there sometime."

A fine, light laugh escaped his mouth. "Maybe that's the real peace: Letting go of one's position. Letting it go. Each to his own. I have had a wonderful wife in you, and I have been allowed to accompany wonderful daughters whom I love above all things, and they love me, I know that. Love your neighbor as yourself. I have let go of my sons by no longer being offended by their rejection. Do you remember the family trees that were displayed in the Herzog August Library in Wolfenbüttel? Anyway, with my sons, the family tree would have become even more complicated than it already is." A sly smile pressed around his lips, showing the edges of yellowed teeth.

It had long since grown dark. Pink lights flashed all around the small market. The stage had just been set for the nineteen o'clock performance of the travesty artists.

"The show must go on. This is our Christmas peace. I love you! But now I'm hungry again. Let's get another bratwurst and people-watch while we eat. Same procedure as every year. I want a red one. And you want a white one, right?"

"Wait a minute," she said, "does that mean ..."

"Yes, it means I'm taking them out. Both Alexander and Michael and Frauke. They don't appear in our family tree. The way they want it."

Conny accepted her white bratwurst and squeezed medium hot mustard on it from the big bucket. Then she spread the bratwurst wide in the bun and leaned her head against his cold jacket.

"I learned so much from you," she said.

Afterward -

 Trivia about pedigree and the like.

I got the inspiration for the travel narrative "The Bulky Family Tree" during a visit to northern Germany, where people in my husband's family were intensely discussing events in their close relatives. Some events I have heard out as described. Others I have added with the freedom of the narrator. In any case, this story occupied me so much that I had to write it down - and put it in "Rosis Reiseerzählungen" as volume 3 as a life journey, even if the main character this time is not Rosi, but Conny. If I can inspire some of my readers with "Der sperrige Stammbaum" to take the first step towards reconciliation in the family, that would make me very happy. Perhaps a courageous venture into one's own past will open up a glimpse of an even better or even happier life?

The phenomenon of patchwork families is not as new as one might think. In earlier times, the early death of one spouse often forced a remarriage (to provide for the children and the farm, for example) and thus a new branch of the family tree or a throwing together of the children.

In the following I take you readers still on a small excursion into the family research.

The family tree is an old-established representation form, in order to show, starting from an ancestor, who forms the trunk, the descendants of this ancestor. This picture was widespread especially among noble families to prove the descent from a very specific noble ancestor, often called progenitor, for example the oldest Wittelsbach, the oldest Guelph, the oldest Habsburg, which had an effect on the succession. From a trunk branches off, on it the children are called, in the next branching stage the grandchildren, then the great-grandchildren and so on. Since our society was patriarchal, women were often not mentioned and not named as "progenitors".

Hordes of genealogists today deal with family data and their exchange and assignment in their associations all over the world. Whereas in the past genealogists had to undertake arduous journeys, for example, to locate birth, baptism, marriage or death data in church records of distant places, nowadays billions of data feeds can be found on the Internet. A major contribution to this has been made by one particular religious group: the Mormons. They have created huge databases and would like to make it possible for long-dead ancestors to be baptized and accepted into the Mormon community through a living representative. Thus, according to their belief, deceased people can at least get on the right track in the afterlife. Other people have digitized the handwritten lists of passengers on emigrant ships to America, and still others have had fun photographing gravestones in all kinds of cemeteries and displaying the names thus collected in a structured way on appropriate websites, where a modern genealogist can find and evaluate them.

In contrast to the family tree, the genealogical table is a list in which the ancestors of a person, his ancestors, are listed, usually starting from the youngest generation, thus: his two parents (one generation back), his four grandparents (two generations back), his eight great-grandparents (three generations back) and so on.

A conclusive numbering of the naturally wide ramifications was named after the genealogist Stephan Kekule von Stradonitz (1863-1933). The Kekule system has proven itself worldwide in genealogical research. It is based on a person or sibling line, and since this is the beginning of the genealogical table, Kekule assigns the number 1 to it and calls it "proband":

1 = Proband (regardless of gender).

2-3 = parents

4-7 = grandparents

8-15 = great-grandparents

The paternal side is always shown on the left, the maternal side on the right of the genealogical chart, with the wife receiving the number of her husband plus one in each case.

The purpose of such an overview was in former times among other things to find out kinship relations, in order not to marry too intensively within families (inbreeding).

Of course, I present here only a small part of the wide field of genealogy. In specialized books and in the net much information is to be found in addition. And because I find it very valuable in this context, I would also like to mention the genogram or genosociogram, which is often used for therapeutic purposes. Medical, psychological, socio-pedagogical and other aspects provide information about accumulated life events in the family history and can be used for analyses, for example, of hereditary diseases and for future resolution.

Here ends my excursion into theory, and I draw the bow again to Wienke. She was only twenty and did not even know the term "genogram", and yet as a daughter she felt a hunch. So she approached her father about it: "When are you finally going to settle this with your sons, Dad? Do you notice anything? I now have Sönke's twins in my life. Twins! Just like you. But isn't that transference? Am I taking over a reappraisal here, which would actually be your task?"

I wish you - oh yes, and me as well, of course - a lucky hand in retrieving our "skeletons in the family closet".

Yours

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