

The Black Kid who grew up in Nazi Germany! The Fascinating Story of Mola Martin Ngeka Luma

By Prof. N.N Susungi

The Nazi hatred of the Jews resulted in the Holocaust. That is now fully well documented. But how could life have been for a black African kid growing up in Germany from around 1927 to 1945? This is the true story of one such African kid who found himself growing up in the Third Reich as a result of circumstances which he himself did not understand. The personal testimony of Martin Ngeka Luma, who died in Cameroon on April 13, 2003 of prostate cancer and which was delivered to Prof. N.N Susungi in the course of a nearly four-hour videotaped interview, reveals a side of Nazi Germany which the outside world does not know and has probably never been told.

Martin Ngeka Luma was born September 10, 1927 in Bwinga –Tiko which lies at the foot of Mt. Cameroon in the former German colony of Kamerun (present day Cameroon) which Germany lost as a result of WWI. He was the son of *Nako Ndumbe Tonga* (his father) and *Enanga Ngombe* (his mother).

His mother *Enanga Ngombe* had been married to a German called *Mathias Funk* who was an employee of Lever Brothers with whom she bore as many as seven children; but all of them had died of various diseases. The Funks came originally from Bremen in Germany. When Mathias Funk was transferred to the Central African Republic which was at the time part of German Kamerun, the parents of *Enanga Ngombe* refused to allow their daughter to move there with Mathias Funk. After the departure of Mathias Funk, *Enanga Ngombe* got married to *Nako Ndumbe Tonga* and bore a son and called him “Minyangadu” Luma. Unfortunately for the boy, *Nako Ndumbe Tonga* died three months before his son was born. The last that was ever heard of Mathias Funk is that he died in Central Africa from injuries suffered after falling from a horse which trampled on him breaking his ribs.

Enanga Ngombe decided to take the child to Douala to introduce him to relatives living there. During the course of a nocturnal boat journey to Douala an accident took place and the baby fell out of the arms of the nurse who accompanied them to Douala. But the child miraculously survived by being trapped and kept afloat by roots of the giant trees along the sea shore. *Enanga Ngombe* took in a lot of water into her lungs, but died a few days after being rescued. Thus shortly after the birth of this child called “Minyangadu”, both parents had died leaving him an orphan.

As the one-month orphaned child would not stop crying, the relatives looked for all kinds of solutions to pacify him. The responsibility finally fell on *Joana Epiti Ngeka*, the child's grandmother a Bakweri woman who had studied in Germany and spoke German very fluently.

An old German Jewish couple who had been plantation owners in Kamerun and who were childless prevailed on *Joana Epiti Ngeka* the child's grandmother to allow them to take the orphan with them when they decided to return to Germany for Christmas in December 1927. (*Dr. Luma strangely did not readily remember in the course of the videotaped interview the names of the German couple who took him to Germany. I did not know what to make of this memory lapse. But for the sake of this story, I have taken the license of calling them Mr. & Mrs. Manfred Schneider. The reason is because until his final return to Cameroon, Dr. Luma was known in Germany as Heinrich Schneider*).

Mr. & Mrs. Manfred Schneider, the German couple, Dr. Luma's adopted parents went back to the town of Bremen, the same town where the Funk family came from. This is how the young African boy found himself growing up in Germany in the household of a German family. Mrs. Manfred Schneider's father lived alone in Berlin, having lost his wife.

The *Schneider* family were the object of considerable curiosity and gossip because neighbors wondered how the couple had managed to bear a black child while in Africa. It must have been the hot sun, they thought. For the black kid called *Heinrich Schneider*, growing up in Bremen was quite challenging because he could not understand why he was black while his parents were white.

When he became of school-going age, the family moved from Bremen to the Wuppertal so that Heinrich could go to school down there. There again he found himself in a school where all the children were white while he was the only black child. He could not explain to himself why that was so. He does not recall any stories of discrimination beyond occasional teasing from some of the school children who would open his clothes in order to find out whether he had a tail. One such kid was called *Helmut Schmidt* a childhood friend and schoolmate, who always teased Heinrich Schneider by asking him to show him his "tail". Helmut Schmidt grew up to be the West German Chancellor. The two met again later in life, when Helmut Schmidt was still holding the office of German Chancellor.

Dr. Luma remembers that he did well in school because his step mother had arranged for him to have a private tutor at home who taught him many things which. It is quite interesting that while Dr. Luma had problems recalling the names of his step father and mother, he immediately recalled that his teacher was called Heinrich Foben.

