



**VIETS, HERMANN, Ph.D.**

74, of Wickford, RI and Palm Desert, CA, died at home on Sunday, October 1, 2017. He was the beloved husband of the Rev. Pamela (Deane) Viets. Born in Quedlinburg, Germany, he was the son of the late Otto Hartmann & Herta (Heik) Hartmann Viets and adopted son of Hans Viets. Dr. Viets was the President Emeritus of the Milwaukee School of Engineering and served as Chairman of the Board for AstroNova of Warwick, RI and Precision Stamping Inc. of Beaumont, CA. He was a member of the First Baptist Church in Wickford.

In addition to his wife, he leaves his loving children: Danielle B. Leighton & her husband Michael of St. Cloud, MN, Deane A. Viets & his wife Izabella of Freiburg, Germany, Hans H. Viets & his wife Lauren of Brooklyn, NY, & Hillary H.V. Bowser & her husband Andrew of Muskego, WI. He was the beloved grandfather of Samuel S. Leighton, Leonardo.S. Viets, Alexander J. Viets, Naomi K. Viets, Ani C. Viets, Hilda A. Bowser, Rowan A. Bowser, & Tannen B. Bowser.. He was the brother of Frauke Roth & her husband Keith of North Andover, MA and the late Hildegard Ebner.

His Memorial Service will be held Monday, October 16, 2017 at 1:00 pm in The First Baptist Church in Wickford, 44 Main Street. Burial will be private. Calling hours are respectfully omitted. In lieu of flowers, gifts in his memory to Milwaukee School of Engineering, University of Rhode Island International Engineering Program, First Baptist Church in Wickford or HistWick will be appreciated. Arrangements have been entrusted to THE CRANSTON-MURPHY FUNERAL HOME of WICKFORD.

Published in The Providence Journal on Oct. 5, 2017

[Read Less](#)



**VIETS, HERMANN, Ph.D.**

74, of Wickford, RI and Palm Desert, CA, died at home on Sunday, October 1, 2017. He was the beloved husband of the Rev. Pamela (Deane) Viets. Born in Quedlinburg, Germany, he was the son of the late Otto Hartmann & Herta (Heik) Hartmann Viets and adopted son of Hans Viets. Dr. Viets was the President Emeritus of the Milwaukee School of Engineering and served as Chairman of the Board for AstroNova of Warwick, RI and Precision Stamping Inc. of Beaumont, CA. He was a member of the First Baptist Church in Wickford.

In addition to his wife, he leaves his loving children: Danielle B. Leighton & her husband Michael of St. Cloud, MN, Deane A. Viets & his wife Izabella of Freiburg, Germany, Hans H. Viets & his wife Lauren of Brooklyn, NY, & Hillary H.V. Bowser & her husband Andrew of Muskego, WI. He was the beloved grandfather of Samuel S. Leighton, Leonardo S. Viets, Alexander J. Viets, Naomi K. Viets, Ani C. Viets, Hilda A. Bowser, Rowan A. Bowser, & Tannen B. Bowser.. He was the brother of Frauke Roth & her husband Keith of North Andover, MA and the late Hildegard Ebner.

His Memorial Service will be held Monday, October 16, 2017 at 1:00 pm in The First Baptist Church in Wickford, 44 Main Street. Burial will be private. Calling hours are respectfully omitted. In lieu of flowers, gifts in his memory to Milwaukee School of Engineering, University of Rhode Island International Engineering Program, First Baptist Church in Wickford or HistWick will be appreciated. Arrangements have been entrusted to THE CRANSTON-MURPHY FUNERAL HOME of WICKFORD.

Published in The Providence Journal on Oct. 5, 2017

[Read Less](#)



Herta Heik Hartmann Viets

## FOREWORD

The early 1960s were a difficult time for my mother. My stepfather Hans Viets had died in 1958. Her eldest daughter Hilde had moved to California with her family and her younger daughter Frauke had moved to Manhattan, close to her work. Since I spent most of the decade in college, I was the only one of her children still at home and yet was too busy to be much company. At this point, Mom must have questioned her decision to leave Germany for the United States in 1948. Beyond her children, practically her entire family lived in Germany and she missed them. Mom was also concerned that her children were losing their German heritage, a common fear of immigrant parents when their children are young adults and have so many other activities not involving the family. They usually do return to the family ties but it takes some time. In any case, this combination of circumstances led Mom to write down some of the memories that she felt were critical to understanding our family background. The resulting twenty or so pages were written mostly in German, with the transition to English coming only with the description of the start of our life in the United States. It is a clear sign of Mom's ability to acclimate that she preferred to write in the same language she was actually using during the particular period she was describing.

I was not aware of these pages until the 1990s. I had been encouraging Mom to write her memoirs for some years and had even started to tape some conversations with her in the 1980s. The reason was twofold. Clearly our family would benefit from a written record of their own history but, perhaps even more important, Mom had a great story to tell. Her life has historical importance in the way it reflects the events of those years. She was born into a world of coal energy and steam power, when even those sources were only becoming generally available, and she has seen the moon landing and the omnipresence of computers. She went through great social changes brought about by World War I, lived in England, witnessed firsthand the start of aviation and the rise of the Third Reich, married and lost her husband in the Second World War, lived under the occupation of the Americans, English and finally the Russians, escaped twice from the Russian Zone, married a naturalized American, visited post-war Sweden, traveled to the United States on a freighter, built a business with her husband in New York City and lived there over twenty years, lost her second husband and moved to California, traveled extensively throughout the world, helped her daughter and son-in-law's business succeed, lost them in a plane crash, helped their company to survive and is still active in the management of that business. She has lived in three distinctly different societies, Germany, New York City and Southern California and flourished in each one. She is a truly interesting person, both as an individual and as a representative of the times she has witnessed.

