



SEEDS FOR CHANGE

THE LIVES AND WORK OF
SURI AND EDDA SEHGAL

MARLY CORNELL



SEHGAL
FOUNDATION

Des Moines, Iowa

Contents

Foreword	<i>by Kenneth M. Quinn</i>	xiii	
Introduction		xv	
1.	Five Waters	1	
2.	Lalamusa Junction	18	
3.	The Midnight Hour	30	
4.	Blood on the Tracks	43	
5.	Miracles	53	
6.	Doors Open	63	
7.	Uprooted	76	
8.	Apples and Potatoes	93	
9.	Small Gardens and Big Ideas	113	
10.	Exotics	122	
11.	Land of Wood and Water	135	
12.	All Is Forgiven	152	
13.	Going International	162	
14.	Edda's Mastery	177	
15.	Karma	189	
16.	Sweet Poison	201	
17.	Global Initiatives	215	
18.	Giving Back	232	
19.	Assuring Sustainability	252	
20.	Blessings	262	
	Epilogue	269	
	Afterword	<i>by Peter H. Raven</i>	271
	Sehgal Foundation Information	273	
	Acknowledgments	275	
	About the Author	277	

Foreword

Seeds for Change: The Life Work of Suri and Edda Sehgal is an inspiring addition to an already remarkable Iowa-India agricultural and humanitarian heritage that includes Professor George Washington Carver providing nutritional advice to Mahatma Gandhi during India's quest for independence, and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Dr. Norman Borlaug bringing "miracle wheat" to India to inaugurate the Green Revolution and save millions from starvation.

Beyond its historical context, this volume is a stirring, only-in-America tale of two individuals who struggled as refugees in their home countries—one in Asia and the other in Europe—then came to the US and not only fell in love with each other but, improbably and highly appropriately, with the state of Iowa, a place with an international reputation for welcoming refugees and feeding the world.

Suri and Edda were married in Des Moines, raised their family in Urbandale, and, along the way, made contributions to a great scientific and humanitarian legacy around the globe. Inspired by Gandhi as a young boy, Suri became an admirer of legendary Iowa hybrid corn breeder and US Vice President Henry A. Wallace, who, in turn, had been mentored by Professor Carver. Wallace founded the company that became Pioneer Hi-Bred International, where Suri spent decades building its acclaimed global research and production network.

Suri had a fascinating connection to Dr. Borlaug as well, in that both of them were assisted during the early stages of their careers by a Rockefeller Foundation grant that involved Harvard Professor Paul Mangelsdorf. It was Mangelsdorf who facilitated Borlaug's initial work in Mexico, and encouraged Suri to apply to Harvard where he earned his PhD. It was in Cambridge that Suri began dating Edda, an au pair living with the family of a political science professor at Harvard named Henry Kissinger, on whose staff I later served at the White House.

While Marly Cornell's book richly details Suri and Edda's odyssey, my own introduction to the full impact of Suri and Edda's work and the Sehgal family's legacy came only in 2010 during my initial trip to

India. While there, I learned that Suri is revered as an iconic figure in Indian agriculture, both for the extremely significant contribution that he personally made to the development of the country's seed and agribusiness industry, as well as for the most impressive programs that the Sehgal Foundation is so commendably implementing in villages in the Mewat region, one of the poorest areas of India.

My wife Le Son and I were received with extraordinary courtesy and hospitality during our visit to the headquarters of the Sehgal Foundation development organization outside of Delhi, to learn first-hand about the steps Suri and Edda are taking to address this very difficult but critically important challenge to alleviate poverty. We are thrilled that, as a result of that visit, each summer an Iowa high school student spends eight weeks working at the Sehgal Foundation as a World Food Prize Borlaug-Ruan intern, further enhancing the Iowa-India connection.

We were also greatly impressed by the magnificently energy-efficient building that the Sehgal Foundation constructed as the headquarters for its operations in India, which had attained LEED Platinum certification. Suri and Edda's commitment to sustainability impelled me to redouble my own efforts to reach that same highest possible level of energy efficiency for our World Food Prize Hall of Laureates building in Des Moines, Iowa. With my desire to emulate their example and the Sehgal Family Foundation's generous support, we too succeeded in reaching this goal.

In looking back at the end of this volume, an aspect of Suri's and Edda's lives that has particular resonance for me is how, not unlike my own family, they always seem to find themselves caught up in some of the worst natural and man-made disasters: the Nazi depredations during World War II, the Partition of India, political revolution in the Dominican Republic, and an earthquake in Japan. At home on the Iowa prairie or in the Punjab, the Sehgals have always persevered. Whatever the obstacle, through dedication, diligence, and sheer determination, they have brought great success to everything they undertook and, as it is clear, shared their blessings widely with others.

Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn, president
The World Food Prize Foundation
Des Moines, Iowa

Introduction

International entrepreneur, humanitarian, and philanthropist Dr. Surinder (Suri) Sehgal is a principal elder among a distinguished lineage of experts in world agriculture,¹ who became over the course of his career one of the primary players in the development and worldwide dissemination of high-quality hybrid seed—earning a rightful place alongside eminent crop scientists, seedsmen, and agricultural visionaries Henry A. Wallace, Paul Mangelsdorf, and William Lacey Brown. How Suri became a respected and pivotal figure in the development of the global hybrid-seed industry and, in partnership with his wife Edda, how they used their combined skills and good fortune to make a positive difference in the lives of many of the poorest people in the world can best be understood by taking a brief glimpse back in time.

Suri was born in 1934 in the old Punjab, which was then northwest India under the British Raj and is now Pakistan. He was the second son and fifth of eight children of a Sikh mother and a Hindu father in a land-rich but, by then, cash-poor family. The Partition of India in 1947, dividing British India into Pakistan and India, brought sudden outbreaks of violence in Punjab, Bengal, and elsewhere in the country, shattering Suri's idyllic childhood.

When Muslims began attacking and killing Hindus and Sikhs, Suri's father's effort to send three of his daughters to the relative safety of India resulted in a desperate measure—he pushed thirteen-year-old Suri onto a refugee train to escort and protect a younger sister who had become separated from the others in the commotion. Wearing only a shirt and shorts, and sandals that he would lose along the way, Suri spent the next two months helping his sisters reach a family friend, then going in search of his uncle, armed only with the knowledge that his uncle worked "somewhere near Delhi."

1. *Maize Genetics and Breeding in the 20th Century*, ed. Peter Peterson and Angelo Bianchi, World Scientific Publishing Company, 1999.

Homeless and penniless in Delhi, Suri ate whatever scraps he could find in refugee camps and slept in empty train cars. He witnessed the same horrific violence and brutality he saw before leaving home, but now it was Sikhs and Hindus carrying out revenge killings against Muslims. He sought comfort at the public prayer grounds, listening to Mahatma Gandhi speak of peace and address the hatred that was ripping apart India. Suri found inspiration in a stirring speech by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru about the need for harmony among India's different peoples. The roots of Suri's lifelong commitment to make a difference in the world were deeply implanted during this period.

Once his family reunited in Amritsar, India, in severely reduced circumstances, Suri completed high school and college (studying biology with a major in cytogenetics) and formulated a plan to attend graduate school in the US. Suri wrote to Harvard professor and renowned evolutionary biologist Paul C. Mangelsdorf, a giant in the field of genetics and an expert in the origin and evolution of maize. Mangelsdorf answered with an invitation for Suri to apply for graduate work at Harvard University.

While at Harvard, a series of serendipitous encounters and collaborations brought Suri together with other great thinkers, scientists, and visionaries of the day and gave him the opportunity to take the first step in forging a career that would eventually span the globe. Suri thrived in the collegial atmosphere of intelligence and high spirits where everyone studied and worked hard.

Suri's life changed forever when friends introduced him to a recent arrival to the US, a beautiful young German woman who was learning English and living as an au pair in the home of Harvard professor Henry Kissinger and his wife Ann. Edda Jeglinsky came from a background as turbulent as Suri's. As a small child she had been evacuated with her family from German Silesia in January 1945, just ahead of the onslaught of the Soviet army. Her family's escape from danger eerily paralleled Suri's. They were both children of displaced cultures, whose elders had lost their deep roots in ancient ways of life. Together in the US, Suri and Edda not only found each other but also an altogether new and different world where their destiny would result in the fulfillment

of their version of the American Dream and helping others fulfill their dreams.

Suri and Edda raised four children and made it possible for other relatives to immigrate to and/or study in the US and abroad. They continue to make profound differences in many lives, not only within their families and the rings upon rings of others radiating out from them, but also with many in the international community who have been helped through their philanthropic organization in India and in the US, the Sehgal Foundation.

