

## Hilde and Thanee

Prelude: Siberian walk (2:48 min)

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### What is a human?

**Hilde:** When you die... Who - or - what could give a true picture of who you were when you were alive?

Would it be people you met during your life?

Could it be documents in official archives?

Can a box of photos found after your death enlighten us on who you were?

**Thanee presents:** TA research assistant in the project Illuminating the Non-Representable.

**Hilde:** You have already met me on the screen, walking in Siberia: I am Hilde Kramer. I work at the Faculty of Fine Art, Music and Design at the University of Bergen, running this research project Thanee just mentioned.

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### Momarken

**Hilde:** Does anyone in the audience remember Momarkedet? Between 1950 and 2013 there was this annual event on TV. Organized by the Mysen Red Cross. With big stars, like Bing Crosby, Tina Turner, ABBA, Jahn Teigen, AHA and even our own queen Sonja has performed there, singing on stage. What few people remember today is that this place, Momarken - by the way, it is also a horse running track, located in Indre Østfold, just an hours travel from Oslo, almost became a Nazi- German concentration camp for 5000 prisoners at the end of the war.

**Thanee** An amusement park situated in a former Nazi camp?

**Hilde** Yes! To me that sounded so absurd. When I learned about this in 2018 I got the idea I wanted to illuminate this strange and intriguing part of history.

**Thanee:** I have never heard about a concentration camp in Norway. As far as I know, even Grini, the biggest camp, was a prisoner camp, not a concentration camp?

**Hilde:** Luckily the concentration camp at Momarken was never finished. But it did function as a prisoner camp until the liberation in 1945. When the war ended, it was turned into a camp for former forced labourers and ex-prisoners from the Soviet waiting to return home..

**Thanee** How long were they there?

**Hilde** Only some weeks after the war ended. When they left, local people met up at the railway station cheering hurray, waving flags and wishing the former prisoners a good journey back to Soviet. The sad thing is, many of them were sent straight to Gulag camps. Others had tough lives after returning home. However, the camp at Momarken was not empty for many days. It soon became the home for 600 displaced Polish citizens stranded here in Norway.

Thanee Why were they here?

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Hilde That is a complex story. To simplify, let's for now say they had no papers proving their nationality and were waiting for a decision from the authorities to either be sent to Poland, or to remain in Norway. Housing was a big problem everywhere in Norway back then, so these displaced persons actually had to live in the previous prisoner barracks. This story is about *one* of these 600 Polish people. One person who was in the camp between 1945 and 1947.

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Thanee: What you are going to hear now, is a reconstruction of a human biography. We call him Ed. You will hear from witnesses who knew this person alive, you will be presented archive material, as well as a box of photos found after his death. The voices you're about to hear are a dramatization of interviews we have had.

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**School band member 1 recording (1 min)** : Pivo har også betydd eventyrlig mye for meg. Han var som person so blei'n oppfattet som veldig streng. Han krevde veldig mye av alle som var med men at det han har betydd mye for mange på Mysen, jeg er helt sikker på.

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**School band member 2 recording (1 min)**

Thanee: We have now heard two men giving two different perceptions of a person who was their music teacher during their childhood. But how well did they know him?

Hilde: It was his role as a teacher of music and as school band conductor that mattered to them. Many of those 600 displaced persons had backgrounds from different fields of art and music. Right after the war, there were plans to rebuild Poland through culture, and that's why *these* people were gathered in *this* particular camp.

Thanee: But he stayed here, didn't he? He even got married. So what kind of picture does his wife draw of him? **Shall we take a look inside the first box of memorabilia left after his death?**

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**Wife recording (1 min)** De fikk jo veldig mye sånne noter og sånn da fra tyskerne. Det var de hakekorsene og dette greiene på. Og så flytter dem seg etterhvert og så ble det bare han og (beep sound) tilbake og dem spilte i så mye brylluper og alt som var. Jeg vet ikke hvem sitt bryllup de ikke har spilt i Jeg husker et år så da ble (beep sound) og jeg kona til (beep sound) litt lei oss for da var de borte hver eneste lørdag de hadde fri i julen og første juledag.