Dr. Luma recalls vividly a sporting event which took place in Germany when he was a kid. He remembers that a black man ran the 100 meter dash so fast that he won the gold medal; but the big man (Adolf Hitler) refused to shake his hand. Dr. Luma recalls that many of his German childhood friends pointed at the speeding Blackman saying, "that is your father". Yes the event was the 1936 Olympic Games which took place in Berlin and the fast man on the track was Jesse Owens, Dr. Luma's "father". But soon after that Herr *Manfred Schneider*, Dr. Luma's German father, died.

Mrs. Schneider and her son Heinrich decided to move to Berlin in order to live in the house which she had inherited after her father died. Mrs. Schneider had no other surviving relatives and neither did the young Heinrich. Mother and adopted child had only each other alive. Consequently, Heinrich Schneider followed his mother everywhere she went. Meanwhile, Storm clouds were rapidly gathering over Germany.

It is at this point that Heinrich realized that his stepmother came from a Jewish family. Something happened which made it necessary for Mrs. Schneider to leave home in a hurry with Heinrich. They were stopped by the police (Gestapo) who demanded that Frau Schneider should show her papers. Whereupon they were asked to step to one side and wait. Heinrich Schneider dutifully followed his mother as usual completely unaware of the gravity of what was going on. They were then taken in a bus and transported on a journey which must have taken as much as three hours (*the recollection of time lapse by a 12 year-old kid, might not be entirely accurate*). But they ended up in a camp where there were many other people arriving from different destinations.

In a most dramatic moment when he was about to be taken away to his final destination by a German guard, the guard was challenged by a Swiss Chaplain who intervened saying, "can't you see that he is not a Jew?"

"How can you tell that he is not a Jew?" the German guard asked.

"Look at his nose!" replied the Swiss Chaplain.

The German guard drove the sharp end of his bayonet into the right heel of Heinrich Schneider, almost severing the tendon. As blood came gushing out, the German guard asked, "Can you tell the difference between this blood and that of a Jew?"

The poor kid fell down and screamed in pain. Mrs. Schneider who watched the scene broke into tears and was taken away. It was the last time that Heinrich Schneider ever saw his German mother. It is assumed that she was taken to another concentration camp where she died.

Heinrich Schneider was taken to the dispensary of the Nazi concentration camp and given first aid treatment. For many years thereafter Dr. Luma walked tiptoeing with the right foot. But the limp was to stay with him for the rest of his life.

Following the dramatic incident at the concentration camp, arrangements were made to take Heinrich Schneider to a place where he would be cared-for. That is how Heinrich Schneider found himself in a house which he remembers as "Carin Hall", the Berlin Residence of ReichsMarshall Herman Göering, the 2nd in Command to Adolf Hitler.

He remembers Herman Göering very well as a very jovial and somewhat rotund man who seemed to take a liking towards him. He was assigned living quarters somewhere in the back of the property where he spent most of the time alone except when he would be brought some meals or taken to the kitchen to do some household chores. He even learned how to drive. He remembers the German leader's wife very well. Her name was who had only one child, a girl, with her husband.

Heinrich Schneider remembers two incidents during which Adolf Hitler came visiting the Görings. On one occasion, Adolf Hitler wanted to know what the Görings were doing importing a black man from overseas as a "house pet", when they were trying to build an Aryan pure race in Germany. It is Mrs. Göering who laughed and told the Führer that if he wants to conquer the world, he must make friends everywhere, including Africa. The matter died there.

As the relationship between Heinrich Schneider and Herman Göering grew closer, he developed enough confidence in the kid to share an amazing secret with him. He entrusted a box of tablets with the kid with the instructions that whenever he was going out he would pass at Heinrich Schneider's living quarters and stick his head from across the window as if he was inspecting something inside the boy's room. The boy was instructed on such occasions to take out one of the tablets and place it inside his hair, at the top flat part of his head as close to the scalp as possible and then cover it back with his hair so that the tablet is invisible. DR. LUMA recalls that Herman Göering visited him on many occasions during the period of his stay at Carin Hall. And each time, he placed a tablet into the big man's hair before he went out. But he did not know what the use of these tablets was. (It is obvious to any student of the history of Nazi Germany that the tablets which Heinrich Schneider was placing in the hair of Herman Göering were cyanide capsules, which when placed on the tongue would kill in seconds).

Cyanide capsules were standard gear issued to Nazi leaders so that in the event of capture they could swallow the capsules and commit suicide without revealing any information.

Goering was born at Rosenheim and became one of Hitler's followers in the early 1920's. Elected to the Reichstag (German legislature) in 1928, he became its president. This enabled him to frustrate democratic procedures and help Hitler gain unlimited power in 1933. At the start of World War II, Hitler chose Goering as his chief aide. But Goering's influence declined when the air force failed to

subdue England or stop the invasion of the European continent or the bombing of Germany.