The Midnight Hour

Freedom was in the air. There was plenty to feel good about. India's independence was within sight. However, not all leaders in the All India Congress Committee had the same goal. In August 1946 the head of the Muslim League, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, with the support of a majority of Indian Muslims, publicly demanded the partition of India and the formation of Muslim majority areas into a homeland to be called Pakistan.

Just before starting eighth grade that fall, Suri organized a soccer team of his friends, including Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. The players got along well despite the growing friction elsewhere in the Punjab, which they were hearing about with greater regularity. Though most people who lived in the villages near Lalamusa during this period remembered that time as free from interpersonal or religious conflict, violence was gathering in cities far away.

By January 1947 occasional outbreaks of hostility occurred in some parts of the city of Lahore. An intermittent sense of urgency was looming. Suri's maternal grandparents decided to leave the Punjab for an extended visit with their son, Gurdit Singh, whose job had just been transferred from Lahore to a town near Delhi. Shila's parents planned only to take a break from the tension, which they fully expected would be temporary.

The month of February brought the exciting birth of Shahji and Shila's first grandchild. Suri was now an uncle. Savitri and Brij Anand

had a baby girl they named Ranjana. Their little family lived 2.4 kilometers away in downtown Lalamusa.

While the Sehgal family was enjoying the newest member of the family, the movement toward independence suddenly accelerated. The British Labor government announced the decision to officially end British rule in India by 1948. British Lord Louis Mountbatten was appointed viceroy in March 1947 to broker the independence process. At the same time, riots had slowly spread to other cities in the Punjab, including the Rawalpindi district in the far north. By the time Suri finished eighth grade, the Partition saga had intensified dramatically, and the (now) thirteen-year-old was immersed in a dangerous and brutal chapter of history that was about to play out, literally before his eyes.

In June 1947 Lord Mountbatten announced the Indian Independence Act. The British viceroy's plan included moving up the date of secession of the Indian Union from the British Commonwealth to August, only two months away, and designating the creation of two new independent dominions, Pakistan and India, and defining the partition of the provinces of Bengal and Punjab, with exact boundaries "to be determined."

The Punjab would be partitioned between the two free nations, one Muslim and one Hindu and Sikh. The dividing line would separate the West Punjab in Pakistan from East Punjab in India. Nehru and Gandhiji had worked tirelessly to keep India united; but in the end, Nehru agreed to the partition in spite of Gandhiji's protests.

The difficult agreement would leave large pockets of Sikhs and Hindus in the predominantly Muslim Pakistan. The same was true in reverse for parts of India that were predominantly Hindu with large pockets of Muslims. However, despite the disparities, there was no apparent expectation of trouble with the transfer of power from Britain to the new governing bodies of each of the newly liberated countries. Pakistan was to come into being on August 14, and the "new" India would be free at the stroke of midnight on August 15.

Many of the Hindus and Sikhs, including the Sehgals, in the western area of the Punjab that would be in Pakistan accepted the new reality without too much concern. Though outbursts of Hindu-Muslim

violence were increasingly common throughout the rest of the country, citizens in the Punjab had long prided themselves on living in peace despite religious differences. Even the sporadic attacks on Hindus and Sikhs were mostly looked upon as merely one more isolated riot.

In celebration and preparation for the coming independence, the freedom movement, which still included Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims working together, began having public meetings in the Lalamusa town square. But by July, violence had spread closer to home, in Lahore and Amritsar.

People in Lalamusa were aware of disturbances elsewhere, but their town had remained relatively calm. Few people were concerned to the point that they considered relocation. The Sehgal family had many close Muslim friends and neighbors. Shahji felt confident that his family was not in any real danger.

The monsoon was late that year, no rains yet, and the temperatures were soaring to 43°C (110°F) during the day. A few days before August 14, “freedom day,” as the end of Ramadan was nearing, some Hindus and Sikhs were wounded in a neighboring village and brought to the medical dispensary near the Lalamusa police station across the street from the Sehgal family house.

Suri and Shahji were two of only six or seven people there to help the injured, doing whatever they could with medical supplies and bandages. Young Suri was shocked to see so much bleeding and so much suffering in this one small place. He looked to his father and followed his example, doing quickly whatever anyone asked him to do amid the chaos and cries of pain—one thing after the other—lifting or holding people still. The Muslim doctor was trying to treat each of the wounded people, some of whom had missing limbs. Blood was everywhere. A few of the injured did not survive. This was Suri’s first glimpse of dead people.

Feeling scared and wondering what was going on as he watched the doctor work, the boy smelled danger, not knowing what else might happen. But once Suri and his father had done all they could do to help that day, Shahji dismissed the dreadful incident as an unfortunate isolated event. The elder Sehgal could not imagine anything getting in the way of the exciting changes to come with their country’s freedom, only days away.

Early on the morning of August 14, 1947, the local freedom fighters held a flag hoisting at the railway station in Lalamusa. The atmosphere was festive. The British Union Jack was brought down, and the new flag of Pakistan was raised. Suri and his family and their friends celebrated enthusiastically. Shahji had been invited to speak with other dignitaries at the ceremony. Hindu and Muslim leaders preached the message of communal peace and unity. Idealism was sincerely reflected in the happy crowd as Shahji spoke that morning.

The family returned home from the flag-raising celebration in a cheerful mood. One of Suri's uncles, Surinder Singh Lamba (married to Shila's younger sister, Kuldip Kaur), was staying nearby. He joined the family for a hearty lunch followed by a card game, a family tradition on holidays. Card games were a regular pastime in a room near the top of the stairs.

Suri's father and uncle, along with eighteen-year-old Gurbaksh Singh (pronounced Ger-bucksh Sing), the son of a Sikh priest from the gurdwara next door, recruited Suri to be the fourth in a card game of sweep. Suri, even at thirteen, was already recognized as a competent sweep player. Gurbaksh Singh was a promising young man the Sehgal's had helped by financing his high school education in Lalamusa. His father, as a priest, had no resources to send Gurbaksh to school, and the priest's family was very grateful.

The four enjoyed one another's company and engaged in a spirited card game that afternoon. But late in the day, someone outside yelled that smoke was rising near the edge of downtown. Everyone dropped his cards, and the family went up to the roof to see what they could. The gurdwara near Suri's high school had been torched.

The family's first concern was for the safety of a Sikh priest and his family who lived in the gurdwara compound. They worried as well for Suri's sister Savitri, her husband Brij Anand, and their six-month-old daughter, who lived only a short distance from the gurdwara in the center of downtown. The Sehgal's and their visitors kept a tense vigil on the rooftop until nightfall. They could hear the commotion as people shouted and shops were looted. There was no way of knowing if their friends and family were safe. And no helpful news was to come that evening.

Everyone was scared. The Hindu police sub-inspector, a trusted acquaintance, came to the house. He said he expected trouble and feared that he could not defend his community against an attack. He had only a dozen policemen. Eleven were Muslim; one was Sikh. The sub-inspector invited the Sehgal family to spend the night inside the police station grounds.

On this same evening, about 600 kilometers away in New Delhi, at one hour before midnight, Jawaharlal Nehru gave his first speech in the Constituent Assembly in his new role as the prime minister of the new India, in honor of the attainment of India's independence. His historic speech began, "At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment, we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity."¹²

His moving speech went on, promoting peace and celebrating freedom. His words were met with continuing cheers from the surrounding crowd. Mahatma Gandhi was not present at the huge celebration. Strongly opposed from the beginning to any partition of India, he had begun a fast in an effort to curb the escalating violence and promote religious harmony.

Back in Lalamusa, the sub-inspector, his son, and the Sikh police officer stayed on guard throughout the night to defend the police station. The turmoil in the city went on the entire night. The sounds of continuing upheaval could be heard in the distance. The Sehgal family stayed inside the police station, but no one slept that night.

Early the next day, Shahji left to see what he could find out about what had happened. From someone who had run away from the violence, he learned that the downtown Sikh priest and his family had

12. "A Tryst With Destiny" speech by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was delivered to the Constituent Assembly of India in New Delhi on August 14, 1947. *The Guardian: Great Speeches of the 20th Century*. <http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2007/may/01/greatspeeches>.

been killed by “criminal Muslim elements” who initiated the upheaval. Shock had reverberated through the center of town as Hindus and Sikhs sought refuge. Townspeople fled their homes, taking only cash or gold, trying to find safety in the larger houses or in the Hindu temple.

