

English translation of letter from the artist's father, exhibition poster for
"Kinderzimmer" by R. Sebastian Schachinger at Kaiserwache, Freiburg

Hello Basti.

When we last spoke on the telephone, you apologized for not having taken Grandpa's birthday into consideration. Following that, I sent you his address by e-mail, likewise his telephone number (I forgot the country code), and my e-mail address is, of course, already known to you, just as my address and telephone number are, where you yourself spent a part of your life and could be reached.

As you can gather from the subject line, today I would like to write to you about time, or rather roots; it is nothing new, nothing world-shaking, and yet I would like to tell you about it. I am „taking“ the time to write it down and send it to you, and I hope that you, too, will take the time to read it and not delete it immediately, but perhaps read it again at some later point, when you may be looking at the world from a different perspective. Unfortunately, this letter also contains unpleasant matters that I wish to address, such as regret and disappointment. But all in all, I do believe that you will be able to recognize that it is a father, who cares for you and loves you, who is writing to you.

Well then, why time? Because time is an important factor for us human beings as well. Although stripped down to its essentials for now, let me list some of its characteristics: it is precious, it is transient, it is relative (at least as far as our human faculty of perception is concerned, and our ability to assess it properly, but also in setting something against transience itself).

It is not for nothing that people say, „Time is money“ (and money is certainly something important in our lives); or, „Time heals all wounds“—for me, as a trained and practising physician (even if now in the past), not an insignificant provocation, but nevertheless a remark worth paying attention to. And then there is also: „...better late than never,“ not least with regard to transience, to the time that has passed, to the time that has been lived, and this is surely also the possibility we human beings have to gather experience, that is, to learn. And this time, even when it has passed, does not thereby become worthless or lost. On the contrary, because we remember it, it becomes very valuable, naturally depending on what that time has had in store for us, how much happiness has been bestowed upon us, what blows of fate have been asked of us to endure, and, of course, what we have learned, achieved, accomplished... And in this, too, lies a part of that relativity which Salvador Dalí represented so magnificently in one of his paintings: you surely know the picture, it is the one with the „melted“ clocks. And if you do not know it, then I do not need to explain to you, as an art student, where and how you can find it. It deserves attention and can offer more than mere pleasure in looking at it.

So then, because time for us human beings is also limited, I ought to keep myself somewhat shorter in order to write something about roots as well, which, as already mentioned, is in fact what I intend to do.

The fact that, to this day, you still have not contacted Grandpa, and that on the occasion of my birthday you likewise did not feel it appropriate to send even a few thoughts, is regrettable and, to be perfectly honest, disappointing to me. But it is also reason enough to remind you of your roots.

Yes, I can understand that your mother's attitude of no longer speaking with me has rubbed off on you; but you are an independently thinking person, a young man whose present and future are, if not necessarily determined, then nevertheless shaped by his roots and his origin. And because you have apparently forgotten these things, or, amid the turmoil of life, regarded them as not worth paying much attention to, I would like to remind you of them.

You were born as a German citizen in a reunited, wholly German Federal Republic of Germany, and you grew up within the circle of your father's Protestant Christian family, who rightfully earned, fought for, and deserved to call this beautiful landscape of the Breisgau their chosen homeland. The good fortune and the opportunities connected with this cannot, and do not need to, be described by me here in anything approaching completeness, I merely wish to mention, among other things, that it gave you the possibility of travelling freely and of getting to know the world beyond this landscape, indeed even beyond this suddenly much enlarged „new“ Federal Republic. And also of enjoying the prosperity of the home that surrounded you. It gave you the possibility, while you were still a minor, with the assistance of your legal guardian, of determining your own place of residence. It allowed you to find your own personal way of dealing with the Christian faith. It permitted you to decide freely whether or not you wished to perform military service. As for the diversity of cultural offerings and educational opportunities, I need not write anything except to confirm that, taken as a whole, they are overwhelming. We owe all this to God and to the historically immense changes on our continent, whose effects reached the political situation of our entire planet only a few years before your birth.

What, however, was amenable to human influence, and not some fortunate accident of history or an unalterable fate to which every one of us must submit, was that you came into the light of this world and encountered the conditions that have shaped you, for which, human decisions, actions, efforts and accomplishments were necessary, and for that we should be grateful. You owe thanks for this, and to an equal extent so does your mother (whose way of dealing with the memory of me is anything but respectful), to your grandmother Eva-M., to your grandfather K. Peter, and to your Paps (dad), Tristan. You cannot know this, of course; in the meantime you should've caught up and yet the respect due for what I contributed is, unfortunately, rather slight.

The subject of roots, naturally, is far too extensive to discuss conclusively here. Nor was that ever my intention. And I do not close my eyes or ears to your reality in a country different from the one in which I live, nor to your family circumstances, which are different from those in which I myself grew up and lived. And if I do not wish to say anything further about this here, it is only because I hope that you will not close the book on the past as though it were something no longer physically present today and in the future, and therefore no longer deserving of a respectful care for remembrance.

I visit Grandpa every day, seven days a week, usually for a short while, and in doing so I experience at close hand what it means to have reached a certain age, at which one comes to depend upon good care. When the body no longer functions as it did in younger years; when illness considerably restricts one's quality of life; when a spouse of many years dies. It is anything but easy to deal with such things. There are, of course, signs of sympathy from relatives, friends and acquaintances, and these are, at the very least, a small consolation. But they can help. Quite often, however, one finds oneself very much alone in the situation described above. Thank God, Grandpa is not. My own contribution is, naturally, laughably small, but it should not be underestimated. Simply knowing: your son comes to visit you every day or, should the need arise, can stop by at short notice at any time, is not to be underestimated in such a situation. To what extent my contribution is truly a help to him, I do not know, but whatever is possible, I try to accomplish to the best of my knowledge and conscience. So then, that's all for today.

Take care of yourself: My thoughts and my wishes for you and towards you will continue to accompany you (whether you like it or not; whether your mother denies me, discredits me, or not).

With love,
Paps Tristan