

## **Gottfried Müller**

### **10. April 1914**

Gottfried Johannes Müller was born in the small Swabian village Gschwend as the second oldest of three siblings. His father, Johannes Matthäus Müller, a skilled saddler, was the district male nurse and maintained a small, self-sufficient farm. His mother, Katharina Müller née Schurr, was a housewife.

### **1920 – 1926**

He attended the local school in Gschwend. His father returned home from World War I severely wounded.

### **1926 – 1929**

He was trained in the Kienzle grocery in Gschwend. He wanted to become a doctor but did not have the financial means to study medicine.

### **1930 – 1935**

During this period, Gottfried Müller worked in the sales department of the company Ploquet in Heidenheim/ Brenz and later in Vienna as a salesman of men's wear in Austria and Italy.

### **1935/36**

#### **First journey to the Orient**

With a bike, a friend and 60 German marks he travelled to the Orient by land and by sea, visiting Cairo and the Pyramids, JeruSALEM, Bethlehem, Bagdad and venturing into the hitherto secluded empire of the Kurds. His first book 'Breaking into Secluded Kurdistan', the travelogue of this first journey to the Orient, was published in 1937 by Philadelphia Reutlingen.

### **1937/38**

After returning from the Orient, Gottfried Müller had to do his military service. He was stationed in Ulm where, among other things, he was trained to ride horses and drive a coach. Eventually, his service ended and he left in the rank of Reserve Second Lieutenant.

### **1939/40**

During this time, he was a salesman in Vienna and a horseman in the traditional cavalry regiment "Hoch- und Deutschmeister". In the meantime, World War II broke out. He was drafted to serve in France. In 1940 his brother Christoph was killed in Russia by an exploding grenade.

### **1940 – 1942**

Stationed in Reichenbach/ Vogtland, he worked as an instructor for warfare in Russia, and later for the Stalingrad campaign. In between times, he was trained by the German Air Force.

### **1942 – 1948**

#### **'Operation Mammüt'**

## **Second journey to the orient**

During the war, he attempted to conquer oil fields for the German army with the help of the Kurds. His secret mission was betrayed. He and his Kurd friend Ramzie were taken prisoner by British and Iraqi forces – he was tortured and sentenced to death, but eventually escaped.

He described these events in his book 'In the Burning Orient' which was first published in 1959 – today the book is in its 3rd edition. The book was later translated into English, Arabic, Turkish and Kurdish.

He spent one year in the death cell where he he contemplated life and death. This was his inspiration to later found SALEM.

## **1948 – 1950**

After the war was over, he was transferred to the British internment camp Hamburg-Neuengamme in 1947 and later to Camp Augsburg. He was released in 1948 and in the same year marries his first wife Susanne Firgau who raised their son Amadé during the war. They then had a second son, named Alexander. During these years, he lived with his family in an attic flat in Backnang studying economics and working as an insurance agent.

## **1951 – 1954**

During this time, he worked for Siemens selling vacuum cleaners and together with his family he moved to Stuttgart. But he was not satisfied with his regular life and the relative prosperity it gave him. Often pictures of his imprisonment and escape, the death cell and his rescue, came to mind. Since being imprisoned he had vowed to be a vegetarian and non-smoker. Moreover, he had then made God the promise: 'If I get out of here, I want to serve You and help the poor'.

## **1955 – 1957**

He became more distanced from the idea of making money. He contacted Abram Poljak, a Messianic Jew. The reconciliation between Christians and Jews meant a lot to him. During these years, he organised a number of lectures with Abram Poljak in Germany, Switzerland, England, Sweden, Denmark and Finland.

At this time, he gave everything he possessed to two old and disabled Jewish women who were in need. His marriage had begun to suffer from his continued social commitment and both he and his wife separated, eventually divorcing in the 1960s.

## **1957**

In this year he had an incisive experience: in Stuttgart he overheard homeless people saying that nobody would take care of them. When he asked them why they weren't working, they answered 'Because we are homeless, nobody gives us a job. If we had a home we would get a job'. So he promised he would help.

## **16. September 1957**

Together with friends, he founded the Brotherhood SALEM as a registered

association in Stuttgart-Leonberg, Germany.