The Sehgal family returned to their rooftop perch and continued to watch what was going on in the distance along with several friends and neighbors. Fear mounted as they saw a huge crowd assembling at the far southwest end of the empty field in front of their house. Suddenly, hundreds of Muslims carrying spears, swords, and daggers began screaming and running toward the Sehgal family house.

The Muslim policemen fired only into the air, unwilling to shoot at other Muslims. The Sikh policeman, the sub-inspector, and his son were the only ones prepared to defend the police station. Their fear rising, the Sehgal family members raced through their home, gathering kerosene, oil, acid, and whatever defensive weapons they could find. They didn't know what else to do. They had no guns, nothing to defend themselves from an angry mob.

If the violent mob had attacked, there would likely have been a massive slaughter. But the horde rushed past, in the direction of the city. From their rooftop perch, the Sehgal family's terror shifted again to fear for the safety of Savitri, Brij Anand, and the baby.

The mob began running faster toward the city, shouting “*Allahu Akbar!*” (God is great!) At that moment, a military convoy arrived, apparently responding to a call from the Lalamusa police sub-inspector to the military station in Kharian, thirteen kilometers away. The police station was the only place in town with a telephone, other than the post office. As the convoy arrived, they saw the screaming throng, quickly stopped in front of the police station, and took defensive action.

The soldiers were mostly Hindu, but the officer in charge was British. He spoke only in English, shouting orders to his men. Soldiers entered the Sehgal home, raced up the stairs to the flat roof, and set up their machine guns. Some found other high points in town. Immediately positioned and clearly intent on defending the town, the soldiers began firing on the mob.

Suri stood to the left of the British commander on the Sehgal rooftop. The officer allowed the boy to stay close to him, watching what was happening as he fired down on the throng. People were hit by the

bullets, and Suri saw them fall, some injured, some probably dead. The mob had not expected guns. Right away, the crowd started to retreat, dragging away their fallen comrades. The city of Lalamusa was saved from further slaughter.

The panic continued that night, even though the threat from the mob had faded. The family continued to worry about the welfare of Savitri and her family and other friends and relatives in the city.

But by the next day, August 16, people from the center of town, including Savitri, Brij Anand, and their infant, had come toward the police station and the street where the Sehgal's lived. The family felt great relief in the midst of a growing sense of unease.

This day, the last day of Ramadan in 1947, was when the exact boundaries of the Partition were finally announced. The news angered various factions throughout the Punjab, Bengal, and elsewhere in the country. Many were not satisfied with the way their communities were being divided. Fear and violence skyrocketed everywhere in the region.

The immediate result was the start of what would quickly become a mass exodus in both directions. Hindus and Sikhs in the new Pakistan began moving toward the new India. Muslims in India headed to Pakistan.

In Lalamusa, the British commander, who had successfully defended the town, now declared the entire area from the police station to the railway station as a refugee camp. His soldiers erected a barbed-wire fence encompassing the area, about 250-by-500 meters, that stretched a little beyond the police station and included the temple, the Sehgal home, the gurdwara next door, a farmhouse, the primary school for girls, and the medical dispensary. People were told to stay inside the camp for their safety. A curfew was imposed. Soldiers were posted at the perimeters as guards.

The oppressive summer heat was almost unbearable. People bedded down in the open within the camp, sleeping wherever they could find space. The military patrolled the camp at night.

The Sehgal homestead was at the very center of the refugee camp, so the family felt lucky to be able to remain in their own house. They offered their hospitality graciously to everyone who came. Friends, relatives, and strangers sought shelter with them. Shahji and Shila extended

the loyalty and generosity that Punjabis were known for. Each guest was an honored guest and treated warmly with all the courtesies.

One young woman in her late twenties, Mrs. Punjab Singh, ended up staying in the Sehgal home longer than expected and became a good friend amidst the turmoil. Her husband was a military officer posted in Meerut, near Delhi, in India. Military families didn't have much money, and she was anxiously awaiting the opportunity to leave the safety of the enclave. She planned to join her husband as soon as space in a refugee train heading for India was available. This contact would become a lifeline for the family before long.

The palpable panic and terror of the first couple of days, the violent mob and the creation of the camp, was replaced by constant busyness in the Sehgal household. Everyone in the family had to help out. Suri had ongoing chores to assist with dozens of people staying with them. There were cots to set up, meals to serve, and continual cleanup after so many guests. Wounded people were brought to the camp on a regular basis, and Suri helped in any way he could. Now under the protection of the military, a certain curious excitement accompanied the young boy's apprehension in this new routine.

Specially designated trains began to take Hindu and Sikh refugees to India and to bring Muslim refugees from India to Pakistan. Each refugee train reserved one compartment at the tail end for the army personnel. All refugee trains were escorted by the military, Muslim soldiers usually, if the train was coming from India; Hindu or Sikh soldiers, if the train was headed to India. However, this only meant eight to ten soldiers with guns, at most.

The trains passed through the Lalamusa station, but arrival and departure times were completely erratic because of the violence occurring throughout the region. The uncertainty added to the tension. The trains originated in Peshawar or Rawalpindi on their way to Lahore. After that, the trains headed east to India. All along the route the trains traveled through hostile territory; many were attacked before reaching Lalamusa.

Sometimes the trains arrived at their destinations full of dead and injured people. The casualties were taken off. The sweltering heat meant that dead bodies had to be left behind along the railroad tracks, where

they rotted and were eaten by vultures. There was no other way. The trains were packed, with people literally sitting on top of each other and more sitting on the roofs of the train cars. Everyone was trying to flee the violence pressing down upon them. Trains in both directions were crammed with scared, tired people.

Those in the camp tried to leave when news reached them that a refugee train might stop in Lalamusa. There were frequent disappointments, however. As trains arrived, there was usually not enough room even after the dead bodies were taken off. People were desperate, even frantic. They piled into and on top of every train that stopped. Throughout the refugee camp, people pleaded for the chance to get on trains headed for India. Hundreds of people came to and went from the Sehgal home over the next few weeks as the horrors multiplied.

In areas without railway stations, departing Hindus and Sikhs formed caravans. Slowly and collectively, the convoys headed toward India from small villages throughout the Punjab. Many traveled on foot with as much as they could carry on their heads or in carts pulled by pairs of oxen. Belongings were piled high in every cart, with cattle driven alongside.

Stories came back to the camp about great carnage and violence on both sides of the new border between India and Pakistan. Bitterness was overflowing, and brutalities worsened. Muslims suffered at the hands of angry Sikhs and Hindus in India, just as Hindus and Sikhs were suffering at the hands of angry Muslims in Pakistan. The rioting continued for weeks as Hindus and Sikhs left West Punjab and Muslims left East Punjab. The violence stoked greater levels of vengeance and retaliation in each community. Hundreds of thousands of people on both sides of the border were butchered. This mass migration by so many had never occurred before in human history and remains unparalleled. The true extent would not really be known for many years after the fact. Somewhere between twelve and twenty million refugees were dislocated, and more than a million were killed.

Gandhiji, Nehru, and their Congress Party tried to stop the violence and promote peaceful coexistence, but the success of their efforts was minimal against this level of atrocity. Those at all points on the political spectrum were shocked and overwhelmed by the depths of the ghastly crisis.

The town of Lalamusa and the refugee camp were rapidly emptying. Anyone who could leave was doing so, despite the risk, by train, truck, bus, or bullock cart.

But in the face of all that was going on throughout the country, and the violent behavior surrounding them, Shahji remained reluctant to leave, even after several weeks. More than a few of the family's Muslim friends came to the house, urging Shahji to stay.

A staunch supporter of the Congress and a sincere believer in secular traditions and community spirit, Shahji held out hope that things still might improve. He worried that, as district president of the Congress Party, his departure might give the impression that he, too, was running away, or that there was no longer any reason for others to hope. He did not want to abandon the people in the camp. He would only agree to move if all the other people moved, too. In addition, the loss of their house in Lalamusa and all their other homes and properties in the surrounding villages, and in Guliana, would be substantial.

But as the trains came and went across the border, the sights of bloodied and dismembered victims stirred up the local people on each side to greater anger. Resentment and animosity festered as the situation deteriorated and violence worsened every day. Movement of any kind became very limited. Killings were reported on the outskirts of the refugee camp every day. Non-Muslims who dared to step outside the fenced area risked death, and those who left were not heard from again. Angry Muslims now sometimes lurked beyond the safety of the camp and carried daggers with poison on the curved tips. Because it was difficult to tell a Punjabi Hindu from a Punjabi Muslim (the two groups had no obvious physical differences), the men with daggers confronted those they encountered outside the refugee camp by drawing their blades and asking the men to recite a verse from the Koran. Others were forced to pull down their pants to show whether they were circumcised and therefore Muslim, and not in danger.

