

It had to be something he really wanted to do.

He went for a check-up and mailed the results to the Canadian Embassy in Bonn. He needed to include seventy-six-years of medical history.

He had to state in writing that he could get dressed and undressed, tie up his shoelaces and wash without any help, that he could do his own cooking and shopping.

He had to go and see a psychiatrist, who questioned him about the relationship he he'd had with his mother and father, with his brothers and sisters, his children. The psychiatrist jotted down observations in a thick notebook. He tried to make out what was being written across the table. He read upside down: "Perhaps a typical case of" — but that was all he could see.

He had to declare he wouldn't be financially dependent on anyone in Canada and submit as proof all his financial data: the revenue from the sale of Rothenburg (one hundred and fifty thousand marks), part of the contents of the house (antiques and paintings worth ninety thousand marks), his pension income, the alimony he paid Hannelore.

"If your financial situation is good," his son said, "everything will turn out all right."

And everything did turn out all right.

When in February 1977 he officially received permission to emigrate, he cried. He wrote on the outside of the envelope: "My emigration to Canada! Thank God!"

He put together a list of the things he absolutely had to take. After a month of tallying, choosing and discarding, he was left with four closely typed sheets.

The first two read:

Bechstein

Piano stool

Elisabeth's things (jewellery, girls' books, glasses, hearing aid)

Writing desk

Beds (1 double, 2 single)

Duvets (5)

Blankets

Covers and fitted sheets

Mattresses

Secrétaire

Swabian cabinet

Frankfurt cabinet

Chesterfields (4)

Bookcases (10)

Red sofa, green sofa

Tea table

Dining-room table with chairs (6)

Low table

Persian carpets

Bohemian crystal

Meissen service

Enamelled bronze snuff-bottle

Mortars

Weights

Barometer

Bronze bell (Hauenstein)

Paintings and etchings

Curtains

Hunting-horn

Washing machine

Dryer

Vacuum cleaner

Household: miscellaneous (plates, pans, cutlery, mixer, et cetera — left and right
kitchen cupboards)

Two record players with speakers (8), amplifiers

Radio

Television

Long-playing records

Books

Music books

Lawn mower

Chainsaw

Rake

Pruning shears

Hoe

Spade

Hammer drill

Sander

Lathe

Tools, miscellaneous (2 hammers, 2 handsaws, monkey wrench, pair of pincers —
garden hut)

Guns (Sauer and R 93)

Skis

Tents and accessories (large, small)

Sleeping bags (3)

On the other sheets he had itemized his favourite records, books and music books. He skipped the clothes. No need to list those. He was just going to take what fitted into his backpack anyway.

He tried not to get all choked up when he shuffled through the house in his dressing gown — through the conservatory with its white, pink and purple amaryllises, the music room with the grand piano, which his hand would gently stroke as he passed, the living room with the Persian rugs, the sheepskins piled in thick layers in front of the fire place, the dining room with her knick-knacks.

After Elisabeth had stopped performing on the stage, she got rid of her evening gowns, her diamond earrings, her large feathered hats, and acquired loden skirts and cardigans with leather buttons. She threw herself into collecting cuckoo clocks, dolls in traditional costume

and lace cloths just as fervently as she used to practise her scales. Mrs. Baches, the housekeeper, always took a deep breath when it was time to tackle the dining room. She'd loosen up her shoulder blades as though she were getting ready to dive ten metres under water, and only then would she step inside.

He tried to keep a cool head and not think about that day, twenty years ago, when he'd set out hand in hand with Elisabeth to choose the wallpaper, and the tiles for the bathroom and the curtains. He tried to forget how they'd been back hand in hand six more times, because she wanted a whole new colour palette in the house every few years. That's what she called it and he cleared his throat.

"Come on now, be ruthless," he told himself at least a hundred times. And sometimes it worked. Then he tossed all the chipped cups into the garbage can and stuffed Elisabeth's clothes and table coverings into bags for the Salvation Army in a single afternoon.

He was only going to take the most useful things. Only what he'd otherwise have to buy in Canada anyway. Only what he couldn't do without.