The first twenty pages were very interesting indeed. I translated those and we were off in pursuit of this project, never expecting to get this far. It was unreasonable to expect Mom to write the entire memoir on her typewriter and the improvements in computing made it a lot easier for me, so we pushed forward with interviews when I happened to be in California. I would then try to put those interviews into a context that included the general history of the time. The visits became more frequent

as I became more involved in the PSI business and my wife Pam's parents moved to California, only a mile or so from Mom. We would have breakfast every day and each time we spoke I would learn something new. Especially interesting to me was the ability to finally put together all those pieces of information and stories I had heard over the years.

As we started to search for pictures, we came upon a cache of documents that my father had gathered on the history of his side of the family, tracing some of them back to the late 1700s. Those documents are included here as an appendix. Some of the pictures also came from that collection, including three taken in the 1850s, one taken in Brazil. Our German relatives, Friedel and Annegret Müller, Heinz Fedders, Franzi Heik and Dolfi and Hannelore Männicke contributed additional photographs.

It is our objective to present this volume with quality printing and a very high quality leather binding. The rationale is that a quality binding may save this volume from being discarded at some future time. We can't assume that the writing will save it but if the binding will do so, at least the story has a chance to be read by a future generation.

My involvement in the writing of my mother's memoirs has been a great pleasure for me. I have enjoyed every moment of it and, in the same way that one approaches the end of reading a good book, am sorry to see it completed. I love her very much and am very proud of her!

Hermann Viets

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, October 23, 1999

#### Addendum

While we were working on her memoirs, Mom never wanted them to be finished. The reason was very simple. Whenever we got together, we had much to discuss and spent hours over breakfast and additional quiet time in her apartment, looking over photographs and discussing items for inclusion in the memoirs. Partly because of our work, we never lacked for conversation, a rather unusual situation for mother and son. Thus we never did complete the effort while she was living and she was comfortable with that.

Mom passed away on September 28, 2002 in Rancho Mirage, CA, very near to her home in Palm Desert. She was not in pain and had her family with her during the decline.

It is now time to complete her memoirs. There are no substantial changes, only minor additions as we find more material. She was happy with the almost complete product and often showed the volume to visitors, to an extent of which I was unaware until after her death. She would be pleased with this final result.

The *italicized* headings are the favorite stories she told us as children and adults and are gathered in the appendix.

#### Hermann Viets

Herta Heik Hartmann Viets' own list of the countries and states she visited during her life:

COUNTRIES: Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Ireland, England, Holland, France, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, U.S.A., Canada, Mexico, Panama, Bermuda, Nassau, Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, China, Japan, Korea.

STATES: Washington, Oregon, California, Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Nebraska, North Dakota, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, Mississippi, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Virginia, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, Alaska, Delaware, Maryland, Wisconsin and Washington, DC

# THREE DIFFERENT WORLDS

*Herta Heik Hartmann Viets*

*(As told to Hermann Hartmann Viets)*

1/4/8

## CONTENTS

### 1. BAD OLDESLOE

### 2. FAMILY

- A. Father Wilhelm Heik
- B. Mother Ida Stern
- C. Sister Ida
- D. Sister Elli
- E. Brother Willi

### 3. CHILDHOOD

- A. The Family Business
- B. World War I
- C. My Education Continues
- D. England

#### 4. OTTO HARTMANN

- A. Courtship
- B. The Early Nazi Years
- C. Otto's Family
- D. Hilde
- E. Otto Hartmann in the War Years

#### 5. THALE DURING THE WAR

- A. The War Widens
- B. Frauke and Hermann
- C. Bunkers and Bombs
- D. Food

#### 6. THE WAR'S END

- A. Preparing for the End of the War
- B. Advancing Troops
- C. The American Occupation
- D. Leaving Thale
- E. Bergedorf

## 7. OTTO'S DEATH

- A. The Bad News
- B. Return to Thale

## 8. CROSSING THE BORDER

- A. Caught

## 9. HANS VIETS

- A. A Short Courtship
- B. Marriage
- C. Sweden
- D. Hans' Family
- E. Crossing the Border Again
- F. Getting to the West
- G. Thale After We Left

## 10. GETTING TO AMERICA

- A. Again in Bergedorf
- B. Visas
- C. Meeting in Norfolk

## 11. WOODHAVEN

- A. Hans' Relatives
- B. Manor Delicatessen
- C. Arrival of the Children
- D. Adjustment
- E. The Good Times
- F. Visit to Germany
- G. Hans' Death
- H. Life without Hans

## 12. THE EBNERS AND PRECISION STAMPINGS

- A. Jim Ebner
- B. Founding Precision Stampings
- C. My Involvement
- D. Fred and Lucielle Hirsch
- E. The Accident
- F. Survival and Growth of PSI

## 13. CALIFORNIA

- A. Looking Back
- B. The Grandchildren and Our German Family
- C. The Collapse of Communism
- D. New York to Banning
- E. Banning
- F. Palm Desert

#### 14. THE FUTURE OF THE FAMILY

- A. Looking Forward
- B. Frauke's Family
- C. Hermann's Family
- D. Schacht Family
- E. Männicke Family
- F. Heik Family
- G. Hartmann Family
- H. Lieschen Viets Schröder Family
- I. Emmi Viets Oehr Family
- J. Käthe Viets Fitschen Family
- K. Hermine Viets Müller Family
- L. Changes

15. CONCLUSION

16. LIST OF FIGURES

17. INDEX

## 12. THE EBNERS AND PRECISION STAMPINGS

### A. Jim Ebner

Jim Ebner was a wonderful young man and everyone was very fond of him. His given name was Horst, which he converted to a middle name when he changed to James. Jim and Hilde met at some German organization and they were a close couple immediately. Hilde had a good position as a secretary at CBS Radio after graduating from Katherine Gibbs Secretarial School. Jim was a sergeant in the Marines. He was born in Bederkesa, Germany on June 30, 1934 and arrived in America in 1954 with his parents and younger brothers not far behind. When he first arrived, Jim lived with an uncle who is the only person of whom I am aware who could not get along with Jim. This drove Jim to join the Marines as an alternative. He was a very successful Marine, being named Marine of the Month of the entire U.S. Marine Corp for two successive Augusts! When Jim met Hilde, I think he had planned on making the Marines a career, but that would mean accepting the next assignment in another place. He decided that he would rather leave the Marines and pursue Hilde.