Known Muslim friends came and went, able to leave and return safely. Most visited for business reasons. The only Muslims who actually lived inside the refugee camp were the blacksmith and his son.

As long as the Hindu or Sikh military provided protection, there was no serious problem. But the military kept changing. There was always the chance that hostile Muslim soldiers would come.

Savitri's husband Brij Anand had a job in the military, and he felt confident that he could obtain some sort of vehicle to arrange transportation for the family. Savitri and the baby stayed with her parents when he left the camp to get help. He had no idea that it would be impossible for him to return for his wife and child.

The determining fear was obvious. Everyone was afraid for their own lives to one extent or another. But most important, families wanted to save their sisters and daughters from rape and abduction. Many girls and young women had disappeared throughout the region. Stories had come back that some Hindu and Sikh women jumped into wells, preferring suicide to that fate. Knowing it was very risky for his daughters to stay in their home, Shahji decided one day in September that the girls had to leave immediately, by whatever means possible.

Suri witnessed part of a conversation his father had with some men in the room near the stairs where the family usually played cards. A few Muslim men sat around the card table, discussing the possible purchase of some Sehgal properties. Shahji told them he was willing to sell the house and farm at any price, that he desperately needed cash for his children's travel. Suri recognized the sense of urgency and was alarmed by the look of desperation he saw on his father's face. Unfortunately, no deal occurred that day.

Late one evening only days later, Shahji learned from a Muslim friend who worked for the railway that a refugee train was expected to arrive from Rawalpindi early the next morning. It would be stopping only briefly in Lalamusa before heading toward India.

The elder Sehgal decided that four of his children would be on that train. Kedar, now twenty-five, had come home when the trouble reached Lahore. Shahji planned for Kedar to accompany his three sisters—Shakuntla, fifteen; Padma, almost fourteen; and Santosh, eleven—and keep them safe on the train ride to India.

Savitri and the baby would stay, waiting for her husband's return. The two youngest girls, Parsanta, age seven, and Sanjogta, almost three, would also stay behind with Suri and their parents. The departing children knew nothing about it until the September morning when their train was supposed to arrive.

Shahji and Shila woke the girls early and told them to put together a few things, "not much." They were told, "The train is coming. Get ready now."

Suri was awakened by his father and told he was to accompany his brother and three sisters to the train station to help with their baggage. Shahji and Suri would return home after the four were safely on the train.

There was no concrete plan for what would happen once the siblings reached India, nor could there be, under the circumstances. None of the family's relatives were living in India at that time, except one uncle. Shila's brother Gurdit Singh, a police inspector, was now working "somewhere near Delhi." But they had no address for him. Their close family friend, Amar Nath, lived in Palampur. Otherwise, the whole extended family was spread out from Peshawar in the North to Lahore in the South, and none further east than Lahore. The only address they had was Mrs. Punjab Singh's, the young woman the Sehgal's had taken in and helped when the refugee camp was first established several weeks before. Kedar and his sisters had only a few rupees between them and no idea if or how they would find their parents again once they reached India—if they reached India safely.

Suri and his father went to the station with Kedar and the girls. Suri helped carry the suitcases they'd quickly stuffed their belongings into. But when the train arrived, it was already crowded. There was no way for Kedar and his three sisters to fit in one compartment. The baggage they were carrying could not go with them; there was simply no room. They could each only bring along a small bag of clothes. Everyone had to move fast. Shakuntla and Padma managed to squeeze into one compartment, and Kedar ran into another.

Eleven-year-old Santosh found a spot in a rear train car. But someone needed to accompany her. Suri was enlisted at the last minute as Shahji quickly pushed the boy into the compartment behind his little sister and, without warning, the train started moving.

Shahji hurriedly said good-bye to his children, literally running from one compartment to the other as his dear ones left for an uncertain location and a perilous future.

Suri had, of course, not left the house that morning with any expectation of leaving on a train. He had nothing at all with him when he was tossed like a football onto the train car by his desperate father. Suri had only the clothes he was wearing: a pair of knickers (shorts), a short-sleeved shirt, and flimsy sandals.

Instantly accepting his assigned duty, despite his own panic, Suri struggled through the crowded train car to reach his little sister. When Santosh saw her brother, a degree of relief could be seen along with the terror in her eyes.

Suddenly dislocated from the intimate domain he had enjoyed until age thirteen, Suri would now have to rely solely on his own inner sense and the values embedded in him by his family and his childhood in the Punjab.



CHAPTER 7

Uprooted

In Central Europe, a few thousand miles from the Punjab, Edda's story begins in the Silesian Lowlands that are now part of Poland. Edda Jeglinsky could not recall much about her life before she and her family became refugees in the traumatic evacuation of the German population from Silesia when she was barely three years old. Her earliest memories began ten months later in the fall of 1945 in a small village in Bavaria.

Edda's family origins on both sides had deep roots in the Silesian soil. Her father's family came from Breslau (now Wrocław, Poland), a town that was pulled back and forth between different nations many times as it became a commercial, intellectual, and manufacturing hub in Central Europe. Edda's mother's family was from Festenberg (now Twardogóra, Poland), a small town about forty kilometers out in the country.

Silesia's borders changed often before the unification of Germany in 1871. The region had at different times been German, Polish, Prussian, Bohemian, and Austrian. Grand dukes and Habsburg kings had ruled there. The population had been intermarrying for generations.

By the end of the nineteenth century, three quarters of the almost five-million inhabitants of Silesia were German, and one quarter were Polish, particularly those who lived east of the Oder River. Czech and Jewish communities were scattered throughout Silesia, in cities and all through the hinterlands.

Edda's maternal grandfather, Max Wiorkowski, was the oldest of six children of Polish parents in the town of Festenberg. His mother, a woman reputed to be quite beautiful, had become a widow early in life. Max did his best to help support her and his five younger siblings.

As a young man, he had served in the Kaiser's Special Guard, an elite group known for requiring "flawless" men who were tall, strong, and well composed. The guards wore elaborate crisp white uniforms and pointed helmets and rode white horses.

After Max's military service, he was approached by a master craftsman to learn the furniture trade in Festenberg—a town known for furniture making. Always looking out for his family, Max would only agree to begin the apprenticeship if the master would also train Max's brother, who was partially disabled with hearing and speech impairments. The master agreed and both brothers began training in the traditional German way over many years, first as apprentices, then as journeymen, before becoming professionals. Max went on to earn certification as a *Meister*, which allowed him to hire and train his own apprentices.

Max was a married man by the time he was a master furniture maker. He took out loans to begin his own furniture factory in Festenberg. He was hardworking and tough on his apprentices, expecting the very best of them, as he did from himself. But soon after opening his factory, Max's wife became very ill and the medical bills were hefty. He was forced to take out more loans. Tragically, Max lost his wife to lung disease shortly after the birth of their first child, a daughter named Erna, on February 25, 1910.

Max's late wife's two unmarried sisters agreed to care for the infant, but the women sat and knitted throughout the day to earn money, paying scant attention to baby Erna. When Max visited and found his precious little one neglected and malnourished, he scooped up the pitiable girl and took her home. He burned all the baby's belongings, including the crib because it was so filthy. Max began an earnest search for a new mother for his child.

A family in the neighboring town of Goschütz agreed to the temporary care of baby Erna. Max had a weekend job as a waiter in a popular restaurant night spot in that town. At a dance gathering there, he met an attractive and outgoing woman named Ida. At twenty-eight,

Ida was two years older than Max. She had an enviable position working in the castle of the count of Goschütz as first lady-in-waiting to the countess. Max and Ida had a fairly swift courtship. From the time Max took her to visit his daughter, kindhearted Ida fell in love with baby Erna. She gave up her job with the countess to marry Max, took over the care of his baby, and nurtured the child back to health.

Though Max worked hard for many more years to try to get out from under the heavy financial debt he carried, he and Ida had two more children: a son, Alfred, born February 14, 1913, and a daughter, Margarete, born June 25, 1919.

After the Great War, which had ended in 1918, hyperinflation caused money to be worthless. Max struggled to survive financially; furniture orders were few. He and Ida and the children lived as simply as possible, relying on a big vegetable garden, fruit trees, and some goats, chickens, ducks, and geese. Each family member had one pair of shoes that had to last for a year. Max was pragmatic in the face of his family's financial limitations. He was as tough on his children as he was with his apprentices. When Margarete started school and needed glasses, Max responded, "In our family, nobody needs glasses."

