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# Huntsville, Alabama: Home for the German Rocket Team and Their Families

[An Extract from the Autobiography of  
Elfriede Richter-Haaser]

## Introduction

Even though Huntsville was considered a small town it had been FIRST in many ways:

1811 first town incorporated in Alabama  
1812 first Mason Lodge chartered  
1816 first bank incorporated  
1819 first State constitution drafted  
1819 first Governor inaugurated  
1819 first Session of the Legislator held  
1824 first cotton mill erected

and now, after 1950, we were first in more ways than one.

The population of the city had grown from approximately 16,437 with annexation of the 5 wards, to 21,765 and later to a metropolitan population of more than 38,000 by 1955.

The arrival of the 120 German scientists with all their families, under the sponsorship of the US Army, to work at Redstone Arsenal, marked the start of the tremendous growth we have today.

I remember the first time a meeting was held and Dr. von Braun spoke about his dream, building rockets large enough to fly to the moon and explore the universe — people did not comprehend the enormous task ahead of the nation. Looking around in the room, I saw all kinds of expressions on the listeners' faces. At that time few gave any special thought or attention to a dreamer from Germany. But today, his work has changed our life completely in so many ways that it is impossible to list all of them.

Since my family was among the German contingent that made Huntsville home and helped it become Rocket City U.S.A., perhaps our story will shed light on the larger story.



### **At Home In Huntsville, Alabama**

On April 1, 1950, we left El Paso, Texas by train at night, the thermometer reading 110°. It took us until the 3rd of April to arrive in Huntsville, where the temperature was 30°.

A friend, Dr. Hans Grune, who had been here before us, picked us up with his car from the train-station, the one we still have today as a museum. We drove through town on Madison Street and noticed the old courthouse on the square, the cotton row, and all the stores. The sign on Terry's store, "Great is the power of cash," greeted us at the

south side of the square. We passed the Huntsville Hospital and found our apartment in the "College Hill Apartment Complex" which had just been built to house the incoming Germans. The housing shortage at that time was a big problem. There were the Longwood apartments, some at Colonial Hill on Meridian Street and, some houses were being built on Holmes Avenue. The Noojin housing project was also under construction. What we mostly noticed that day were the black people on Franklin Street. The families were sitting on their front porches in rocking chairs, smoking pipes. The black community started south of Lowe Drive, and we observed that the white people were very aloof about them. We quickly learned that on busses, we could sit in the front; they had to ride in the back. Washrooms had signs, "White only." All this seemed strange to us and we were often not sure how to handle the situation. In Germany the only black people we ever saw before were in a circus or black soldiers after the war. And, at that time, we talked to them as equals if we needed their help or assistance. Nobody had prepared us for this strange situation in Huntsville. The Kiwanis club presented their annual "Kiwanis Capers." It was a parody of the lives of black people. Local businessmen would participate. It stopped in later years.

As soon as we moved into our apartment, we stored the luggage and boxes, including warmer clothes. But to our dismay, it had turned cold in Huntsville. Water pipes were frozen and water was running out of the apartment next door, which belonged to some friends of ours coming by car, who had not yet arrived from El Paso. In this mess, while we were frantic to get everything under control, we received our first visitor, a Mrs. Wilson, who came from the Welcome Wagon Club to welcome us to Huntsville.

Mrs. Wilson introduced herself to us and said she wanted to make us feel at home. With a stack of cards in her hand, she named all the merchants in town who were welcoming us to Huntsville and had a small gift for us when we would visit their store. My husband tried several times to interrupt her and ask her to come back at a more opportune time. My son

was ill from a cold, I felt miserable, the water was running out of next door, we had all our hands full, but she insisted that this was just the right time for her to see us. Later, at a party, my husband demonstrated this event to our friends and we almost died laughing.