Goering loved extravagant entertainment, lavish uniforms, and unusual military decorations. But although he was jovial, he was ruthless with opponents and rivals. Goering was judged guilty of war crimes at Nuremberg. He defended himself ably before the International Military Tribunal at Nürnberg. He saw himself as the star defendant, a historical figure; he denied any complicity in the more hideous activities of the regime, which he claimed to be the secret work of Himmler. When after his condemnation his plea to be shot and not hanged was refused, he took poison and died in his cell at Nuremberg the night his execution was ordered. Only in 1967 was it revealed that he had left a note explaining that the poison capsule had been secreted all the while in a container of pomade.

Thanks to Dr. Luma who shared his secret for hiding his cyanide capsules, we now know how Herman Göering managed to smuggle the poison capsules to his prison cell in Nuremberg enabling him to commit suicide and cheat the hangman after he was convicted.

It is also while living in the household of Herman Göering that DR. LUMA met a man who finally took him back to his homeland in German Kamerun. The man's name was Theodor Bleich. Theodor Bleich was an Austrian who was very close to the Goerings. He was known officially as a translator because he could speak many languages. His translation job took him to places like New York, London, Paris and to many other parts of the world. But the interesting fact about Theodor Bleich is that he was an ace pilot because he flew everywhere he went. Dr. Luma believes that Theodor Bleich was certainly a German agent and probably a double agent working for the allies as well as the Germans.

Theodor Bleich had a very strange connection with German Kamerun, which eventually proved instrumental in paving the way for Heinrich Schneider to return to his native land. One of his business associates was a man named Gonzalez who was an employee of Elders & Fyfes. Mr. Gonzales borrowed money from Elders & Fyfes to buy a plantation in German Kamerun. But shortly after the transaction was concluded, Mr. Gonzales died leaving his young widow in a pile of debt. Whereupon the young widow requested Mr. Theodor Bleich to take over the management of the plantation so that the loan from Elders & Fyfes could be repaid.

That is how Theodor Bleich became a frequent visitor to German Kamerun in the late 1930s where he always came by plane. It is indeed for his preferred mode of transport that he became instrumental in the construction of the landing strip in Tiko which eventually became known as Tiko Airport. His plantation home was located on the hill above the Police College in Mutengene from where he could see his vast estate.

It is during his frequent visits to Kamerun that he came to know Dr. Luma's uncle who informed him that a young relative of the family was taken to Germany as a baby and must be around 12 years old. It immediately occurred to Theodor Bleich that the young boy in question might be the same one whom he had met in the home of Reichsmarshal Herman Goering. On his next visit to the Goering home he made enquiries on how the young man named Heinrich Schneider had come to live with them. It was not difficult for this German intelligence officer to make the necessary research to discover that Heinrich Schneider was in fact the young relative whom his friend in Buinga, Kamerun had mentioned.

The story of how Theodor Bleich finally brought back Heinrich Schneider to Kamerun in the middle of WWII is a thriller which only a film maker can do justice to. The trip back to Kamerun and the reunion with Mrs. Joana Epiti Ngeka, his grandmother is recounted in detail by DR. LUMA in this video documentary. This was done with the help of this German Gestapo Agent, with whom DR. LUMA maintained links long after the war.

This story was told to me in a videotaped documentary which presents a rare glimpse of life in Nazi Germany as seen through the eyes of a young black kid called Heinrich Schneider, later known as Martin Minyangadu Luma, later known as Martin Ngeka Luma. He grew up in Cameroon to become a Minister in the Government of President Ahmadou Ahidjo.

On the reintroduction of multiparty democracy in Cameroon he joined the Social Democratic Party (SDF), where for many years he occupied the position of 2nd Vice Chairman of the party. He later parted ways with the SDF because of the failure of the SDF to back the cause of the Anglophones in Cameroon. He became the Chairman of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), an organization which is now dedicated to the quest for independence for the English-speaking territory of the Southern Cameroons.

He died on April 13, 2003 at the *Clinique Muna* in Douala at the age of 75 of prostate cancer. He was buried in Tiko (Buinga) where it all began for him.

May his soul rest in peace!

By Prof. N.N Susungi

NB: The story of Dr. Martin Luma is an epic story of great historical significance because it turns out that he has the answers to a question which historians have asked for many years, namely, how Herman Goring managed to smuggle cyanide capsules into his prison cell and eventually cheat the hangman by committing suicide. Secondly his concentration camp experience as a young black kid, following his white step mother, who turned out to be a Jew, is one that is entirely unique, because it took place in Nazi Germany.

I believe that this story needs to be told on film by a skillful film-maker because it has potential to be as powerful as ***schindler's list***. Anyone who knows a film-maker who might be interested in this fascinating story should contact me at: nsusungi@yahoo.com