Margarete felt somewhat alone as a child growing up with a sister nine years older, a brother six years older, and parents who were working so hard all the time. She felt closest to her brother Alfred, who teased her a lot. She enjoyed his attention. Her best friend was a classmate named Charlotte Jeglinsky, whose parents, Günther and Emma, had moved their family from Breslau to Festenberg during the Great Depression that was devastating all of Europe and most of the rest of the world by that time. Günther had opened a meat shop, hoping that life in the country would be easier than it had been in the city.

Charlotte's brother Heinz, four years older, adored young Margarete Wiorkowski. His persistent attention was successful in gaining her favor, though she was barely a teenager by the time the Jeglinskys decided to return to Breslau. Their meat shop had not been a success. Cosmopolitan by nature, Günther and Emma felt ill at ease anyway in a small town where everybody knew everyone else's business. They were not comfortable, nor did they feel accepted, during their sojourn from city life.

After he and his family moved back to Breslau, Heinz kept in touch and visited Margarete in Festenberg. His visits became less frequent when, seeking adventure at age sixteen, Heinz joined the merchant marines in 1931. He continued to visit Margarete whenever he could between long sea voyages. Her loneliness increased when her brother Alfred completed his apprenticeship at Max's furniture shop that same year and enlisted with the Reiter Brigade (cavalry) in Breslau. She didn't see her brother very often after that.

When Margarete turned fourteen, school was a luxury her family could no longer afford. Against her wishes, she had to quit school and go to work to help support her family. She had been a good student and loved school, particularly sports, and hoped to become a gym teacher. Instead, her father arranged a three-year apprenticeship for her in a clothing store, which she was obliged to take. The agreement was a promise made between Max and a friend of his from the local fire department where he worked as a volunteer. Margarete's boss, as required in similar apprenticeship agreements, sent her to trade school one or two days each week, and her salary would increase a little bit each year.

When Margarete started working in the clothing store, she decided the time had come to cut her long hair for the first time. She'd always worn it in two thick braids to her waist, just as all young girls in the town did in those days. Margarete found such long hair to be more of a burden, especially in the winter months when it took so long to wash and dry. Girls in the bigger cities, such as her friend Charlotte in Breslau, cut their hair shorter and wore stylish bobs.

Margarete did not consult with her parents about her decision to have her braids cut off. Later that same day, one of her father's friends in town ran into Max and mentioned seeing Margarete's new haircut. Max stormed home to see for himself. He was furious that his daughter would do such a thing. He held the view that long hair was a woman's most precious ornament. He refused to speak with Margarete for six full months. The teenager was not happy that her father was angry, but her new spirit of independence as a young working woman left her with an attitude of "Oh well, too bad." Max got over it eventually.

Overcoming her considerable disappointment at being forced to leave school in the first place, Margarete focused her attention on becoming an excellent employee. She did a bit of everything—sales, bookkeeping, collections, sweeping up—and she did each thing well. Though her boss valued her work ethic and easy way with the customers, outwardly he was demanding, stingy, and temperamental.

During this time Heinz Jeglinsky continued to come and go as a merchant marine. But the relationship basically tied down Margarete as a very young teenager, at least as far as boyfriends were concerned. Heinz was her first, and only, love interest. Though the two were not formally engaged, Margarete, by age sixteen in 1935, was fully committed to Heinz, and there was no turning back.

Adolf Hitler had become the German chancellor in 1933. As a teenager, Margarete was aware of the rise of Nazism in her country, though she never attended any of the meetings where thousands assembled to listen to the chancellor speak. She had the general impression at first that what was happening in Germany in those early years was probably a positive thing, particularly for young people. New clubs for boys and girls were formed, and the emphasis on youth helped to instill some much-lacking pride in the German people for the first time since the Great War and the Depression.

Joining the Hitler Youth was made compulsory in 1936 for all German children ages ten to eighteen. Seventeen-year-old Margarete joined, as required, and went on some outings with the youth groups. They sang folk songs and played sports, but when she noticed politics creeping into the activities, she shied away from involvement.¹⁷ Neither Margarete nor her family had any interest in what they considered the circus around Adolf Hitler—the person, his speeches, and the large assemblies in the town square where everyone had to do the “Heil Hitler” salutes.

17. When Hitler came to power, he abolished all the youth groups that had become popular in the 1920s in favor of Hitler Youth, which was designed to prepare boys for military service and girls for motherhood. Margarete was nineteen when it became mandatory for kids ten to eighteen to also attend evening meetings that included vigorous indoctrination into Nazi notions of racial purity. http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/hitler_youth.htm.

Margarete's father used to say, "This is just rubbish!" and that was that, as far as Max was concerned. The family basically dismissed Hitler as a *Spinner*, a German word for a person who doesn't make sense, is mixed up or crazy in some screwball way, a person with grand ideas that no one would really believe.

The family did not anticipate or predict that their country's leader might actually be dangerous. For Jews and others to be systematically targeted in more and more ways made no sense to the Wiorkowski family. The only Jewish family Margarete knew of owned a clothing store in Festenberg, a competitor of the store where she worked, which was considered to be very exclusive. People shopped there when they wanted something special.

When her three-year apprenticeship was completed, Margarete quit her job in the clothing store. Fed up with her inconsiderate boss, she was immune to his pleadings for her to stay. She had no further interest in working in clothing sales. However, her knowledge of quality goods and her natural flair for dealing with people turned out to be important assets in various ways throughout her life, particularly during the difficult times to come.

Margarete made the decision to leave her family in Festenberg. At seventeen, she moved to Breslau to take an office job working alongside her best friend, Charlotte. Heinz and Charlotte's parents invited Margarete to live with them in their apartment, and her parents approved.

Margarete loved living with her future in-laws, with whom she got along well, and city living in general. Though it was difficult for Margarete to see Heinz so infrequently, there were lots of things to do in and around Breslau in her free time, such as dances, concerts, and theater. She and Charlotte were young girls enjoying relative independence in the big city. Margarete had fun as a young working woman in a business environment. She was fast and efficient at typing and enjoyed office work. Her work friends were a collegial group, participating in regular office parties, group activities, and ski trips. She had respectful bosses and sometimes traveled for work with her boss or with colleagues. Life in Breslau was even better for Margarete when her brother Alfred

got married at the end of 1937 and he and his wife Gertrude moved into nearby army housing.

A sudden wave of violence broke out on November 9, 1938, in hundreds of cities and towns throughout Germany and its annexed territories at the same time. Two days of hostilities were focused on Jewish homes, synagogues, and thousands of Jewish businesses. Store windows were smashed, shops were looted and destroyed, and synagogues were burned to the ground. Nazis in civilian clothing, along with stirred-up Hitler Youth members, carried out the well-organized assault. However, the German news provided an official report that these were all spontaneous acts. The attack was referred to as *Kristallnacht*: “the night of broken glass.”

Margarete and her family at home were shaken by what happened. She was especially upset to hear about the destruction of the finest clothing shop in Festenberg. But she and her family assumed the government-controlled media stories were true, that the violent behavior was some sort of mass hooliganism.

It would be some time before she understood that *Kristallnacht* was part of a much larger and more insidious plan Chancellor Hitler had been engaged in from the moment he took power. His intention to rid Germany of certain types of people and create a German master race involved ever-increasing terrorism that resulted in “the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder” of approximately six million Jews and various other groups Hitler considered to be inferior: all people with disabilities, Slavic people, gypsies, homosexuals, communists, socialists, union members, and on and on.¹⁸ The Holocaust had begun.

Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, resulting in the onset of World War II. Heinz was drafted and assigned to U-boats. Until then his life as a merchant marine had entailed long sea voyages with intermittent and infrequent breaks; but now, as a member of the German military, he had regular shore leave with more frequent opportunities

18. “Introduction to the Holocaust.” <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005143>.

to spend time with Margarete. He learned that he could have an even greater amount of leave time as a married man. Setting a date for their actual marriage, after their six-year engagement, was happy news for both families, especially in contrast to their country's involvement in an expanding war.

Heinz and Margarete's wedding was held at her parents' house in Festenberg on December 28, 1940. Margarete's work colleagues arrived by train from Breslau for the celebration. There was an all-night party with music and plenty of good food and drinks. Friends and family talked about that occasion for a long time.

Margarete continued to work in the same office as her best friend, and now sister-in-law, Charlotte, and to live with her husband's parents. The workplace had changed as a lot of the men Margarete had worked with were now in the German army, and throughout Silesia more women had joined the overall workforce. Everyone knew people who lost family members in the war.