Fortunate for us, there was a motel, "Heart of Huntsville," within walking distance, so that we could spend the first two nights there until the apartments had been made ready and repaired. Our first purchases in Huntsville were raincoats and warm clothes and an umbrella. Texas had very little rain, so we had never needed one. Being used to walking long distances, it was no hardship for us to walk to town. The Huntsville people were not accustomed to people walking; most of them drove their cars everywhere and would stop to give us a lift. They could not understand our reluctance to hitch a ride.

As soon as possible after we arrived in Huntsville, we walked to the library in downtown and acquired a library card so we could check out books for reading. We were very well known there pretty soon. The old library at that time was located just one block to the south from the First Alabama Bank.

Huntsville had a population of approximately 15,000 in 1950 when we came to make this town our home. It's square, with the courthouse in the middle, was the stage for all happenings. There was a flavor of small town life, as you would still find in the surrounding areas such as Scottsboro or Guntersville. The First Alabama Bank on the west side of the square, with its white marble columns, is a landmark of Greek revival architecture built in 1835-40 and designed by architect George Steele. It is the oldest, still existing bank in Alabama. Slaves were once held as collateral in the basement of the building. We were told a legend that Jessie James robbed the bank and made his escape by jumping off the cliff into the spring below. That, of course, is not true.

Going into a store was a strange thing for us, because the salespeople would ask us, "What will it be for you, Honey?" In Germany we were brought up very formal and only with dear friends would we exchange the familiar, "du" (you in German). Dr. von Braun was most of the time still Dr. von Braun, while the American people would just call him Wernher.

When we were leaving the store, they would call to us, "You come back, hear!" and we would turn back from the door and want to know what they still wanted from us. It was difficult for us to speak and understand the English language. Even though we had English in German schools, it was more the 'high' English. Also, to understand the southern drawl was a problem for many of us.

Harrison Brothers Hardware store was visited frequently by us, especially our husbands, looking for special tools or other needed gadgets. The brothers found great delight in chatting with the German people. They mentioned to us that somewhere in their heritage was a German immigrant, which pleased us to talk to them about our homeland.

Dunnivant's was another great store. We felt immediately at home when we saw Mr. Dunnivant at the door greeting all his customers in a personal manner, calling a salesperson to assist us and find the items we were looking for. We also liked to shop at Belk & Hudson just a block from Dunnivant on the other corner. Mr. I. Wind would sit in his rocking chair outside his store when the weather permitted and chat with us. He helped us with any special wishes we had; so did all the other stores. Mr. Mahoney served our men folks for their needs and dressed them accordingly. After a while, we all became friends with these people on a first name basis. My favorite store was Harold's on the north side of the square. I always felt dressed like a queen when wearing a garment from Harold's. How we missed this merchant and other when the square was redesigned and many moved to other places on the newly built Parkway after 1955.

There were movie theaters in Huntsville, the Grand and the Lyric, only some blocks away from our apartment. We would see as many films as possible to improve our language, so we could make ourselves understood.

Industry in Huntsville was mostly related to cotton, because at that time, cotton was still king and reigned in this region. The west side of the square housed the Cotton Row where all the cotton merchants had their offices. Looking down from there was the Big Spring, where John Hunt had settled in 1805. It is a delightful place to relax and feed the ducks, which are considered very important inhabitants of the town, having their own legal right-of-way when crossing the street.

We had been living in the apartment for 3 months when the opportunity came to move to a house at 1409 Ward Avenue. Our landlord and landlady, Mr. and Mrs. Couch, were an older, charming couple whom we adopted immediately as our 'grandmother and grandfather.' Our son Juergen would chat with them in his broken English, but usually made himself understood. The house needed a lot of improvements to make it livable for us. My husband, being handy in all phases of work, delighted in fixing the house up. When we moved later on, it was in much better shape than it had been before. Not far from us, other German families had also rented houses. We would visit each other, giving help when needed.





The backyard made a wonderful playground for Juergen and our dog, Falco, that we had acquired from some friends. Juergen had a sandbox and, in the hot days, would cool himself off with the waterhose and later on in a small swimming pool. The other children were puzzled about his speech, half German — half English. One girl ran to her mother and said, “That boy talks so funny.” But, they got along fine.





