

Gunther Schiwy and a 50th anniversary

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The date of April 1, 2011, is very important in the long and often perilous life of Gunther Schiwy. On that date, he and his family will mark the 50th anniversary of Gunther Electric, the iconic business which bears his name in Wye Mills, Md. Schiwy, who came to this country from Germany in 1952 and whose rich and warm German accent clothes his speech, is 79 years old.

He lives with a quadruple bypass and has need for the same procedure on six other arteries but those operations are now physically impossible to perform, according to his physicians. He also lives with spinal stenosis, a painful and degenerative medical condition of the back.

He has 15 months to go to that 50th anniversary. It will be, for him and his wife, Regina, an anxious journey. They have been on anxious journeys before. But on this one, Gunther Schiwy has turned to Easton chiropractor Dr. Christopher Cianci, and cardiac specialists in Baltimore, to do what they can to help sustain him. Will there be a 50th anniversary celebration of sorts? "I don't know," Schiwy said, "but I want very much to be there."

If Gunther Schiwy's good fortune —and amazing good fortune it is — holds out, he will be there.. Still, he counts each day a blessing. Gunther's family was living on a farm in East Germany in January 1945. Gunther was 14. The end of World War II was near. American forces were advancing from the west, the Russians from the east. Fearful that they would be in the Russian path and sent to Siberia, the Schiwy family – parents and six siblings -- loaded food and what belongings they could on a covered wagon and headed west.

The journey had begun.

With the Russians close behind, and dogged by cruel weather and unbelievable obstacles — picture a frozen body of water which the Russians bombed to prevent them from crossing on the ice — the journey of almost two years would take them across East Germany, ultimately to a refugee camp in Denmark and then finally to West Germany to reunite with Gunther's father who had become separated from the family but whom the Red Cross had located.

All along the way, good fortune continued to be a travel mate of the Schiwy family, preventing the family from boarding a ship, which sank two days later with 5,000 people on board; being aboard another ship which, indeed, hit a mine but did not sink and was towed into port; and in the village of Wahnbeck, Germany, providing the opportunity for Gunther to see a pretty young girl riding by on a bicycle. He decided he wanted to meet her.

"It wasn't hard," he said. "It was a small village." She would become his wife and give birth to Ursula, the first of their five children. Finally, in the spring of 1952, the incredible journey, on its last leg, would take the family to America. But even then the dream threatened still to become a nightmare when the family's sponsors failed to show up at Ellis Island and they were left alone in that sprawling warehouse of a building.

Gunther's good fortune held, as it always seems to. The Travelers Aid Society found another sponsor. Charles Rathel in Wye Mills, Md., needed some help on the farm. The Rathels and other German families in the area welcomed them. Three months later, Gunther got another job, on Arthur Houghton's Wye Plantation.

Whenever he could on the long, perilous journey, he took every opportunity to learn the electrician's trade and in 1956 he accepted a job with Gale Electric Co., in Denton. There he polished those skills and on April 1, 1961, with \$278 in his bank account, he opened Gunther's Electric.

It was tough going in the war years of the 1960s. Work was scarce. "If you wanted to wire a house," Gunther said, "you had to build it."

So he did and so he didn't have to lay off any of his crew. He built 31 houses all told. Ten of them comprise the little Easton neighborhood of Colonial Court. He and Regina live in No. 8. Gunther's Electric, now owned by son Mike, prospered. Among its proud achievements was the design and installation of the wiring of the former Tidewater Publishing plant on Route 301.

More good fortune? You bet. Gunther explained: "They put in Heidelberg printing presses, the best presses in the world. The instructions were written in German. I was the only electrical contactor in the area who could read them." The arduous journey and the years of hard and often physically demanding work began to take its toll in 1991. A heart attack resulted in the quadruple bypass surgery. Then, about 10 years ago, by his recollection, the back problems began.

He had surgery and had sought chiropractic care in Florida, where Gunther and Regina used to spend their winters. Nothing worked, Gunther said. As the pain increased – "it got to be terrible," he said, — a daughter, Heidi Fleming, a respiratory therapist living in Florida and a "computer whiz." according to her father – researched available care in this area and recommended that her father contact Dr. Cianci. His first appointment was Oct. 19 of last year.

Gunther Schiwy's condition, in Dr. Cianci's view, presented somewhat of a classic case. "He shows how, despite his age, his complex medical history and his advanced degenerative disc disease, chiropractic and spinal decompression treatments can help even the most chronic spinal problems," Dr. Cianci said. He added that special care had to be taken in evaluating Gunther's case, "but spinal decompression and cold laser treatment can offer a promising future for Mr. Schiwy."

The goal of the Cianci Chiropractic Center, Dr. Cianci said, "is to help people do what they love to do. I will have a huge smile on my face and joy in my heart at that 50th anniversary." Gunther Schiwy is not pain free, he admits, but he adds "there is much less pain now," (and that was only a little over a month after starting care with Dr. Cianci.) "It's a great relief."

Sitting, now comfortably, in his favorite chair in the warm and picture-filled Schiwy family living room, he paused for a moment. "I have been so fortunate to have these doctors helping to keep me going, to extend my life. God's been with me all the way. It's a miracle."

P.S. First daughter, Ursula, may be known to local readers. She is Mrs. John Mosley, the mother of two children and a teacher at the Wesleyan Christian School in Denton.