Heinz was on duty, mostly in Scandinavia. Margarete sometimes traveled by train to see him when his shore leave was in North Sea port cities, such as Lübeck or Bremen. The only conversations that he ever engaged in with his wife, related to the war, were about the things he experienced on shore leave in Norway and Denmark. He frequently commented on how impressed he was by the honesty of the people in Denmark. He said a person could leave a bicycle unlocked along a road there, and it would never be stolen.

Being part of the military, Heinz had it pretty good as far as Margarete could tell. He didn't experience the shortages of food that people did in Silesia. He brought back cheeses, cans of sardines, and other items that were no longer available at home.

When Heinz found out that he could have additional time off with his wife if they had children, the couple decided to have a baby.

The birth of Heinz and Margarete's first child, Edda Gudrun Jeglinsky, was attended by nuns in a Catholic hospital in Breslau on Christmas Day in 1941. Margarete had hoped that her baby would arrive before midnight, like the Christ child.

She later told Edda, “But you were fifteen minutes late!”

In fact, Margarete had been engaged in a more serious tug-of-war on Christmas Eve regarding the timing of her baby’s birth. The nuns in the hospital, similar to nuns in schools, lived within very regimented schedules. Christmas being their most exciting celebration of the year, they were quite eager to celebrate midnight Mass at the church, not in a hospital.

Midnight was fast approaching, and Edda’s impending birth was interfering with the nuns’ plans. They did their best to convince Margarete to delay the birth, insisting that there was plenty of time.

But the baby was already overdue by several days, and Margarete had a gut feeling about her child’s birth. In her concern, she was rather insistent about not delaying anything. As it turned out, her instincts were right on target. The umbilical cord was wrapped around the baby’s neck. If they had waited to appease the nuns, the baby might have suffocated. The nuns missed midnight Mass in the church, and Edda was delivered safely right after midnight, Christmas morning.

Mother and child stayed in the Jeglinsky apartment in Breslau for a while, but Max wanted Margarete and his new grandchild to move home to Festenberg. He pointed out to Margarete that life in the country would be better for the child than living on the high floor of a city apartment building in Breslau with the Jeglinskys. Besides, life was safer in the country. The cities were being bombed.

Erna had moved home, too, after her husband Robert was drafted into active service. Alfred and his wife Gertrude and their baby, born the previous April, stayed in Breslau where Alfred was still stationed in the cavalry.

Margarete agreed with her father. She and Edda moved back to Festenberg.

Other than the regular sight of armies marching through to the Eastern Front, the effects of war in general did not cause much disruption to everyday life for the family in Festenberg. Their basic needs were met. They had their own vegetables, fruit, and meat, so food wasn’t a problem. Max worked hard and maintained his connections in the local business community, socialized on the weekends, enjoying a drink

with friends, and attending the town dances. He was a sought-after dance partner for the ladies whose men were away at war. He danced with everybody, and Ida didn't mind. But his soft side was most evident around little Edda. He showered attention on the baby.

Edda's family felt relatively secure at home throughout most of the war. Max and Ida focused their loving attention on their grandchild. Margarete told Edda again and again, over the years, how close Edda and her *Oma* and *Opa* were during those first three years of her life. Margarete said Ida was an angel to Edda, and Max doted on the little girl. Margarete joked with her, "You will never have it so good again!"

Max's furniture business was finally picking up. He was almost out from under the huge debt. Furniture orders began coming from clients in Breslau who paid well.

But the horrors of World War II were not too far away from their somewhat-safe haven in the country. Sad news came frequently. Heinz's father, Günther, died soon after Margarete and Edda moved to Festenberg; and word came that Heinz's half-brother, Walter, was killed while on active duty.

Over those three years, Margarete and Heinz scheduled their time together during his shore leaves in places such as Zingst, an island in the *Ostsee* (Baltic Sea). Heinz wanted to see his wife and daughter whenever he could. The summer Edda was eighteen months old, the three were vacationing there on the beach—far from the realities of war. The summer season in Silesia was typically so short that any time in the sun was treasured. All along the shoreline, vacationers were dozing on lounge chairs with cloth canopies. Margarete and Heinz lay back in their beach chairs while Edda played happily in the sand. When Margarete finally noticed exactly what Edda was doing to entertain herself so busily, she was surprised to see that the toddler had collected the sandals and shoes from all the other people along the shore and created a big pile of footwear right in front of Margarete. Edda said proudly, "Mommy! Shoes!"

A charming and outgoing toddler, Edda was comfortable going up to almost anyone. Her easygoing ability to entertain herself for hours at a time came in handy in an emergency one evening during a visit

with Heinz in Bremen, when he was suddenly called back to his ship. The landlady of the house where they were renting a room had allowed Margarete to do her husband's laundry, and he now needed his clothes before the ship pulled out.

Margarete couldn't carry both the laundry and the toddler on public transportation back to Heinz's ship before he left. Under the rushed and difficult circumstances, she had no choice but to leave Edda alone in her room for what could be more than an hour, though the landlady was elsewhere in the house. Margarete quickly instructed Edda, "Stay in this chair, and don't go anywhere until I get back," before she ran out the door with Heinz's clean laundry.

When Margarete returned a couple of hours later, she rushed into the house to find Edda sitting quietly in the same chair, happy to see her mother. She didn't appear to have moved even an inch since her mother left, or to be at all bothered by the time she spent alone. Margarete was at once relieved and amazed.

The Allied Forces were closing in on Germany in early 1945. Hitler's reign was collapsing, and the city of Breslau was key to the southern invasion route into Germany. The largest city in the former eastern territories of Germany, Hitler had designated Breslau as a *Festung* (fortress), one of seven cities to be held at all costs, "to be defended to the last drop of German blood."¹⁹ Alfred was drafted to defend Breslau right after that announcement. Margarete feared for her brother's safety.

The *Gauleiter* (the regional Nazi leader) for Lower Silesia, an SS man named Karl Hanke, did not permit or even reveal the possibility of evacuation from Silesia until the Russian army was closing in on Breslau by way of Festenberg in mid-January. He gave the order that women, children, and old men must leave Lower Silesia. They had twenty-four hours to leave for German-occupied Czechoslovakia.

The weather was particularly severe that winter; the temperature was often -20°C (-4°F). Max sprang into action and managed to get a wagon with horses. Margarete grabbed her fur coat and what few

19. *After the Reich, The Brutal History of the Allied Occupation* by Giles MacDonogh, Basic Books, 2009.

necessities she could carry: some photographs, bars of soap, and a little potty for Edda. Abandoning their home, Max loaded up Ida, Erna, Margarete, three-year-old Edda, and a few neighbors, and they set off together in the cold, joining the rest of the fleeing German population from Silesia.²⁰

The family felt particularly upset leaving their animals—goats, chickens, rabbits, a gaggle of geese, and a flock of ducks. Who would feed them? They tried to imagine that someone staying behind might care for the animals. In retrospect, though, they realized their animals were probably butchered by the hungry Red Army that was immediately bearing down on the town.

When the family reached the railway station, people staying behind took the horses. Though the trains were jammed, Edda's family was able to stay together in the same car of the first of many trains they boarded in the coming days, weeks, and months. The train cars had no windows and no heat. Margarete was very glad she brought the potty for Edda. People were so tightly crammed onto the train that some of them could not get to the train toilets. They wet their pants, which would then freeze. A few individuals died of burst bladders in the bitter cold. Many were too weak to withstand the extremes in temperature and the continuing discomfort. Thousands leaving Silesia that winter died from hypothermia in transit.

The trek by train wound through Czechoslovakia, with many stops along the way. The refugees were required to walk long distances back and forth from the train stations and wherever they were told to stay at night. Hundreds marched together for miles in the cold to stay overnight or longer in schools. They slept on straw that was strewn wall to wall on gymnasium floors. Ida suffered with pain in her joints. She had difficulty walking and struggled to climb on and off the trains.

Refugees focused only on basic survival, food in particular. A distribution system was set up for people to receive a small allotment of various food items. Ration cards were issued and used to obtain meager supplies, some bread or potatoes, at stops along the way in the seemingly endless journey. People waited for hours in long lines for their allowances. Everyone was cold, miserable, and hungry.

20. Refugees fleeing from further north headed to East Berlin and northern Germany.

Mothers with young children were allotted a quarter liter, about a cup, of milk per child. Every day, in whatever town they were in, Margarete went to the assigned location to receive her milk for Edda. She would return with the precious milk, wait her turn at what was usually a single stove in a large hall full of people, and cook *Grießbrei* (cream of wheat) for Edda. But Edda would not eat the lumpy mush. Margarete tried everything to make the toddler eat the cereal, which she knew was an important supplement to their already limited diet. Margarete cajoled, bribed, even spanked, but nothing worked. In the end, the food was not wasted of course. Someone in the family ate it.²¹

To get through the unending travel ordeal required effort from everyone in the family. Edda's grandparents were a godsend, helping to entertain the child. Erna had always been fairly fragile and lacked the robust health her father enjoyed. She needed help coping with various requirements and discomforts, but she gladly helped take care of Edda.