Another factor that helped to convince Jim to leave the Marines was the removal of his tonsils. This was done in a military hospital under a local anesthetic. Apparently an inexperienced doctor under the direction of a more experienced surgeon did the actual surgery. During the surgery, Jim could hear all that was occurring. He heard the older doctor say, "Don't cut any more. I think you cut too much already!" This upset Jim so much that he called us up and asked if he could come to our house to recuperate. We set up a bedroom for him, he checked himself out of the hospital and Hilde and I picked him up on a Sunday afternoon. He was very happy to be staying with us. A few days later, he was well enough to go back to work.



**Figure 12.1** Ursel Fedders (L) with Hilde Viets and Jim Ebner  
in our delicatessen kitchen in Woodhaven.

In many ways, Jim was like a son to us. He lived in the neighborhood and even long before he and Hilde were married, Jim would come over for supper almost every night. Having the delicatessen store was a terrific advantage. Sometimes Jim would arrive too late for our group meal. We always laughed and said, "Poor Jim! He needs to eat roast beef again because everything else is gone." So Jim went through our wonderful buffet line behind our delicatessen counter. **Figure 12.1** shows Jim in our kitchen with Hilde before their marriage. Ursel Fedders is cutting a beautiful cake so it may be someone's' birthday.



**Figure 12.2** Hilde Viets and Jim Ebner before their marriage.

A picture of Hilde and Jim around this time is shown in Figure 12.2. This photograph was taken on a trip with Ursel and Heinz to the Catskills. Although it was planned to be a daytrip, they were snowed in and could not make it back that day. Another trip was more predictable, to Rockaway Beach with the Fedders, Frauke and her friend Joan Schloderer, as seen in **Figure 12.3**.



**Figure 12.3** At Rockaway Beach (L-R) Ursel Fedders, Hilde Viets,  
Jim Ebner, Joan Schloderer and Frauke Viets.

Jim Ebner's parents and brothers followed him to the United States a short time after he arrived. They all lived on Long Island, NY and I got to know them rather well. Jim and his parents, Erich and Annemarie Ebner are shown in **Figure 12.4** along with Jim's brothers Eric and Werner.



**Figure 12.4** The Ebner family, (L-R) Werner (George), Annemarie, Erich and his father Eric and Jim Ebner.

When his enlistment was up, Jim left the Marines. Having to choose between Hilde and the Marines was not much of a contest and Hilde won easily. But the choice of Hilde was not a career and Jim had no idea what to pursue as a career. While he thought this over, he filled this interim period working in a gas station. In those days, gas stations still performed automotive repairs. One day a customer came into the station and complained that another station had repaired his car and the repair had not helped a bit. Jim thought about it and told the man what he reasoned his problem to be. He turned out to be exactly right and the man returned impressed. He told Jim he was wasting his time in the gas station and asked Jim if he would be interested in becoming a tool and die maker. Jim had never heard of tool and die but the man arranged an interview for him with a friend who owned a tool and die company. This resulted in a tool and die apprenticeship for Jim at the John Volkert Company in Queens Village, New York (now Volkert Precision Technologies). The apprenticeship lasted three years and was a difficult time for Jim, due both to the required intensive studies and the very modest income he received. But he was very interested in the precision work and particularly the very small parts produced. Jim developed into an excellent tool and die maker, receiving his diploma in May 1960 as shown in **Figure 12.5**.



**Figure 12.5** Jim Ebner (L) receiving his diploma upon the completion of his tool and die maker apprenticeship.

After Hilde and Jim announced their plans to marry, we threw an engagement party in the upstairs apartment for many of their friends (see **Figure 12.6**). Ursel and Heinz were living in our upstairs apartment at that time and pitched in to help. The furniture was moved out of the way and a lot of food and drink was prepared. The older group was downstairs in our apartment, including our clerks Henry Schneeclaus and John Luhrs. Henry, a former gymnast (or Turner), performed handstands in our living room after he had consumed a few drinks. As the change tumbled out of Henry's pockets, John Luhrs dove on the floor for a share of it. John and Henry are shown in **Figure 12.7**.



**Figure 12.6** Ursel Fedders with Hilde Viets and Jim Ebner at the celebration

of Hilde and Jim's engagement in our upstairs apartment in 1957.

That night, Henry's wife drove him home. He had certainly had enough to drink. While trying to get him from the car to the house, Henry sat down in the driveway and refused to move. She could not leave him there, so she went to the refrigerator for a tray of ice cubes and dumped them down the back of his shirt. With that motivation, he jumped up, ran into the kitchen and fell asleep at the kitchen table. John Luhrs did not fare much better. He lived next door and had to climb his stairs on all fours. All enjoyed the party.