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Hilde: When I interviewed his widow the first time in 2018, I became intrigued by the story of this man who had arrived in a new country, *literally swimming*! Among many other things, she said that he spoke seven languages. He was passionate about music, both as a musician and as a teacher of music. And I wanted to find out more about him. There was something in the story that puzzled me...

Thanee: Yes, there is something odd about this story - he says he spent *three hours* in the water?

Hilde: Yes, exactly! What is even more strange is that he says it happened in October! The ocean is quite cold at this time of the year. How did he manage? I started looking for ships being torpedoed in October 1944. I contacted different archives. But... it did not add up. All the archives I contacted told me there were no matching incidents in October 1944.

**Thanee:** Could the journalist have mistaken the year? Maybe it was a typographical error, that he meant to write 1943?

**Hilde:** No. I checked that too - There were no October incidents in 1943 either!

**Thanee:**

How strange!

He claims he was on a ship that was torpedoed?

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3 hours in the water?

Did you finally find this accident?

**Hilde:** Well, there was *one* that matched. I read about this researcher, Michael Stokke, at Narviksenteret who had written about a ship being torpedoed outside the southern coast of Norway on 21st October 1942. The ship was called Palatia.

(We go to the back)

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**Palatia recording (2:30 min)**

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**(Reading during the Palatia recording)**

**Thanee:** This is what we know: The prisoner ship Palatia had a thousand Soviet war prisoners on board when it left Kristiansand harbour in the morning of October 21st, escorted by a submarine chaser. At 15:05, she was discovered by a war plane who launched a torpedo at a range of 550 metre, hitting the ship in the starboard side, ripping the ship apart and huge amounts of water gushing in. Then panic broke loose on board. A Soviet survivor from Palatia described the brutality of the Nazi-German guards towards the Soviet prisoners:

Some of the prisoners were sucked down with the ship and some could not swim. I grabbed a metal lifebuoy. After a while, a gunboat appeared, but the crew did not dare launch a lifeboat into the high seas, but threw out lifelines. If a Russian got caught in a line before it was his turn, he was shot at close range.

I lost consciousness. Someone on the deck grabbed my head and pulled me on board, I was saved. I came to myself but could not stand on my feet. Some German sailors dragged me under deck. Surviving comrades were naked and frozen. All of the prisoners had marks after heavy blows. The gunboat increased speed and went ashore. There the Germans waited with weapons. With the help of fists and rifle butts, they got us lined up. There were about 160 men. The time was between 01.00 and 02.00 at night. Finally, we reached the outskirts of a town where we were placed in barracks behind barbed wire fences. There was endless moaning from the sick and wounded. One prisoner after another died in the barracks. The bodies were wrapped in paper bags and dumped in the sea."

This is what the Soviet prisoner recalls after this terrible shipwrecking. The number of perished has been listed as 986 people, including 915 prisoners from the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe. For weeks after the sinking of *Palatia* large numbers of corpses floated ashore on the beaches of the Lista area. The bodies were collected and removed by the Germans. The sinking of *Palatia* is the second greatest ship disaster in Norwegian history.

**Hilde:** 986 people died

**Thanee:** How come we have not heard more about this terrible shipwrecking?

**Hilde:** For the Germans, *Palatia* was a military scandal since they had not conducted themselves according to German marine regulations. So they made it hush- hush.

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**Thanee:** Why didn't the Norwegian newspapers report about the shipwrecking?

**Hilde:** The media were under strict censorship. Besides *only one Norwegian person*, the ship pilot, drowned. The research began in the early 1990ies.

**Thanee:** But this man in our story, he was *Polish*, wasn't he? This doesn't add up.

**Hilde:** I agree. I asked researcher Michael Stokke if there were Polish prisoners on board. But no. Only German soldiers, Soviet prisoners and one Norwegian pilot. He said: Check Riksarkivet in Oslo. There is a huge archive about displaced persons of different nationalities in Norway after the war. **Let us open box number two:**

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**Ankieta: Sound recording of the text found in Fragebuch from 1945: Two actors reading questions and answers**

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**Thanee:** Listen, he insists that he is taken by force by Wehrmacht to Norway. He also says he only had Polish nationality.

**Hilde:** Yes, and here he is saying that he came to Norway in October 1942, not 44.

**(Closed up image of the ankieta)**

However, there was one detail that made me question him... Because on the top of the questionnaire from 1946 someone has written in Norwegian "Har vært Feldwebel i D.W H" That means he was a Feldwebel in the German army. Feldwebel means *sergeant*.

