

EDITH OGUTSCH : IN MEMORIAM

"Oh, the difference to me!"

Edith was a wonderful woman, whom I loved and admired. Her death in February was a grievous loss and -- though not unexpected -- a great shock. I knew that she had been very ill for years, but I always hoped, because she was so brave and enduring, that she would recover and continue to be there as long as she was needed.

She showed her steadfast qualities very early in life. She was born in Germany and as a child escaped Hitler's ovens only through the foresight of her father. I thought remembered her as saying that he was a rabbi, but she explained later that instead he was an influential man of the temple, who managed to spirit his daughter out of the country nearly at the last minute before it became an impossibility. As a little girl she sought refuge in England, facing alone a strange country and learning a strange language. Later, during World War 2, she helped operate a searchlight in an anti-aircraft unit. Her father, who saved her life, could not perform the same miracle for himself. He died in one of the Nazi death camps. Edith's mother survived and through the help of the Red Cross mother and daughter were reunited after the war and came to New York City about 1946. Edith was a naturalized American citizen.

Once she showed me a photograph of her schoolmates in Germany: a group of children, six or eight years old, staring somberly at the camera and an uncertain future. So far as she knew, she said, all of them were dead, except herself. I said I believed that she was saved for some reason, mysterious though it might be. She denied having any particular mission in the world, but nevertheless, though she never married, she brightened life a little for me and for other friends. As a colleague where she worked once remarked, "There's no gutsch like an Ogutsch."

Edith was a member of the LASFS (I drove her to meetings on a few occasions in my Los Angeles days); attended several sf cons, including Pacificon II in 1964, where I remember her fondly; occasionally contributed poems to fanzines, including mine; and collaborated on a few fantasy stories with Ross Rocklynne which were published in the semi-prozine *Witchcraft and Sorcery* and elsewhere. I met her through the good offices of Dale Hart, another late lamented friend, who told me about this amazing woman who published great amounts of poetry in little magazines all over the world and even made a tiny profit from such endeavors. Her friendship was one of the best things that ever happened to me in fandom. That Gretchen (who met her about a year after I did) also loved her only validated my own high regard for Edith.

I met her sometime in the spring or summer of 1963 and remained her friend for the rest of her life -- at a distance, much of the time, unfortunately, though I saw her whenever I visited L. A. and once (Memorial Day weekend, 1967) when she came to the Bay Area. On the latter occasion she stayed with an acquaintance in El Cerrito at a place that was, by a remarkable coincidence, only a stone's throw from a house where Gretchen and I moved four years later. I still pass by there frequently and think of Edith each time.

Over the past eight years she told me in letters, later by hastily typed or scribbled postcards, about her life-threatening attacks of asthma, which were caused, at least in part, by the infamous Los Angeles smog. I urged her to go elsewhere, but she preferred southern California, whence she moved from New York

sometime in the 1950s, I believe. Worried about her, I once phoned her long distance at the very moment she was about to leave for the hospital emergency room. She survived that attack, and wrote me later that she was amazed at my prescience.

I did not write or phone her as often as I should have, but at least she did not die -- as other fans and friends have done -- while I owed her a letter. I wrote her a letter in early January, and a few weeks later sent her a birthday card as I always did (her birthday was 30 January). I also sent her a Valentine, as I did every year, and I intended to send her a St Patrick's Day card, also an annual custom. I always addressed the latter to Edith O'Gutsch -- a small and feeble joke, but she enjoyed it the first time I did this, and it became a private jest that I kept up for her amusement.

But I won't do that this year. Her friend in L.A., Bob Smith, informed me in early March that Edith had passed away about 22 February. "I had tried to reach her by phone for four days without success," he wrote, "so a friend and I went to her apartment and with the manager's help and a little muscle managed to get into the apartment. We found her lying dead on the kitchen floor. The paramedics wrote in their report [that she died of] natural causes.... Her second cousin, Louise Goldwyn and her husband, arranged the funeral, which took place Tuesday, 27th of February, at the Home of Peace, just south of San Diego. Just thought you should know," he concludes, "as she was fond of you. I'll miss her terribly."

In a poem dated 12/6/64 and called "A Memorial for Hannes Bok" -- was it ever published anywhere? -- Edith wrote of Hannes, whom she knew in New York, that she couldn't accept the news of his death till she "invented heaven, inch by inch" for him to live in,

"A custom-tailored paradise to fit
A painter's dream -- with every shade of green,
Exotic blossoms to enchant your view,
A rainbow anchored firmly in the sky,
Ripe fruit to eat, a limitless supply,
And all your brushes, canvas, easel, paints"

and only then, she said, could she bear to let him go. Her poem ends,

"Because you died and forced me to invent
An after-world for you, I can't believe
That death will mean oblivion for me.
I face the gloomy gates with faith, not fear.
What fabulous adventures wait beyond?"

Farewell, dear Edith. Go with my love, always.

-- Redd Boggs

7 March 1990