**Figure 12.7** John Luhrs and Henry Schneeclaus at Hilde and Jim's engagement party with Bea Munch in the back.



**Figure 12.8** Hilde Ebner's Wedding Party, (L-R) Delores Perez, Frauke Viets, Hilde and Jim

Ebner, Jim's cousin George Kupfer and Hermann Viets, August 19, 1958

Hilde and Jim were married on August 19, 1958. It was a very happy occasion and not inexpensive. I remember Hans always saying to our daughters, "If you want to elope, I'll help you hold the ladder!" In reality, he enjoyed it immensely. The Ebners wedding party is shown in **Figure 12.8** and includes Hilde's best friend from high school and beyond, Delores Perez Shearman. The newlyweds first took an apartment around the corner and later moved into our upstairs apartment. I was very happy to have them so close, especially when Hans died that fall.

It is interesting how many wedding photographs are included in this volume. I suppose the reason is that we gather our families for these occasions and therefore it is the perfect opportunity to gather pictures of all those relatives we don't see very often. One such example is **Figure 12.9**, including many of the characters discussed herein. Harald Kuehne (second from left) is the boy holding the Dachshund in **Figure 11.5**.



**Figure 12.9** At Hilde and Jim Ebner's wedding. (L-R, left side of the table) Britta and Harald Kuehne, Adele and Curt Munch, Arthur Tum Suden, (right side) Gertrude and George Pape, Herta and Hans Viets

Shortly after Hans' death in November 1958, Hilde and Jim came to tell me that she was pregnant. Their first daughter, Kathy, was born on July 22, 1959. It was a very vivid demonstration to me that life does and must go on. We had lost Hans and now had baby Kathy. I was very sorry that Hans did not live to see his grandchildren and for us to be retired together.

When Kathy was born, Hilde gave up her position at CBS. Because Jim was still an apprentice, this strained their financial position. This was when they moved into our upstairs apartment. Not needing to pay rent helped them very much and having them upstairs made me very happy. On May 29, 1961, Hilde gave birth to her second daughter, Kristine. She, like Kathy, was a lovely child. Both children are seen in **Figure 12.10**, taken in July 1961, not long after Kristine's birth.



**Figure 12.10** Kathy and Kristine Ebner in July 1961.

After completing his apprenticeship in 1961, Jim was ready to make a move. He and Hilde decided to move to Seattle where Jim accepted a tool and die maker position with the Boeing Company. That move was not very successful. Jim liked to work with very small stamped parts while the Boeing parts were really quite large. In addition, the Seattle area where they lived was full of younger married people who were not very reliable and not very faithful to each other. In retrospect, this was clearly a sign of the times. A third depressing factor was the weather that year in Seattle. All together, this meant they would move again but they needed to wait a year. Leaving sooner would mean reimbursing the company for the moving expenses they had received. At the end of that year, they were ready to go.

The next move was to Beaumont, California and a tool and die position with the Deutsch Company, makers of electronic connectors. This was a position more to Jim's liking. He enjoyed the work and the surroundings in California. They searched for an apartment in Banning, five miles from the plant, but no one wanted to rent to a family with two small children. So they took an apartment in Beaumont that had no stove, so Hilde cooked on a hot plate. When they bought a small house five miles away in Banning only a year later, Hilde was especially happy about having a stove and oven. However, when they arrived at the house after the closing, the previous owners had taken the stove with them. Hilde and Jim were fortunate to have an understanding and honorable real estate agent that knew that this was not proper. He gave them the money to buy a stove and they were off to a good start in their new home.

Among their earlier visitors in Banning were their cousins George and Marilyn Pape with their own daughter Kristine in **Figure 12.11**.



**Figure 12.11** George and Marilyn Pape and their daughter Kristine visiting the Ebners in Banning in the early 1960s. Kathy and Kristine Ebner are in the foreground.

The Ebners loved the Banning area and were integrated into many of the community activities including church and clubs. There is a local celebration, Stagecoach Days, where everyone dresses up in western garb and the Ebners major role. **Figure 12.12** shows Kathy and Kristine in their western outfits.



**Figure 12.12** Kathy and Kristine in their western outfits for Stagecoach Days.

#### B. Founding Precision Stampings

Although Jim enjoyed his work, he soon realized that in order to control the work and make a more substantial income, it made sense to start his own company. He, Hilde and others talked for a long time about founding their own company before they decided to do it. The ironic thing is the attitude of Jim's employer, the Deutsch Company, had a lot to do with their success. When Jim told them of his plans, their reaction was, "Think about it very carefully. If you walk through that door, you can never come back." There were many times when Jim would have been happy to have his old job back, but he knew it was impossible and that fact drove him on. Eventually, Precision Stampings was successful and Jim never forgot Deutsch's attitude. When his employees wanted to try the same thing, he was encouraging. "Go ahead and try it", he would say, "but I think you'll find that it's not better than PSI". He rehired several of them when they wanted to return.



**Figure 12.13** The first home of Precision Stampings Incorporated in 1966.

Jim and Hilde started Precision Stampings in 1965 along with two partners who were also tool and die makers. They rented space in Beaumont from Fred Hirsch, on Egan Avenue next to the old bank building, shown in **Figure 12.13**. The first home of Precision Stampings had formerly served as the post office for the City of Beaumont. Fred was to become very important to PSI and to Hilde and Jim. Fred and his wife Lucielle are shown at about this time in 1966 in **Figure 12.14**.



**Figure 12.14** Lucielle and Fred Hirsch, 1966.

Hilde was an important element of this new company right from the start because she was the only one with experience running an office and turning out professional documents such as letters and bills. Both Hilde and Jim are seen in the PSI front office in **Figure 12.15**.



**Figure 12.15** Hilde and Jim Ebner in the original PSI office

The company intended to build dies and eventually to produce the actual metal stampings that are used in the electronic products. The start was very difficult. Business was scarce and companies who otherwise might deal with PSI were looking for a stability that was not yet evident in the new company. Absolutely necessary ingredients for any startup business are enthusiasm and confidence. These are clearly demonstrated in a newspaper article of August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1966. Jim is quoted by the Daily Enterprise, "We plan to have up to 30 employees in a year". He also knew the best situation for their young firm. "We hope to concentrate on long term work contracts with the leading companies", he said, "That will give us assured payment and provide plenty of work for a long time to come."