We shopped for groceries at Five Points, at the Star Market, owned by Mr. C. Russell. We would walk with the baby stroller and Falco to buy food. Mr. Russell would try to help us in getting certain types of spices or food, bread, etc., especially sweet butter, so that we would not miss too much being far from home. I am still today a faithful customer of that store, now run by his son, Wade.

In 1951, while living on Ward Avenue, our second son was born. Hein was the best bargain we ever had in life. The Hospital, doctor, and everything cost us only \$25.00!

We had our first telephone installed when we began to feel like paupers because our American friends would ask us to call them and we had to reply that we didn't have a telephone! The only connection we could get was a four-party line and it proved to be a problem when the phone was needed for emergencies. The teenagers on our line loved to use it. So one day, when I needed the phone for calling the doctor and could not use the line, I called the telephone company and gave them an ultimatum: either I get a private line or they could come and take the phone out. Needless to say, I succeeded.

At our arrival in Huntsville, the ministers of the different churches gave each other the doorknob in hand, coming and going as they did, in their effort to entice us to become members of their congregation. Not knowing how the church system was in America, we became puzzled and kind of annoyed. In Germany only two different religions were known, Catholic and Lutheran. Here we could not find out what was the difference about their services and why their beliefs were not the same as we had been taught. But, the need for a Lutheran church was eminent, and in 1951, a wonderful pastor, George Hart, took over the lost sheep from Germany and formed a congregation from scratch.

In March of 1951, the property of Chambers Funeral Home (very appropriate), on Franklin and Longwood Drive, was purchased and converted into something like a church. Mr.

William Angele, a pillar of our new church, built the steeple in his garage in two hours and then it was erected on the church. On October 31, 1951, Reformation Sunday, St. Marks Lutheran Church was formally organized into a congregation with 119 baptized members and 73 confirmed ones. Later, a permanent church was built just across from the old one at the corner of Longwood and Franklin. It is still a very active church. It became the scene of many weddings and baptisms, but now unfortunately, also funerals — more than we like.

It was a great day when we bought our first car from Herbert Ray, who gave us a good deal. It was a brand new Ford, gray, four door. We were so happy and naturally very fussy about it. While anticipating a trip to Florida, I had the car checked out since there was a terrible rattle, but nothing was found. I went home and still the rattle did not disappear. Again I went to complain about this situation. While Mr. Ray was leaning with his back toward the trunk and telling me that there was really nothing they could do about this situation, he looked down and retrieved a little glass baby bottle out of the back bumper. This was the culprit! My son must have placed it there. Needless to say, blushing, I apologized and drove out of the place.

With our new car we could discover the beautiful area around us. There was Monte Sano for picnics and hiking. Farther out we discovered the Gunterville lakes. Here we could swim and fish and have a wonderful day outdoors. My husband had already, while at Ft. Bliss, started to like going fishing in the irrigation ditches and here was the fisherman's paradise. While Hein and I would relax and enjoy the peace and quiet, daddy and Juergen would go off fishing. Juergen, escorted by his dog Falco, would go from one fisherman to another, always with the question, "Did you catch fish? Big fish?" The men then would show him their catch and inquire about his dog, its name, etc. They always teased him, saying they would like to buy the dog from him. But, he was quick to give a definite 'NO!'

In the fall, a fishing rodeo would be held at the Big Spring Lagoon and my two sons proved to be good sports. One day, while they had a big one on the hook and were trying to bring it ashore, one son fell in the water, which fortunately was not too deep. So, I had to catch both fish and boy out of the lagoon.



While exploring the countryside, we would drive up to Monte Sano, and take a left turn up to the place where Dr. Burrirt lived. He was delighted to let us come to his house, show us around, and make friends with us. He had the most magnificent view of the city from his place. When he passed away he gave this place to the city and now visitors from all over the world have the opportunity to see the growing town, thanks to Dr. Burrirt's generous gift.