**Thanee:** So he is both insisting to be forced to a German army service and at the same time he has a military rank?

**Hilde:** Mm-mm. Look what else is written in Norwegian.

**(on the screen we see the writing in Norwegian)**

**Hilde:** Obviously, Those who interviewed him in 1946 do not think he is telling the whole truth. They think he is bluffing.

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**Thanee:** Who is he?

**Hilde:** Kim on jest?

**Thanee:** Quien es el?

**Hilde:** Wer ist er?

**Thanee:** Qui est tu?

**Hilde:** Ed, hvem er du?

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**Thanee:** (Question 19) So doesn't he want to go back to Poland?

**Hilde:** Probably Ed doesn't feel he *belongs* to Poland anymore. Because of the cold war, Poland was changing quickly. There were Polish officers that came to Norway to interview the Polish DP to determine their national identity. These were sent by the exiled Polish government in London. But

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another government was settling in Warsaw, supported by the Soviet Union. And many people who returned to Poland experienced hard repercussions at arrival.

#### (Letter picture)

**Hilde:** This letter was sent by a Polish member of the orchestra where Ed played. His friend who returned to Poland sent a coded message saying “**do not go back**”.

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**Hilde:** We know that Ed was born in 1920. Then Poland as an independent nation had only existed for two years. He also came from a city close to the German border, and historically it was always an area with a multicultural identity, where the balance between people identifying as German and people identifying as Poles was fifty-fifty. In the rest of Poland, people from this region were looked at as quite Polish, they were from **Śląsk**, or as it is called in German, **Schlesien**. After the war, the German population had to leave. Their houses, industries and farms were taken over by ethnic Poles. And Ed did not have any family left in the region. Besides, the way he expresses himself, he evidently does not sympathize with the new Soviet-friendly government in Warsaw. There is one other thing we should remember: His mother was born in Austria.

#### (closed detail of the Ankieta, mother)

**Thanee:** And she and Ed's sister moved in 1938 to Austria. Then there was **Anschluss**. Austria was practically part of the Nazi-German nation. But why did **she** leave Poland? Can we look at some family photos? Lets open **Box number 3**

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#### (Showing Family Portrait)

**Thanee:** This photo must be taken before 1938. We know from the questionnaire that his father died that year. In this photo, they are still in Poland. Ed has told his wife that he remembers his father as a very

strict patriarch, having a solid job in the city's main post office. They had a good economy. The father badly wanted Ed to learn to play music. He was enrolled in the music school already at the age of five. And he had to practice the violin for hours every day while the father supervised his training. If we look at the atmosphere in this photo, it almost looks like it could have been the nineteenth century because everything radiates a sort of bourgeois solidness. But then the father dies. Ed has just enrolled in the Polish army; he is 18 years old. And his mother and sister have left the country. He is all alone, but then again, he is busy adjusting to military life.

### (Soldier picture)

Just look at the photo he sends to his mother in the uniform belonging to the prestigious Polish mountain division. Please note the writing on the bottom of the photo, it says it is taken as a souvenir from the army service.

**Hilde:** Could you turn that photo around, please? It says: To my dearest mother: As a souvenir from my army service. It is dated 23rd of May 1939. Less than four months later Poland was attacked by Germany. And no other country interferes.

In the questionnaire he says that he had finished his officer training and was now in the 21st division of the mountain brigadiers in Podhale. His military rank is that of a sergeant. From the 1st of September 1939, he took part in the war actions on the Polish side. And then the Polish army is defeated. He is taken prisoner in a small place called Jozefow. And then he manages to escape!

**Thanee:** What happened after that?

### (Photo of Ed playing the accordion in 1941)

**Hilde:** Here there is a hole in our documentation. The only thing we can say for sure is that we have photos of him in Austria, dated 1941. He is playing an accordion with other musicians. There appears to be trains behind them.

**Thanee:** That in itself is spectacular! How did a Polish sergeant go from the middle of the Polish battlefield to the Austrian mountains during the war? And why is he playing in a train station?