Jim is shown in **Figure 12.16** in a photograph accompanying the article with one of his partners Helmut Prell.



**WORKERS**—James Ebner (seated in left photo) and Helmut Prell, tool and die artisans, operate a new industry in Beaumont.

**Figure 12.16** Helmut Prell and Jim Ebner at the start of Precision Stampings.

### C. My Involvement

After a time, Jim's partners experienced doubt and were expressing a desire to get out of the partnership. Normally this is a very difficult thing to do because new investors are hard to find for a business not yet doing well. As a result, Jim wrote to me one day in 1967 and asked if I would be interested in buying out one of the partners. With regard to my investments, I had always said that I

wanted nothing to do with a bankrupt company and, at least on paper, PSI was bankrupt. But I wanted to support Jim and Hilde so I sent a \$7000 check to Jim by return mail and became a partner. That may not sound like a lot of money but it might be helpful to note that two years later, I purchased their original house in Banning for \$15,000 and that was a market price.

Jim and I always got along well. We very often would travel together to visit his customers in the area. When Jim drove, he got very tired and drowsy. It was dangerous for him to drive alone. When he had a trip in the late afternoon, he would call and ask if I could come along and I always did. I could tell when Jim was getting tired and I would say, "Jim, I'm getting a little tired. How about stopping for a cup of coffee?" Jim would respond, "I'm getting tired too; that's a good idea." We would stop for a while and then start out again, refreshed.

If the visit was a business deal, I was always included. And why not, since I was a partner in the company. If it had to do with customer details where it made no sense for me to attend, Jim would drop me off and I would have a cup of coffee and a piece of cake. By that time he was usually back to pick me up. Our relationship was certainly not the typical son-in-law, mother-in-law situation. Even when the Ebners went on vacation, I always went with them. **Figure 12.17** shows us on such a trip into the mountains. We rented an A frame cabin and included Tante Hanna Hartmann from Germany and Kathy's friend Susan Wall.



**Figure 12.17** A vacation trip to the mountains in early 1975, (L-R) Hilde, Tante Hanna, Herta, Krisitine, Kathy and Susan Wall.

D. Fred and Lucielle Hirsch

Fred Siegfried Hirsch was a very interesting man. Born October 4, 1888 in San Francisco, Fred told the story of being very sick as a young man. His doctors told Fred that there was nothing they could do for him. Encouraged by an acquaintance who was an advocate of fasting, Fred gave up eating for several weeks and survived only on water. He then reintroduced food in a specific order with the simplest foods first. He never ate meat and limited himself to mostly salads and grains. The special diet must have done him some good because he lived to September 1, 1979, a few days short of his 91<sup>st</sup> birthday. On the other hand, Fred's wife Lucielle, who loved a thick steak and butter on her potatoes, lived even longer to the age of 95 years. The Hirsches are shown in **Figure 12.18** at a dinner at my home in Banning.



**Figure 12.18** Lucielle and Fred Hirsch at Lucielle's 84<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration at my home in 1977.

The progress of PSI really improved when Fred Hirsch bought out Jim's other reluctant founding partner. Not only did this give Jim complete day-to-day control but it also gave PSI the financial backing the company needed. Fred Hirsch and Lucielle had both had successful business careers. They married in 1943 when Lucille was fifty years of age and she moved to Beaumont where Fred already lived. Thus they never had children and, in many ways considered the Ebner children, Kathy and Kristine, as their grandchildren.

The Hirsches were good friends of Albert Einstein, who often came to visit with them (see **Figure 12.19**). I'm not sure how they became friends, but the Hirsches had a very wide range of friends. Many of these friends came to visit at their large "Highland Springs Ranch", as they called it, on Highland Springs Road between Banning and Beaumont. At one time the ranch was a resort, the original Highland Springs Resort from which the street got its name. It was no longer operated as a resort by the Hirsches but their many friends, some of them artists, stayed for a long periods of time. The ranch later was sold and developed for housing along Highland Springs Road.



**Figure 12.19** Fred Hirsch with Albert Einstein and his wife Elsa in 1931 near

Highland Springs, California. The woman on the left and the children are unidentified.

Einstein and Elsa are shown at the Grand Canyon on the same trip in a volume of Einstein's papers<sup>22</sup>

Fred Hirsch was in the publishing business, producing magazines on nutrition through the Ehret Literature Publishing Company that are still published. His conversion to health foods was caused by his illness as a young man and he credited the philosophy reflected in the Ehret publications for his cure. The publishing business was only one of Fred's business interests and almost all those business interests made money, so much so that Fred was a very wealthy man by the time he met the Ebners. In addition to the publishing company, Fred ran a mail order laxative business, the InterClean Laxative Company, which he founded in 1912. Fred's office was in the bank building at the corner of Fifth and Egan in Beaumont, now the PSI headquarters. Jim Ebner had started PSI just next door in space rented from Fred. He thus had easy access to Fred's advice, which he was happy to receive and Fred was happy to give. Fred had been in many different businesses and had a good deal of experience, success and money behind him.

---

<sup>22</sup> Renn, Jürgen, ed. Albert Einstein, Documents of a Life's Pathway, pp.271 and 387, WILEY-VCH 2005.

Lucille Hirsch was also successful in business. The story was told that Lucille, when she was working in Los Angeles, worked for a man in the real estate business who invested all her savings in LA real estate. As history shows, that was an excellent investment in Los Angeles, so Lucille had her own significant fortune. There was a strong relationship between the Hirsches and the Ebners. I think Fred considered Jim the son he never had.