At the Big Spring Park, a big swimming pool for "Whites Only" gave us relief in the hot summer weather, and the tennis court was at our disposal to keep slim and trim. To play tennis in Germany was mostly available for the wealthier people, so was horseback riding. Here you could do all this for very little money, and we took advantage of it. At the Fairgrounds we would display baked goods; my speciality was the gingerbread house and German bread, which was well liked. At the Colosseum we were entertained with a wandering circus to the delight of young and old.

In the years 1951 and 1952, not much in the way of entertainment was available. We discovered a nightclub, 'Cambron' down south on Whitesburg Drive where the Faith Presbyterian Church now stands. We would team up with friends and enjoy a night out dancing. There were no alcoholic beverages served, but you could bring your own bottle. Since we were a group of young people, we would celebrate christenings, weddings, and later on, graduations. It always gave us an excuse to come together.

An organization, "Community Concerts," brought out-of-town entertainment to the Huntsville High School. We went to such productions as The Trapp Family Singers and the Vienna Boys Choir. Mr. and Mrs. Benno Wilcoxon would invite all the entertainers to their home on Franklin Street afterwards for refreshments and would invite some of the German people, so that we could meet our countrymen and chat with them.

Mr. Alvin Dreger, known as "Mr. Music," who played the cello made himself acquainted with our German group and found out who played an instrument. Even Dr. von Braun played the violin and the cello. The musicians met in different homes and at special functions to play quartets and other pieces. By and by, an orchestra was formed and a conductor, Dr. Arthur M. Fraser, from Montevallo in Alabama commuted for years to help organize and conduct it. The moment came, in March 1954, when, at the old Butler High

School, the first concert was presented. It was a huge success and from then on, Huntsville had its own symphony orchestra. Over the years it grew and when the new Huntsville High School was built, we had bigger facilities with better acoustics. I attended the first concert and most all others, having missed only a few in all the years I have lived in Huntsville.

Since my husband had a good job and we had two children, we decided to buy our own home. A group of our German friends had teamed together to buy some property on top of the Monte Sano and had divided it into lots, some of them overlooking Huntsville. This proved an excellent investment later on for everybody concerned. But, we were more concerned then to have our children close to a good school and not have to have them bussed from the mountain. So, we looked for a home in the Blossomwood area. A school had not been built in 1953, but there was all this empty space for one. Only a few houses had been built, and we loved the view of the mountain. This lasted only a few more years, and houses were built up to the mountain. Huntsville had become the fastest growing city around. The building boom had hit. We found a very well-built home on Woodmont Avenue where I am still living today. The Fifth Avenue School was not far from us. Juergen went there for one year and then to the brand new Blossomwood School, even closer to home.

We moved into our house on the 1st of April, 1953, and settled down to make a home for us and our two sons. In the back, dividing the other property was a natural creek, the water coming from the mountain, which proved to be a wonderful play place for the children. They would build their own little swimming hole. And, once in a while, even catch a little fish. They always found something useful to them floating in the water.

The Blossomwood area would grow by leaps and bounds after 1953. Juergen was ready to attend kindergarten, and Mrs. Luther had one on the corner of California and

McClung Streets. Juergen's English became quiet good, and he had learned it mostly through playing with his friends. The families in the Blossomwood area were mostly young families with children about the same age as our two. The children joined the Cub Scouts and we mothers became Den Mothers. It was a challenge for me and I enjoyed it very much. We did handicraft things, sports, etc.

A Garden Club had been formed in 1952 and I became a member. Meetings were held taking turns in each member's home. We would hold contests in flower arranging or competitions in growing flowers. Then, at shows each year, the best prizes were awarded. I was lucky to win several blue and red ribbons for outstanding specimens and once won a silver bowl for the best arrangement. These are treasures to remember by. This also gave me a chance to meet many wonderful families, and the children had friends to play with.