**Hilde:** The box with private photos also contained a **business card** from Austria. It has the same worn patina like the family photo, the soldier portrait and the photo from the train station. I think he carried all these in his wallet. As well as this business card. Take a look.

**Thanee:** He could have had financial problems? According to the questionnaire, he was unemployed, his mother was a housewife, so we cannot expect her to have had an income. Maybe playing in public spaces was a desperate act to support his mother, and his sister.

**Hilde:** This is only a speculation since we lack documentation.

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(moving around the Salen)

**Thanee:** Ed, Are you lying?

El esta mintiendo. Es evidente, nos esta mintiendo! Ed, estás mintiendo.

**Hilde:** Ed, myślą, że kłamiesz  
Wir denken dass du lügst.

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**Thanee:** But how can we know the truth?

Let's go to the **Bundes Archiv in Germany**. Every German soldier had a folder. (we go back towards the wall to let the video speak for itself)

**Hilde:** We saw from the papers in the German Archive he from March 1942 first was in Kompanie Landeschützen-Ersatz-Bataillon, later Kriegsgefangenen-Arbeits-Bataillon. And in 1944 Festungs-Bataillon and later that year back to Kriegsgefangenen-Arbeits-Bataillon: that is a solid documentation of being in the Wehrmacht. As a sergeant, not just forced to enter the army.

**Thanee:** Should we not consider these factors: His father is dead. His mother and sister are in Austria. The Polish army is defeated. Actually, there is no longer a country called Poland. He is unemployed. He has no income. Playing in the train station probably did not give much money anyway. After arriving in Austria; how would they treat his nationality, by the way?

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**Hilde:** The Germans would not consider him worthy of full national citizenship of the Third Reich. The expression they used was Volksdeutsch, because his mother belonged to the Arian race, according to the Nazi way of thinking.

**(Recording of researcher Michael Stokke speaking about Volksliste)**

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**Thanee:** Michael Stokke says they might put him in a concentration camp had he refused to join the Wehrmacht. Maybe to save himself from being treated worse than necessary, he assumes a German identity.

**(Picture of the boats in the sea)**

We can see that he actually started writing on the back of his photos in German! Like here, he writes *Seegang! Big waves!*

And here: V.P. Boot - it is short for For-posten-boot, these boats were used for patrol duty, escort, or submarine-hunting.

**Thanee:** OK, let's try to imagine Ed being on board of Palatia. The boat is sinking. What does he do?

**Hilde:** That is the question: *How does he behave?* There is a chance he was among those who beat or even shot at the desperate Soviet prisoners trying to get into the lifeboats. On the other hand, if he is surrounded by Germans who do not consider him as full-blood German, they might treat him as badly as they treated the Soviet men! Remember, he says he is swimming for three hours in the cold October ocean.

**Thanee:** Three hours... swimming in the ocean. Trying to escape a sinking ship, surrounded by drowning people. That sounds terrifying.

**Hilde:** His wife said when they later in life were at the beach, he never liked going further into the water than being able to feel the ground beneath his feet.

**Thanee:** It is probably not easy to divide people into categories of being guilty or innocent of war crimes? On the other hand: Deep in that box of photos, we found some pictures that he probably had not shown anyone else.  
(photos in Kristiansand)

**Hilde:** Er det deg, Ed, som står der ved siden av de elleve hakekors draperte kistene utenfor Kristiansand militærpsykehus i 1942? Vi vet ikke, for her har du ikke skrevet noen ting på baksiden av bildene.

**Thanee:** Who are you, Ed? At this moment? Are you German? Are you Polish? What are you thinking about if you are that lonely soldier standing beside the coffins?

**Hilde:** He could be among the musicians playing in the German military orchestra?

**Thanee:** He probably would not have kept these photos, unless it mattered to him? Who knows who is inside those coffins? Maybe other Folks-deutsche soldiers, boys who were clinging to the shipwreck debris together with him in the ocean? Young boys, who unlike Ed, did not survive the hours in cold water. We know he was hospitalized for a while after the incident.

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**Hilde:** This moment, whether he feels Polish or German, it probably became something so *non-representable* that he could not speak about it later in life. Not even to his wife who he trusted so much. But don't we all have something in our past that is beyond what we can tell to others? Secrets. Moments of *shame*. Moments that are beyond comprehension to anyone who weren't there?