**Figure 12.20** Fred Hirsch and Herta Viets at the Ebner's home in April 1973

I also enjoyed Fred and Lucille's company. Fred had a business mind I could really appreciate. He and I often spoke about business and very often about PSI. We are deep in conversation at Hilde and Jim's home in **Figure 12.20**.

When Kathy and Kristine were with Hilde in the office, they often played in a small open area between the bank and PSI, shown to the left of the PSI building in **Figure 12.13**. They would come in and ask Hilde if they could go over and see Mrs. Hirsch. "All right," Hilde would say, "but don't stay too long" and they would run over to visit Lucille. She always loved to see them. With the way the Hirsches treated Kathy and Kristine, I'm convinced they would have shared a large part of the Hirsch estate. The girls are shown at this age in **Figure 12.21**, taken at the top of a substantial hill behind my house in Banning with a great view of the Banning Pass. The hill was very popular with visitors, particularly Pam and Hermann's children, for whom a visit to California was not complete without the climb.



**Figure 12.21** Kristine and Kathy Ebner overlooking the city of Banning around 1970.

Fred Hirsch was on the bank board in Beaumont and when he bought out Jim's second partner, he told the bank to give Jim Ebner whatever he needed because he was backing Jim. This made all the difference in the world and resulted in the growth of PSI in those early years.



**Figure 12.22** Hilde, Kathy, Kristine and Jim Ebner in May 1966.

The change in PSI is reflected in the difference between the Ebner situation at Frauke's wedding in 1966 and later at Hermann's wedding in 1968. Hilde, Kathy and Kristine came east to attend Frauke and Keith's wedding but Jim could not leave and, actually, none of them could afford to come. I helped them with the

fare and they traveled by train across the country. **Figure 12.22** shows the whole Ebner family just weeks prior to this cross-country trip, followed by Kathy and Kristine in dresses I made for them (**Figure 12.23**).



**Figure 12.23** Kathy Ebner, Herta Viets and Kristine Ebner, 1966.

Hilde, Kathy and Kristine's departure from Banning by bus for the train station and the cross country trip to Frauke's wedding is documented in **Figure 12.24**. Jim is pictured at the bus station with the girls, seeing them and their mother off on their adventure.



**Figure 12.24** Jim Ebner and his daughters at the Banning bus station in 1966

Only two years later, at the time of Hermann and Pam's wedding, Precision Stampings was already doing well and producing a profit sufficient to allow Jim, Hilde and the girls to travel across the

country and to take all of us to City Island for a delicious lobster dinner. It was a wonderful change and I was very happy for them. A family portrait of the Ebners from around 1970 is shown in **Figure 12.25**.



**Figure 12.25** The Ebner family; Hilde and Jim with Kathy (top) and Kristine.

As PSI prospered, I felt it was important for Hilde and Jim to own a majority of the company so there would be no question who was in charge. I gladly returned my shares to them. Then one day Hilde appeared at my door with a PSI stock certificate made out to me. "But," I told her, "I wanted you and Jim to have the shares." "Mom," she said, "We only need enough to give us a simple majority. The rest you should keep." After that, every time the company declared a dividend to its shareholders, I received a check from Hilde for the dividend I would have received for the shares I had returned to them and on the check she had written, "Happy Birthday!"

The Precision Stampings success continued. Jim opened a steady flow of business with ITT Canon, an international company with a local presence in southern California. This resulted in an early

international business trip in the spring of 1970 to Europe. On this trip, he stopped off to visit Pam and Hermann while they were living in Brussels, Belgium for that year. Jim found their apartment and left a note for them to call him at his hotel. When the Vietses returned later that evening, they all got together and had a wonderful visit as seen in **Figures 12.26** and **12.27**. Jim came home from that trip and told everyone that he thought Pam was pregnant, although it was not yet announced. He was right! Pam was expecting their first daughter Danielle.



**Figure 12.26** Jim Ebner and Pam Viets in front of the Viets' home in Brussels, 1970



**Figure 12.27** Jim Ebner and Pam Viets climbing the Waterloo monument in Waterloo, Belgium, 1970.

The Ebners took an extensive trip to Europe in the summer of 1975, visiting relatives on both sides of the family. They stopped in Bergedorf to visit with Ursel and Heinz Fedders and their children Ricki and Suzi. The four cousins are shown together in **Figure 12.28**.



**Figure 12.28** Cousins Suzi Fedders, Kristine and Kathy Ebner and Ricki Fedders, summer 1975.

The Ebners' trip to Europe was an opportunity to renew old relationships and to build new ones. Hilde had been 12 years old when she and her sister and brother came to the United States. She knew and remembered the family well. In **Figure 12.29**, Hilde is shown with two of her aunts and two cousins.



**Figure 12.29** Hilde visiting Thale in 1975, (L-R) Elli Männicke, Hilde, Rosie Peters, Hanna Hartmann and Kristine Peters.

Especially in view of what was to happen the following year, I was happy that the Ebners took the opportunity of this trip. They all enjoyed seeing their relatives and had a wonderful time.

#### E. The Accident

Jim and Hilde worked very hard and the business grew and prospered. Kathy and Kristine matured into fine young ladies. They were very good students and Kathy was looking at colleges with an eye toward medical school. With the business operating well, the cost of college was no concern for Hilde and Jim. The two girls are shown in **Figure 12.30**.



**Figure 12.30** Kathy and Kristine Ebner in 1976.

In fact, everything was going so well that they could turn their attention to some other interests. **Figure 12.31** shows the Ebners in front of their home, about to take off on a trip, perhaps for the weekend or longer. Jim and the girls were avid skiers. Hilde had been a skier but gave it up because she had some injury to her leg. At least that was the official explanation, but she had confided in me that she simply did not enjoy skiing very much anymore. However she did enjoy going skiing with Jim and the girls, although she no longer went on the slopes.