Margarete, on the other hand, was energetic, dynamic, and inventive in the face of adversity. She always found a solution to any problem, and nothing seemed to get her down. Even though she had no idea how or when she would see Heinz again, she maintained a steady positive spirit as far as anyone around her could see.

As the man in the family, Max was expected to take charge in most circumstances, but he recognized his daughter's talent in dealing with people. She was wise and pragmatic. Max noticed how often others came to her for advice. So whenever they had to meet new people or ask for help, Max told Margarete, "Girl, you go; you can do it better."

Margarete was able to make easy contact with the officials or any other people they came across. She was sure to have far more success approaching strangers with requests than Max might. He was smart enough to know that the frayed officials and public servants were less likely to put up with a gruff old man than a lovely and vivacious young woman.

As weeks and weeks went by, Margarete was determined to find better accommodations for the family each time there was another

21. Though Edda retained no memory of her mother's efforts to make her eat the dreaded *Grießbrei*, she continued all her life to avoid any food that was similar in color and texture—any kind of porridge, pudding, polenta, or white gravy. She said, "I don't want to look at it."

lengthy layover. She hated staying in crowded shelters, sleeping on straw in huge halls, with children crying and the endless arguing among desperate people. The spaces were packed, dirty, noisy, and uncomfortable. For Margarete, cleanliness was next to godliness. She could not tolerate the misery her family was forced to endure. Thanks to her ability to seek out and ingratiate herself with local people wherever they went, the family often ended up staying in private homes where they were treated more considerately. People tended to trust Margarete. They could see that she was a decent woman, reliable and clean.

At one point, still in Czechoslovakia, Margarete found good accommodations for the entire summer in the home of a woman whose husband had not yet returned from the war. They were able to live in small but quite adequate private quarters, and for the first time they had dearly coveted laundry privileges. Margarete even learned cooking from her landlady, who was quite talented in the kitchen.

Throughout their journey, Edda was suffering from a terrible rash all over her body, blisters that itched and made her miserable. It wasn't chicken pox, but it was pox-like. The sores oozed, and wherever it oozed, new blisters erupted. If bandages were applied to the sores, they merely broke open when the bandages were removed. There was some speculation that the rash was caused by the straw they slept on at night. The only thing that saved Edda from complete misery was the soap that Margarete had brought along when they left Festenberg. It was a particularly strong antiseptic type of soap for washing clothes. Margarete used it to bathe Edda whenever possible, which brought some relief from the itching.

Finally, in the early fall of 1945, the family reached Bavaria. In this rich agricultural region with adequate food supplies, every farm family was obligated to take in one refugee family. Edda's family was assigned to live in Baldersheim, a rural district of Ochsenfurt, in the northwest part of Bavaria called Franconia. This small village consisted of a cluster of thirty or forty farmhouses, surrounded by their fields. With all the men away at war, many never to return, extra hands were needed to work alongside the farmwomen in the region.

The largest town near Baldersheim was Würzburg, about thirty kilometers to the north. Edda's family left the train in Würzburg,

prepared to go on foot to their newly assigned home. They were walking along the side of the road when a truck with American soldiers came by and offered to give the family a ride partway to their destination. The sight of friendly American soldiers, and their gifts of chewing gum for the children, became common in postwar Bavaria.

The US Army had taken on the task of occupying and assisting in the governing of war-torn Germany, a role they would continue with, to some extent, for many years. Most of Silesia was now attached to Poland, and German refugees who left Silesia and tried to return post-war were denied reentry. Displaced refugees were scattered throughout Germany.

How refugees found their loved ones under these circumstances was a remarkable process. In the local town halls where refugees registered, lists were posted of soldiers missing or confirmed dead. There were bulletin boards there and also in all the schools and camps where refugees stopped along the way and people left messages. With those notes, people eventually made contact with each other. During all of the chaos at that time, it seemed a miracle that Edda's surviving family members eventually ended up in the same little town.

Heinz came almost immediately to Baldersheim. He was never held in a labor camp or a prisoner of war camp as most captured German soldiers had been. He found his mother, Emma Jeglinsky, living in a farmhouse with his sister Charlotte, Charlotte's husband Walter, and their baby Rosemarie. Walter was at least twenty years older than his wife and, due to his age and poor health, he'd never been drafted.

Heinz learned through the postings that Margarete and Edda were in Würzburg. He rushed there to meet them. To his surprise, instead of finding his wife and child, he found Alfred's wife Gertrude and their four-year-old daughter, Anita, in an abbey with a community of nuns. Gertrude and Anita had fled Breslau by way of Hirschberg, Silesia, and had spent quite a while in a refugee camp in Regensburg in the Bavarian Forest before reaching the abbey in Würzburg. By now they had learned the tragic news that Alfred had died in March during the Siege of Breslau.²²

22. The Siege of Breslau ended on May 6, 1945, only one day before Germany surrendered.

Heinz brought Gertrude and Anita back to Baldersheim to stay temporarily with his mother and sister's family, which turned out to be where Max, Ida, Erna, Margarete, and Edda were now headed. Within days, Heinz was happily reunited with his wife and daughter.

Edda and her parents were fortunate to end up with a very pleasant family in Baldersheim. Max, Ida, and Erna were given similar accommodations nearby. Where Edda lived, the man of the family was still gone. There were two children. Alfred was around Edda's age, and Beate was two years older. The two girls would become best friends. Not all refugee families were as fortunate. Some refugees were assigned to people who were stingy and resentful of the forced arrangement.

Heinz, Margarete, and Edda lived in the upstairs part of the farmhouse; the host family lived downstairs. The upstairs consisted of a combined kitchen/living room and a room where they slept. There were no mattresses, so they were still sleeping on straw, the only bedding available. The farmhouse had no indoor plumbing, so water had to be carried upstairs to cook, bathe, and wash dishes or clothes. There was an outhouse across the yard. Edda hated going there because, like on many German farms, the doghouse was next to the outhouse. The dog was kept there on a chain. Going to the outhouse was scary for Edda. The dog barked and strained on his chain each time she walked by.

Host families were required to comply with certain regulations. Though supplies were limited, they were expected to provide the refugees with rations of staples such as potatoes, flour, milk, meat, and eggs. Each family received a quarter-pound of butter a month. Edda's family's farm host was a generous woman who sometimes gave them extra flour or milk.

That first fall in Baldersheim, Edda was admitted to a hospital in the nearby village of Aub to be treated for the horrible rash that still plagued her. She spent an entire month in the hospital. Each day, she was given spinach and potatoes for every meal. Slowly the rash began to heal. However, the mystery around what caused such a horrible skin condition was never fully solved. Whether it was a mineral or vitamin

deficiency, an allergic reaction to the straw Edda had to sleep on for so long, or something else, Margarete never knew.²³

All in all, for Edda and her family, life was not so bad. Although everyone was usually hungry, they had survived the war. They were alive and safe.

23. The thinking at the time was that Edda might be allergic to red currents—berries often found in Silesia and throughout Germany in backyards in three colors: red, white, and black. Many years later, the same rash returned in a much milder form.

Sweet Poison

Pioneer Overseas Corporation (POC), led by Suri, employed more than 1,600 people worldwide in 1988. The operation had twenty-seven breeding stations around the world that were supporting seventeen subsidiaries, and numerous distributors were spread across sixty countries. The projected profit was more than 52 percent of Pioneer's total net income for the year.

Suri was called to the office of Pioneer's CEO on a Tuesday morning in early March. Sitting across the table from Urban were two attorneys. The middle chair had been left empty for Suri, who had just returned from France the previous day.

After Suri sat down, Urban asked, "Do you know why you are here?"

When Suri replied, "No," Urban quickly responded, "Your services are terminated."

Stunned, Suri asked, "Why?"

Urban replied quickly, "We don't have to give you the reason."

Suri asked again, "Why? What is the reason? I have worked here for over twenty-four years. Don't I deserve to know the reason?"

Some papers were thrust in front of him, and Suri was instructed, "Sign this settlement agreement stating that you will not compete with Pioneer for the next two years."

He was instructed to return all of his keys, the company car, Pioneer credit cards, etc., and not talk to any other employees.

When Suri refused to sign the noncompete, he was told he had until 5:00 p.m. that day to agree to the severance terms, including the noncompete clause. One attorney added in an emphatic tone, “You better think over this very generous offer.”