In the Garden Club I met several ladies who were very much involved in the Music Study Club. Since I always loved music, I joined them in 1953 and have been a member of this organization til today. We would meet once a month on a Wednesday morning and would find great talent in our membership performing for each other. Each year we would have a District Meeting in another town and every two years, the National Music Convention. I had the opportunity to go to several such gatherings, and it was a great learning experience and enjoyment for me.

Since our son, Juergen, was born on October 9th, he could not begin the public school the year he was six. The cut-off date being September 30th, he would have to wait another year. But, since we felt he was ready to go to school, we checked around and found Mrs. Freemann on Green Street who had a private school and would take him. He then had to pass a test to attend the Fifth Avenue School on Governors Drive (now all hospital complex). He had learned more in Mrs. Freemann's private school than he needed to take the exam.

On the weekends, we continued to explore the surrounding areas. Decatur was a good place to fish, but we still liked the Guntersville area best. "Otha-Win-Tha" was on the Scottsboro Highway situated among tall pine trees, directly on the lake. It was a camping ground with cabins to stay overnight or for the weekend. Here we met with many of our friends, having a good time swimming, picnicking, and boating. The water at that time, was very clear and beautiful, without the millfoil it has had in recent years. The owner made us all welcome at her charming place and still today we are friends. We had also bought a small aluminum boat and would ride out in the lake to fish. As a small boy, Juergen was a great fisherman already and kept his daddy busy putting bait on his hook and helping him to reel in the fish.



In 1955, friends of ours had explored the surrounding lake area and found that a Mr. Whitaker was selling his property on the lake for very reasonable prices. "Otha-Win-Tha" was some 40 miles away, and this place was only 28 miles from our house. It was a dead end valley, just the spot we had been looking for. An acre of waterfront property cost \$1,000 at this time. We were happy to invest the money. And, we are still enjoying the wonderful recreation in swimming and boating the lake has given us to this day.

Unfortunately, during our building project on the lake I hurt myself and was laid up for quite some time. My oldest son was taken care of as he was already in the second grade at Blossomwood. Little Hein was really no problem, or so I thought. He usually occupied himself playing in the backyard with our dog Falco, who would not let any harm come to him. One day, when I thought all was well and a friend was visiting with me, the doorbell rang. It was the Postmaster bringing a complaint about my little boy. Somebody in the neighborhood had watched him following the postman who was placing the mail in the mailboxes, and Hein, with a little paper sack, was taking the mail out again! When we checked on him, he was happily playing in our backyard in his tent sorting the mail! He felt great and was very surprised to be scolded about his actions! Fortunately, when the Postmaster saw him, he forgave him and all was well.

Another day, while I prepared our family dinner, I was keeping an eye on Hein in the backyard playing with his tricycle. Daddy would be home soon from his work. As he drove in and parked the car in the driveway, I heard a crying sound from my son. I ran out to see what had happened. I was told the following story: Hein had ventured out with his little tricycle into California Street at the busiest time, when the fathers came home from work. Not knowing what kept the traffic at a snarl, his father looked out of his car window and saw Falco going from one side of the street to another, blocking traffic. Coming closer, my husband discovered his youngest son as a happy driver of the tricycle in the middle of the road, unperturbed by the traffic, feeling like a big man himself. Needless to say what happened at home! This adventure was never repeated!





When you are young, you try many things. One day during a coffee, we women talked about the harvest of the cotton, a new adventure for us Germans. My neighbor, an American lady, told me that she had picked cotton once and what an experience it was for her. Mostly the black people were doing it, but we wanted to find out what it was like. One morning we went to a farm and asked to pick some of the “white gold” as it was called. The farm hands were very delighted and we were handed a big canvas sack. The work was hard for us. But what was enchanting was watching the black folks picking cotton, and the sound of their beautiful voices chanting songs all day long. They were very friendly to us and gave us good instruction to avoid hurt fingers. Since my youngest son was born in Alabama, we always affectionately called him our little “cotton picker.” Juergen, being a Texan, we called “Cowboy.”