**Figure 12.31** Kathy, Jim, Kristine and Hilde Ebner around 1976.

To pursue their passion for skiing, the Ebners purchased a condominium at Mammoth Lake, a beautiful resort area about a day's drive north. Since Jim was an enthusiastic pilot, Mammoth Lake was only an hour or two away. Jim had owned his four seat private aircraft for several years and was a very serious and accomplished pilot. On this particular day, August 29, 1976, the Ebners were planning to fly up to Mammoth to see the new condominium. It was, in fact, rather unusual for all four of them to be flying at the same time. Usually at least one of them had something else to do and then I would often occupy one of the empty seats. But this day was different. They were all anxious to visit the new condominium.

On takeoff from the small private Banning airport, their airplane had engine trouble and lost power. As bad as this was, it would have been a manageable situation because these small planes are able to land successfully, even without power. However, on this morning, there was a low layer of fog that covered the ground, a rather unusual condition for Banning. Because of the fog, they could not see where they might land safely and instead they crashed into a commercial section of Banning. All four Ebners died. No one on the ground was injured.

At this point in my life I had lost two husbands but nothing was as difficult as the loss of the Ebners. I have often regretted that I was not on that plane so that at least one of them would have survived. The girls were only 18 and 16 years old and had such promising futures. It is a terrible thing when a parent loses a child. We expect to eventually lose our parents but not our children. The loss of all four of the Ebners was too much to bear and is something I will never overcome.

## F. Survival and Growth of PSI

At the time of the accident, PSI was very successful. In spite of that, Jim was planning to make some substantial changes. Jim's interests had always been closer to the tool and die making part of the business rather than the business operation of the front office. He had gotten to the point where he wanted to return to the shop and let someone else handle the front office. To accomplish this, six months before the accident he hired Peter Gailing from the same Deutsch Company where he had worked. Peter was also born in Germany, near Frankfurt, and his family came from Bad Mergentheim on the Romantic Road through the center of Germany. Peter was recruited from the front office at Deutsch and had the experience that Jim wanted in PSI. It was Jim's plan that Peter should run the office and he would again give more attention to the actual building of the tools. Of course this was planned as an orderly transition but the accident stepped in the way.

Peter and his wife Ann appeared at my door at 7:15 on that terrible morning to tell me of the accident. Both of them were a great help to me during those early days when the question was not the company's survival but our own. However, eventually, we had to be concerned with the PSI's survival as well. From the company perspective, we had lost not only the CEO and top toolmaker in Jim but also the office manager in Hilde. We often noted how valuable it would have been if only we had Kathy to help us. She had worked in the office so much and so long that she had known where everything was. But Kathy was not there and we needed to keep the company operating.

At this time, we were fortunate to have not only Peter but also Ann Gailing. They are shown in **Figures 12.32** and **12.33**. Ann took over the office operation and handled it very well. She had a lot of background in accounting and completed her degree. Peter continued the selling of tooling and the responding to requests for price quotations. During the following months he would often come over at the end of the day to ask me questions about particular companies and individuals that I knew. My knowledge of the company's business came from the fact that I often had dinner with the Ebners and that business would be discussed over the dinner table. Jim was always interested in my opinion on these business issues. We also discussed a lot of business while we drove together to visit many of our customers.



**Figure 12.32** Peter Gailing, Jim Ebner's successor as president of Precision Stampings Inc.



**Figure 12.33** Ann Gailing, who managed PSI's office at the critical time and beyond

Even with all the effort that Peter and Ann Gailing and many others at PSI put into the Company, prospects looked very bleak at this time. Many people lost confidence that we would be able to get through this transition period to a new management. One of the most disappointing of these was the loss of a good tool and die maker, whom Jim had actually made a part owner of the company. He said that he expected the company to fail and that he was leaving before that happened. Although we were short of cash at this very critical time, we felt we had no choice but to buy out this disgruntled employee/owner. Two others, who chose cash but were certainly not disgruntled, were Jim's brothers Werner (also called George) and Erich. They had no particular interest in the business and preferred to have the use of the money, so we raised the capital to buy them out. Both brothers and their wives are shown in **Figure 12.34**.



**Figure 12.34** Jim Ebner's brothers Werner (George) and Erich at Erich's wedding in 1964. The back row (L-R) George Ebner and his wife with Hilde Ebner holding Kristine, Erich and Ruth Ebner. Hermann and Pam are at the front left with Pam holding Kathy Ebner.

George Ebner lived in Scottsdale Arizona at that time and came to visit me several times. In **Figure 12.35**, George and his children are at my home in 1977.



**Figure 12.35** George Ebner and his children visiting Herta Viets in 1977.

Replacing Jim in the Precision Stampings Corporation was Fred Hirsch, who was elected as chairman and president. Peter Gailing became vice president and general manager of the company. I

continued as a member of the board of directors and secretary. My son-in-law Keith Roth and my son Hermann Viets joined the board. All of us were now part owners of the company except Peter. We all felt strongly that the general manager of a smaller company such as ours needs to be a partial owner in order to have the proper motivation for the company to succeed. Therefore, Peter and Ann Gailing were offered shares of Precision Stampings. We were very fortunate to have Peter and Ann at this time. Peter continued to grow the high quality PSI operation that Jim had established and Ann led the office and oversaw the finances at a time when money was particularly tight.

The Gailings and the Hirsches are shown in **Figure 12.36** at the Hirsch's Seven Lakes Country Club condominium. As in so many other ventures where the Hirsches were very early participants, they were one of the founders at this, one of the earliest high quality developments in the area. I recall going into the crowded dining room with Lucielle one day as she asked the Matre de whether there was still a table available. His response was sure. "For you, Mrs. Hirsch," he said, "we always have a table!"