An SOS-SALEM emergency service was opened in the red-light district of Stuttgart, near the Leonhard church. There, the homeless and jobless, ex-convicts and prostitutes could find shelter, a hot meal and help.

## **1958**

The Old Town Theatre was founded and built with the Gottfried Müller's help and under the direction of Klaus and Elisabeth Heydenreich. The theatre still exists today and carries on under the same name by Susanne Heydenreich, daughter of Klaus and Elisabeth.

The original theatre building later burnt down and the theatre was transferred to the subway passage at Charlottenplatz with the help of the City of Stuttgart.

## **1958/59**

In a time of challenges and defamations SALEM received valuable help from senior nurse Lotte Rokitta, a Protestant sister experienced in dealing with homeless people.

She took on the responsibility of running the homeless shelter in Stuttgart, enabling Gottfried Müller to fulfill his vision. New homeless shelters were created in Berlin, Nürnberg, München, Karlsruhe and Frankfurt.

## **1960**

The purchase of the Castle Solms in Baden-Baden – supposed to become a 'House of the Nations', a meeting place where people could learn to understand each other. However, some of his colleagues had political rather than social work in mind and instituted proceedings against him at the public prosecutor's office Stuttgart, for allegedly embezzling donations.

## **1960 – 1963**

These years were marked by accusations and libels. Gottfried Müller was arrested and imprisoned together with two street robbers. Documents were confiscated so that SALEM was no longer able to collect donations and faced complete financial ruin. Gottfried Müller was on the verge of a break down and had to see a psychologist to obtain an expert opinion. Several trials were held at the district court in Stuttgart. He won but only shortly after, the public prosecutor's office in Stuttgart raised an objection which resulted in a retrial at the Federal Court of Justice.

## **1964**

In the trial at the Federal Court of Justice in Karlsruhe, the prosecutor declared: 'I cannot lay any blame on this man'. Gottfried Müller and SALEM were found not guilty. It was the 7th of July 1964 – the day of Abram Poljak's funeral in Möttlingen.

## **1964 – 1966**

At this time, he was keen to know why so many ex-convicts re-offended. He asked many of them and they told him 'We didn't have a happy childhood, no happy home'.

Realising that he had to tackle the problem at its root, he started the first

SALEM children's homes in Neukeferloh, Starnberg, Wartaweil, Pasing, Königsdorf, Fürth in Bavaria, Postbauer near Nürnberg and Königshofen, travelling between the towns.

## **1966 – 1968**

To facilitate the coordination of the SALEM work all over Germany, SALEM established its headquarters in Munich. In 1968 the Brotherhood SALEM was transformed into a non-profit limited company to meet the requirements of the growing SALEM vision.

## **1969**

All the individual SALEM children's homes were moved to Stadtsteinach/ Bavaria in the Franconian Forest. Here SALEM bought land and a couple of empty buildings from the German postal service. He was now able to realise the idea of a SALEM children's village.

## **1973**

He married Ursula Schweizer from Backnang who had been working for SALEM as a children's nurse since 1963. They later had two sons, Samuel and Nathan.

Among his primary concerns were his travels to Africa, to countries like Uganda, Somalia, Namibia and Togo where he began children's villages and other projects. The USA, Colombia, the better part of Europe, Taiwan and Russia were also on his travel schedule. His last journeys led him to Togo/ West Africa, at the age of 84, and to Königsberg in Russia, then 89 years old.

In 1995, his son Samuel started working for SALEM and in 1998 he became the Managing Director. His aim is to run SALEM according to his father's ideas. Ursula Müller as well as many longterm employees, donors and supporters remain true to SALEM to the present day.

## **1969 – 2006**

During these years, Gottfried Müller was involved in many countries of the world, with Stadtsteinach at the centre of his activities. Every day he dealt with a huge amount of correspondence and travelled to spread SALEM's idea of peace. He journeyed several times to Israel, endeavouring to create the Orr Shalom children's homes for Jewish and Arabic children.

## **26. September 2009**

Gottfried Müller died after a long and fulfilled life in the bosom of his family, at the age of 95 years.