The year 1955 was a turning point for many in the German community of Huntsville. Our future was not secure at that time. Rumors were going around, and nobody could say for sure what was to become of the entire German group. Some of our friends had moved to the west coast to seek better jobs. When Dr. von Braun would speak on the matter of

going to the moon, the audience thought him a dreamer and that this would be impossible. We were still waiting for our papers to become American citizens. But, then that day arrived, April 14, 1955. The Huntsville High School auditorium was the place where 66 Germans received their American citizenship. The Rotary Club had made it a festive affair and had invited us all to a banquet at the Russel Erskine Hotel. Each new American family had been assigned to a family from the Rotary Club. It was a day for us to remember always. Lasting friendships had been formed on this day. Now we could go to the courthouse and become voters. Huntsville was indeed, home.

I never will forget the first time we could vote. The place was the Courthouse. You had to stand in line for your turn; then enter a booth with a curtain around you. Here, in privacy, you had to give your vote. One day while standing in line to give our vote, a parade was going on outside. The daughter of our friends had disappeared to see it, when her parents suddenly missed her. Very excited, they just walked away from the booth to look for the girl until they found her. We all had to stand in line and wait for their return. At that time I wondered, how private was our voting system?

A most important person for us Germans was Judge Thomas W. Jones. In his capacity as Probate Judge, he would grant us a drivers' license. Many of our friends had taken their drivers test in El Paso, Texas. Some, having driven already in Germany, found it was more difficult to pass in the U.S. While others who never had any lessons before, passed the driving test with flying colors. After we became citizens we had the opportunity to vote, but we had to pay a poll tax which later was abolished. Also, hunting and fishing licenses had to be obtained and Judge Jones would marry couples at the Courthouse in a civil ceremony. Every year we paid him our car tax and property tax. While in later years, new offices would handle these things, Judge Jones was for us the "Man for all Seasons" and the best friend we Germans could have found in a strange land, and the best bureau for our newcomers.



The year 1955, not only saw us become American citizens, but Huntsville celebrated the Sesquicentennial (somebody's tongue slipped to "Sexy-centennial"). Through the clubs we belonged to we participated in the celebration. We wore old-fashioned costumes and baked goodies which were sold later on. The American people liked our cakes and cookies; they were different and very tasty. I had baked some gingerbread houses which is a tradition in Germany during Christmas time, and I won a prize for it. My children from then on begged me to bake some for their teachers at Christmas. We also made some unfortunate children in the hospital happy with these Gingerbread houses. At that time no restrictions by the Health Department were placed on us in this undertaking as in later years.

Life in America became increasingly exciting for us. We had to undergo a transformation in our daily routine, in our friendship to the American people, and in our handling of finances. In Germany, the husband is the head of the household; what he says is law. Here in America we found a different, more flexible standard. For many of our families it meant changing our thoughts and actions, often not without difficulties. We went to the movies to learn better English, but we had to hire a babysitter to be able to do this. And when we women had time, we went to do babysitting for American families. It was so American, making a little extra money. Fortunately we found out that in this country it is no shame to work in whatever you like to do or can do.

One family organized a group to learn square dancing which we never had seen or heard about. The first time we watched a square dance, we were puzzled and could not understand a word which was said that made the people follow the leader. But after we had several lessons, we were as eager to dance as the others. We even joined other groups in other towns. In all our doings, we never found any Americans who would have objected to our getting involved with something like this and mingling with them. Quite the opposite, everybody was happy that we took such an interest in their life and joined them in their pursuits.

Meeting different kinds of people is a rewarding experience. I heard that the Huntsville Hospital was looking for volunteers to help run the gift-shop and help in other areas too, such as patient care. Since my children were at school I had free time and devoted some hours for this worthwhile cause as a Pink Lady. Also later, I became a driver for older people who needed a ride to the doctor's office. Through all this activity, I met a lot of wonderful people. Communication was often difficult with my German accent and their Alabama drawl, but a smile speaks in every language. And I was at home in Huntsville, Alabama.



