

# The Birmingham Eccentric

habit between both sexes. Adjustments, however, should be made in the technique—for example: it was much easier to hold a girl's hand while sitting on a front porch than in a fast-moving motor car.

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Street improvements, curbing, sewers, and park landscaping demand immediate attention. The rapid growth of our Town will complicate existing problems and will create new and equally serious ones.

Members of the Birmingham City Commission, as our representatives, face serious decisions. Unless a candidate for the Commission has the foresight, and vision to plan for what is ahead, he cannot be of value to the continued growth of the City. SOUND, MATURE JUDGMENT IS REQUIRED.

We believe CHAD M. RITCHIE is best prepared . . . has the foresight and vision . . . and at the same time knows the value of a dollar. We believe he is the man to represent us on the City Commission.

**VOTE FOR RITCHIE FOR THE CITY COMMISSION**  
APRIL 3, 1950

"This advertisement paid for by Men who Know Chad Ritchie is the Best-Qualified Candidate for Office."

**1,000 New Refugees Each Night**

**Germany Has Six Million New Residents -- Escapees from Behind Iron Curtain**

By Robert Ball  
Special Correspondent for The Eccentric

STUTTGART, Germany—Since the end of the war, the population of West Germany has risen from 42 million to 48 million. These six million new inhabitants are the refugees from the East—Silesians and Saxons from East Germany, Sudeten Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, even Russians—all of them Twentieth Century Israelites, seeking a Promised Land in the West.

Every night nearly a thousand cross the barbed-wire frontier where East meets West, most of them with nothing but the clothes on their backs and the tattered snapshots of farmhouses and old touring cars with wire wheels. As if every night a whole village moved out of the East.

No one denies that there are many of them who are of the sort of hard-working, hopeful people and land would be glad to have as citizens.

Yet at the same time, it means six million more job hunters where there aren't enough jobs, six million more house hunters where people are living in bomb shelters, six million more mouths in a country that can't feed itself.

Josef Ritter's story is typical of many of these refugees. It is a story of a family, a government, and a tractor.

Ritter, his wife and son are Hungarians of German ancestry, from the village of Batosok, a hundred miles from Budapest. There Ritter worked as a plumber.

Prospering somewhat, he bought a Ford tractor, one of the first in Hungary, and after rigging it to drive a portable saw, he built up a business cutting wood for the whole village.

**Had to Sell His Tractor**

At this point the postwar Hungarian Communist government came on the scene. One day the government notified Ritter that he must sell his tractor for use on a new collective farm. Ritter refused; his Ford was precious to him.

The government insisted, as governments will. It announced that police would be sent for the tractor, whether Ritter liked it or not. However, when the police arrived they found that the tractor's ignition system had disappeared.

Ritter had decided that if he couldn't keep his Ford, no one else was going to have it. Unable to take the tractor, the police took Ritter.

For three months he was in a camp for "uncooperative persons." Then he escaped and joined his wife and son at his brother's house.

They had been arrested too when the police came with a truck to fetch the crippled tractor, but had escaped by jumping out a window into a garden.



**JOSEF RITTER**

building in Stuttgart. The Ritters got a release from camp and moved to America.

For two years they lived underground, but in every spare hour they collected bricks and building materials from the neighboring rubble.

Evenings, Sundays and holidays father and son worked on the new home, sometimes with the help of other refugees.

Last spring the Ritters could move triumphantly back up into the sun. Against one still pompous wall of the Brown House stood a new, little house—small, low-roofed, but solidly built, with plumbing and electric lights.

There were four rooms for the four Ritters, because they were four now. The son had a German bride.

It was impressive to look around the little house. There was a metal cabinet that had held Nazi documents, a desk at which some SS Gruppenfuhrer had sat, both salvaged and patched.

**Spotlessly Clean**

There was a new bed, bought with savings. Mrs. Ritter complained in housewifely anxiety that the place was simply a mess, but in reality everything shined spotlessly clean. Outside was a little vegetable garden that supplied the kitchen.

Ritter exuded some honest pride. Four years ago they had arrived with nothing, now they had home and furniture and they were making a living. This they had done themselves.

I asked about the future. Ritter shook his head.

"We can't stay here forever," he said. "There are too many people in Germany now. But where can we go? Some of my friends are already slipping back to Hungary."

At Christmas time many went back. So far as we've heard nothing has happened to them, but I won't go back myself until the government changes. I would like to go back some day.

"The way I see it, I was never thrown out of Hungary—I left

by my own choice and I have the right to go back. We have thought of coming to America."

Cousins in Milwaukee

"We have cousins who live in Milwaukee. We wrote to them a while ago, but they never answered. I think the address I used must have been wrong."

"The worst is not being able to plan anything," he said, angrily. "Should we buy furniture, start a family? Should I get a loan to start the electrical business I want? Or should we be ready to leave at a moment's notice."

"The other day the woman was here who owned this land before the Nazis confiscated it. She's trying to prove her title to it, and if she can, she wants to sell it. If she does, we'll have to leave."

He looked out at the garden.

"Then where will we go? We don't know."

"We just live from one day to the next," said Josef Ritter, shaking his head. "From one day to the next."

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