How about **you?** **Hilde:** **slow** to the audience) Is everything in your past crystal clear? No doubt? No mixed feelings? White as snow? Just. Righteous. Honest. Pure. No unspeakable secrets?

**Thanee:** Who are you? (moving around)

**Hilde:** Kim jestes?

**Thanee:** Qui es tu?

**Hilde:** Wer bist du?

**Thanee:** Quien eres?

**Hilde:** The papers about Ed do not reveal much of what he has done during the period 1942 and 1945. In the German archive we see that he was hospitalised for quite some time between 1944 and 1945. But why or where, we do not know. We do know a little about *where he has been*. In the 1946 questionnaire he mentioned Sandeid, Våler ...Mysen and that he became a DP in Lyngdal. In the application for Norwegian citizenship he mentioned Egersund, Stavanger, Karmøy and then Våler. Why doesn't he mention the same places in these two documents?

**Thanee:** Has he got something to hide? Or is it just that time has passed between those two documents?



**Hilde:** The big mystery is how he managed to become a *Polish* DP in Lyngdal. One day Ed is potentially a prisoner guard watching Soviet forced laborers. The next day the war is over. And suddenly he is considered Polish again!

**Thanee:** How does he do that transition? How do the prisoners accept him as Polish now, if he was wearing a Wehrmacht uniform in the service of the Kriegsgefangenen-Arbeits-Batalalion the day before? Who recognizes his national identity?

**Hilde:** When it comes to his national identity, one can only say that he is something of a magician.

**Thanee:** During the summer 1945 he arrives at Momarken. He lives in the Displaced Persons camp among 600 other Poles. And he starts a civil life here; he gets a good job, he starts playing in bands, he participates in the general culture. He gets married. It is a happy marriage. They are very much in love.

**Hilde:** he got a Norwegian passport. And he even applied to do Norwegian military service. Which he gets. What military rank do you think he gets as a Norwegian soldier?

**Thanee:** Let me guess... a sergeant?

**Hilde:** You hit the bull's eye!

**Thanee:** Years are passing...

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**Hilde:** He is surrounded by people who like him. Who recognizes his talent as a musician and music teacher.

**Thanee:** This presentation underlines a dilemma when you do research... Ed's background is unique. Three nationalities. Three times a soldier for three different countries. But because some of the information is of sensitive nature, we cannot show his face to you. We have highlighted and concealed different information, to not reveal his identity.

Having to obscure his eyes in the photos makes him look guilty, right?

**Hilde:** I agree. And we have no idea about what he has done. But he is the only person among the German crew on Palatia that can be identified by name. That makes his story special. *It needs to be told.*

**Thanee:** Hilde, you started this presentation walking in Siberia. Why? In what way does this come into the story?

**Hilde:** In the beginning, that was just a fun fact. The first witness you heard had Ed as his conductor when he was in the school band. As you heard Ed could be strict. He could be demanding. And possibly a bit overwhelming for a small boy who also may have been up to tricks. But the same witness told me many times how they would be preparing for the annual parade on the 17th of May, marching in Siberia. Everyone had to have impeccable clean shoes, shiny instruments and the uniform should be in pristine condition. Walking on sandy roads! It was either dusty like a sandstorm or muddy like a pigsty!

**Thanee:** In the video there doesn't seem to be many houses there?

Hilde: No, you are right. These are open, wind-exposed empty fields. A huge sky above you. And mud roads beneath your feet. Why was he obsessively marching here with the school band?

Thanee: There was still one more photo in that box of private snapshots from his life, right? Can we take a look at it?

Hilde: There you are. Ed.

Thanee: It says on the back that it was taken in 1931. Is this Poland? It certainly does not look like Austria? No mountains to be seen.

Hilde: No, I think *this is his childhood in Siberia*, somewhere in Slask. Schlesien. Or Silesia. It seems to be a hot summer day. Ed: Maybe you are thinking in Polish. Maybe you are saying to yourself *Dobry kon*, which means good horse. Or maybe you whisper *Pferd* in German. You look happy, Ed, on that horse. You have no idea about the troubles you are going to get into in less than a decade from where you are in the photo. Here and now, you live in the moment. *Jesteś spokojny*. You are the peace, mild peace. *Du bist die Ruh*.

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