## *My Story: Elfriede Richter-Haaser*

I was born in eastern Germany, Bautzen/Saxonia. My father was the organist of the Petro-Dome Church, a church which housed both denominations, Lutheran and Catholic. The church was divided only by an iron gate, and as children we would stay after Sunday School to watch the procession of the Catholic Church, when we were not engaged to treat the bellows for my father. Our world was filled with music, plays, and outdoor activities. Weekends were spent in the woods, on tours, or with sports activities. I still remember the boat rides on the Pleisse with our paddleboat.

In Germany everybody attended the public school. Then, according to one's grades and means to pay for it, one would attend a higher learning institute. I attended Gymnasium for girls, and later was enrolled in the "Hoeheren Maedchen Schule." One would call it a "finishing school for young ladies" to give them the know-how for a life in the public eye.

During the war I was called back to work in Leipzig to take care of my ailing mother. After Graduation I had held a wonderful job on a big farm with an old castle owned by a Baron. I enjoyed what I was doing, especially the freedom I had to be outside, checking on the labor of the planters, farmers, etc.

In 1944, during the third bomb attack of Leipzig, we lost our home, and my mother and I moved to a small town in Saxonia where my aunt lived. I found work on a farm near Goerlitz until we were forced to fall back to avoid the Russian soldiers and occupation. Many cruel stories preceded their arrival. But when they finally entered our small town, it was done in a most orderly manner, no rape or stealing was allowed. The officer in charge held his troops in good control, but we still felt uneasy. When a letter from my sister arrived saying that they were living in Landshut before eventually going to American. I was encouraged to come and join her there, which I did.

In December, 1945, I crossed the border from East to West Germany, not without trepidation. In Landshut I had the chance to become a kindergarten teacher to the young children from the German scientist group which was waiting to be shipped to America to join their husbands, who had been over there already for a couple of years and were waiting to have their families sent overseas too.

In the spring of 1947, Dr. von Braun and a Mr. Robert Paetz came from America; the first one to marry, the second one to divorce his wife who did not want to leave her parents and go to a strange country. In his visiting the families of his comrades, Mr. Paetz also came to my sister's house to bring greetings from her husband and instructions on what should be done to make the journey to the USA pleasant. While I was taking care of my sister's youngest son, he came to our house, met me and seemed very interested to get better acquainted. Needless to say, he proposed marriage and I accepted. A few months later I followed him to America, El Paso, Texas and Fort Bliss, where we lived until our move to Huntsville, Alabama in 1950.

Huntsville became our home immediately, the area reminded me so much of our Germany: the mountains, the green trees, the rivers and lakes. And, until this day, I love to live here. The cultural life was different from what I was used to, but I adapted myself to it very fast, becoming involved with the Symphony Guild as a charter member. Also, we helped organize the Huntsville Youth Orchestra. When Mr. Gerhard was conductor, my son Hein took violin lessons from him and also played in the Youth and big orchestra.

When Dr. Pales became conductor, he usually gave me the job to pick up the guest artists. This was the case when the opening of the VBCC was celebrated in March, 1975. To honor the German families, Dr. Pales had especially engaged the world renown German concert pianist, HANS RICHTER-HAASER, to come to Huntsville. It was my job to pick him up at the airport and be his hostess during his

stay. Cupid played a big role and we got married. I moved back with him to Germany to live until his sudden death in 1980.

To further my American education, I attended the North Alabama College of Commerce. I also became a member of the ToastMasters Club which helped me very much in my jobs as a real estate and insurance agent. For a while I became a member of the "Flying Pettycoats" and loved to take flying lessons, but did not make the pilot license.

Around 1984, I entertained the idea to put together a book about our wonderful town, Huntsville, with the Space Center for the many out of town visitors coming to see this once forgotten village which was now making world news. Sightseeing Huntsville was very well received.



**FALCO, beloved pet of both Juergen and Hein**







**FUN TIMES at Big Spring Park**





**Exploring the countryside and Monte Sano**

