



Peony (*Paeonia* 'Friendship')
Snowdrop Anemone (*Anemone sylvestris*)



Bleeding heart (*Dicentra spectabilis*)

Prisoners of War

It is one thing to be a soldier, drafted or enlisted in the military to serve your country; quite another to be a child caught in war, with bombs falling all around you and the safety of your home and family threatened in sunlight and in darkness.

For Trudi, war was the backdrop of childhood, the setting for grief and anguish, but also for strength of character and acts of heroism. In 1942, six-year-old Trudi was too young to understand about Hitler's war. She did understand perfectly that the beans she harvested and traded were a sweet and constant counterpoint to the changes she saw all around her.

In 1943, her worldview changed right outside her bedroom window when the village's produce collection hall became a prisoner-of-war (POW) camp. From her bedroom, she could peer into the scuffed dirt courtyard of the camp. The first occupants were young Russian women with cropped hair, wearing long dark skirts, blouses and kerchiefs. As Trudi lay in bed, she heard their soft, mournful singing. When she walked to school, she looked through the tall barbed-wire fence, often giving them a shy smile. One Russian woman kept escaping, but she was always found near the village pond—on her knees, praying. Brought back to camp, she was locked up again behind the barbed wire. Without identification papers or money, the prisoners couldn't actually escape because there was nowhere to go.

One day, as suddenly as they had come, the Russian women vanished. Fierce-looking men from Mongolia wearing long black braids down their backs took the women's place. After a while, the Mongolians disappeared, and French and Polish men filled the camp, standing in the courtyard under the watchful eyes of the guards.

These prisoners interacted with Trudi, smiling and motioning to her as she walked by. Not understanding what they wanted, Trudi asked her mother, "Why do they point at our house?" Her mother walked outside, looked at the house and smiled. She had hung ears of corn under the eaves to dry until ready to be used as chicken feed. The men, desperately hungry, hoped Anna might share some.