**Figure 12.36** The Hirsches (middle) with the Gailings (r) at the Hirsches' Palm Springs condo, 1978.

Our main customer in those early years continued to be Canon, with a lot of other companies contributing to our sales. Our first objective was to keep the company in the black and this was not helped by the comments of people predicting our failure. But we did succeed and over the next several years we worked with a variety of customers and always seemed to find one major customer to take up the slack when another trailed off. One particularly interesting situation was a start-up company in the micro-miniature pin and socket field named Ulti-Mate. They licensed a pin that had been designed by Jim for which he had received a Design Patent. As all start-ups do, Ulti-Mate ran short of money. To help them and simultaneously solidify our investment, we agreed to convert some of their debt to us to stock in the Ulti-Mate Company. This was of benefit to them because it lowered their operating expenses and made

them a more stable company. Eventually, it worked out well for us because Ultimate was sold to a much larger company, Molex, and resulted in a nice gain for PSI.

Another of our investments ended up with tragic results, not for us but for those more directly involved. We invested in a syndication of a brand new state-of-the-art fishing vessel, as I have described. Probably the most accurate way to describe it would be as a floating processing plant. The fish were caught by fairly standard and highly automated techniques. Within an hour of leaving the ocean, the fish were cleaned and frozen, resulting in a high quality product. I went to see the ship, the Aleutian Enterprise, when it docked in Long Beach. The tour of the entire ship was fascinating and I also attended a reception for the investors on the deck. I am standing in front of the Aleutian Enterprise in **Figure 12.37**.



**Figure 12.37** Herta Viets and the Aleutian Enterprise in Long Beach harbor.

The fishing area for the Aleutian Enterprise was generally the north Pacific of Alaska. The operator of the ship, under contract with the owners, was Alaska Fisheries. In 198-, the ship suddenly and tragically sank with the loss of everyone aboard, about a dozen people. An investigation found some operational problems that led to the disaster. Since the owners were not the operators, we had no liability and received the insurance proceeds. A major suit resulted on the behalf of the victims and I believe it resulted in a large financial settlement

Precision Stampings lost a very strong and reliable leader and we lost a good friend in 1979 when Fred Hirsch passed away. Fred was an early advisor to Jim Ebner as well as his landlord. In addition, Fred was the person who provided the bank guarantees that made it possible for Jim to borrow the cash needed at various times to keep the company going. He later agreed to sell to PSI the former bank

building that was so close to his heart and is now the PSI headquarters. I believe that, had the Ebners lived, a good deal of Fred's estate surely would have passed to Kathy and Kristine. Fred and Lucielle were very close to the children. Upon his death, Lucille replaced Fred on the board. Peter Gailing was elected as president and Hermann as board chairman, while I continued as secretary.



**Figure 12.38** Lucille Hirsch's 95<sup>th</sup> birthday May 13, 1988. (l-r) Peter Gailing, Lucielle Hirsch, Ann Gailing and Herta Viets.

Lucielle Hirsch remained active with PSI until her death on August 20, 1988. Her obituary is reproduced in Appendix She was always interested in the progress of the company and Peter and Ann Gailing helped her a great deal with the operational problems she faced. Lucielle is celebrating her 95<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1988 at lunch with the Gailings and me in **Figure 12.38** at the Rusty Lantern in Beaumont.

Peter and Ann decided to retire in 1995 and we were faced with another succession problem. Luckily, Peter had prepared well and had hired Steve Morgan a couple of years earlier from one of our competitors. Steve replaced Peter as the general manager and was elected a vice president. A year later he was elected president and the following year was elected to the board of directors. Consistent with our earlier view that the general manager should be an owner of the company, Steve and Sherri Morgan were offered and accepted PSI shares. Steve and Sherri are shown in **Figure 12.39**.



**Figure 12.39** Sherri and Steve Morgan with Herta Viets (center) and Frauke Roth (right).

Steve has continued to build on the success under Peter. We have succeeded in achieving QS 9000 certification, a quality assurance certification required by the major automobile manufacturers. In another major step, PSI established an east coast operation in Concord, North Carolina that will help us to better serve our customers in that part of the United States. A second site can also be an important advantage as insurance against major disasters that could knock a single site out of production, even if only for a short time. With the advent of just in time manufacturing, this issue is of real interest to our largest customers because there is almost no inventory stored in their system.



**Figure 12.40** Precision Stampings at 500 Egan Avenue, Beaumont California.

The home of Precision Stampings in Beaumont, California is shown in **Figure 12.40** on the corner of Egan Avenue and Fifth Street. The corner building is the original bank building that once belonged to Fred Hirsch. Just behind that structure, to the right on Fifth Street, is the original building in which PSI was

founded. **Figure 12.41** shows the east coast location for Precision Stampings, located in Concord, North Carolina, just outside Charlotte. The location is still modest in size and business activity but has already shown great promise.



**Figure 12.41** Precision Stampings in Concord, North Carolina

### 13. CALIFORNIA

#### A. Looking Back

When I look back on my life now, I am amazed at the variety of experiences, particularly the different places I have lived and the circumstances that took me there. I never expected to leave Germany, even after the end of WWII when many people wanted to escape the destruction. I came to America to be with my husband Hans and to build a new life for my children

I had many good times and some difficult times in my life. As I look back now. The happiest times were in the Manor Delicatessen store in Woodhaven. We certainly worked hard and the profits came only with great effort but there was a comfort in knowing exactly what we were working for and having the whole family all around us. In all this and in the fact I never had any real problems with my children, I was very fortunate.