Still stunned, Suri walked out of Urban’s office and initiated a series of visits and calls to consult with a few of his closest associates. He first went to see his good friend and mentor, Si Casady, whose office was in a nearby building. Si was immediately supportive. He was glad to hear that Suri had not signed the noncompete agreement and suggested he retain an attorney. So Suri phoned the organizational consultant who had been advising him on various management issues.

Agreeing that it was a good thing Suri hadn’t signed the noncompete, the consultant referred him to a highly respected attorney, Jim Gritzner.

Before heading home, Suri stopped at Bill Brown’s house in Johnston, running into Skid on the way. Brown and Skid had already heard about Suri’s termination from one of Pioneer’s executives who was making the rounds to disclose the news in person. Suri’s own POC staff had been told the news while he was still in Urban’s office.

Both former CEOs of Pioneer were unhappy about this turn of events, and very sorry not to have influence over the situation.

When Suri went home and told Edda what happened, she was not at all surprised. She had watched Suri’s relationship with Urban decline rapidly in recent months. She knew how unhappy her husband had become in his work environment. With her usual pragmatism, Edda had prepared a budget within the hour that showed the family’s monthly needs and expenses and how they could get by for now without the income from Pioneer.

Suri met with Gritzner and his team that afternoon. Their considered advice was for Suri to sign the noncompete. They cautioned him, “You have limited resources, and this type of thing could drag on indefinitely. Pioneer is a huge company . . . the odds are against you . . . you’ve been offered a pretty good financial settlement,” and other advice to that effect. The “generous” offer would be withdrawn at 5:00 p.m., so “consider signing it.”

But Suri was firm: he would not agree to a noncompete. At the end of the consultation, a call was made on a speaker phone before the 5:00

p.m. deadline. Suri's new attorneys informed Pioneer, "No, Dr. Sehgal will not sign the noncompete agreement."

The astonishment in the voices of those in Urban's office could be heard on the phone. That Suri would leave all that cash on the table was unthinkable.

Vicki was surprised to come home from high school that day and find her dad already home. She knew something was wrong: he had never missed work. While Suri was busily digging through papers and file cabinets in his home office, Vicki asked Edda what was going on, and her mother said calmly, "Not right now. There's a lot going on, and your dad needs to find some things."

Later that evening, Edda explained to Vicki that Suri lost his job.

A day later, many were shocked to read the front-page story of Suri's firing in the *Des Moines Register*. The same attorneys who had successfully sued Garst and Thomas had worked overnight to prepare a lawsuit against Suri, which was filed in Polk County District Court in Des Moines that morning. The lawsuit alleged that Suri endeavored to take trade secrets from the company. The lawyers went directly to the media with the story—to the paper, the radio, and television.

A reporter for the *Des Moines Register* called Suri that afternoon to ask him if he had been told he was being sued. Surprised, he answered, "No." He was mystified by the accusations.

Oliver first heard about it on the radio the next morning, as did Jay.

Jay was ironing his shirt while listening to the news before work when he heard someone say that Pioneer fired the president of their overseas operations, and a description of the allegations.

After a moment, Jay realized, "They're talking about Uncle!"

He called Suri immediately.

Suri told Jay in a reassuring voice, "Just hang up, and do not worry one bit. We will sit down and talk later."

That afternoon, Jay took time off work to go over to the house and talk to Edda. She assured him as well. "Don't worry. It'll work out fine," she said calmly.

Suri joined them and explained to Jay, "Calm down; it never helps to be reactive in these situations. There is no use arguing with power. Accept the reality and go on. Everything will be fine."

Oliver had been listening to KGGO radio that morning when he heard that Pioneer had fired its vice president for endeavoring to steal trade secrets. He thought, *Are they talking about my dad?*

He went downstairs and could sense that something was wrong. Edda told him what happened and showed him the newspaper article. Kids asked him about it at school. Oliver answered that it was “bullshit.”

Within days, Pioneer attorneys filed a second suit against Suri, this time in the Delhi High Court, to try to prevent him from taking control over Pioneer Seed Company Limited (PSCL), a joint venture established in India in 1977 and registered under Indian laws. PSCL had been established as a joint venture because the foreign investment laws in India at the time did not permit majority control by foreign investors. Pioneer owned 40 percent; Suri’s youngest sister, Sanjogta, now living in Delhi, owned 40 percent; and Suri owned 20 percent and served as the company chairman.

From day one, the *Des Moines Register* ran the story about the legal case between Pioneer Hi-Bred International and Suri Sehgal.

Suri was very busy gathering his forces to defend his professional business reputation and protect his family’s future. With little savings and suddenly deprived of all income, he was poignantly aware that Pioneer had deep pockets and plenty of institutional clout in the state.

In all his years of traveling around the world for Pioneer, the satisfaction provided by the continued growth of the business had further fueled Suri’s commitment to his work. Building the company had been his focus. Now his focus turned to the work his lawyers were doing. The lawyers were impressed. Noticing that Suri was working as hard as they were, the firm provided him with an office and a desk.

Suri’s attorney, Jim Gritzner, who later became a federal district court judge in Des Moines, reflected on his initial impressions of Suri and his case, saying, “As a lawyer, when you first meet someone, you’re always a little suspect. We deal with a lot of people who are playing a role. Early on, it was very important for me to figure out if Suri was the good guy or the bad guy in this equation. Very quickly I found out that he was the good guy, and there were some pretty significant bad guys involved.”

Gritzner described Suri as “a combination of tremendous achievement and ability, as well as humility and graciousness. Suri regarded his lawyers as lieutenants, not generals, because he remained very much in charge.”

Edda observed that, during this period, Suri never got angry, impatient, or discouraged. He took control. He worked long hours with the attorneys and in his home office, documenting information. He liked his lawyers and approved of their approach. He felt sure that things would eventually be all right.

The newspaper stories were unfavorable toward Suri in the beginning, and his loyal team members took heat. Their exclusive operation had been a smooth-running enterprise, but there had always been some jealousy within the rest of the company toward the tight-knit overseas travel squad and their frequent trips to “exotic” locations. The required travel looked mostly glamorous from the outside, but as Suri and those on his team had often pointed out, “We were working. It was nothing to work sixty or more hours in a week.”

One member commented, “When we were in Paris, the only time I saw the Eiffel Tower was when I flew over it!”

Only a few weeks after Pioneer filed the lawsuits against Suri, he received disturbing news about what was happening in India with PSCL. He decided he had to go there right away to see for himself. But now he had no expense account, and his international travel costs were his own to bear.

In early April, Suri arrived in India and found, to his horror, that PSCL had been stripped of its assets. Pioneer wanted to leave a shell of a company in case the verdict went Suri’s way. All germplasm, cash, documents, and records had been removed; crops had been destroyed in the fields; the managing director, Roger Sawheny,⁴⁴ had been replaced; and most of the PSCL employees in all three of its locations (Hyderabad, Bangalore, and Delhi) had been hired away by PHI Biogene, a parallel company that had been swiftly set up by the Pioneer representative. The employees had been told that PSCL was “dead” as a company.

44. Roger, a Canadian citizen, was married to Savitri and Brij Anand’s daughter, Gita. His family was living in Canada at the time.

Suri worked with his Indian lawyers over the next ten days to obtain a court ruling to regain control of the company and get back its looted assets.

Among Pioneer's tactics to thwart Suri, they filed a motion to move the PSCL litigation from India to Iowa. During the hearing, a Pioneer attorney on the stand in Polk County District Court made a derogatory statement about the Indian judicial system. He said Pioneer was seeking the change in jurisdiction because "the courts in India are very slow, and not without corruption."

Gritzner produced a transcript of the court hearing and gave it to Suri's legal advocate in India, who found a way to quote from it in front of the Indian judge, making it clear that "When this American lawyer refers to corruption, he is talking about you, Your Honor."

Suri said, "I'm pretty sure that helped us in India."

Back on solid legal footing, a new board was appointed for PSCL, and Suri was reconfirmed as chairman of the company. But only six employees remained. No one—that is, no one except Suri—believed the company had a chance to succeed.

Suri wrote personal letters to all the former employees telling them the door was still open if they wanted to return. Some did, including four people in sales. He also returned Roger Sawheny to his position as managing director.

Roger moved immediately to Hyderabad to take control of the operation there, finding the scene of devastation that had been executed on instructions from Pioneer. The research fields had been plowed under or burned. Since all research records were missing, it was almost impossible to make sense out of the destroyed field plots. Roger's immediate tasks were to secure all facilities, make an inventory of the production fields, and locate all the field records.

When litigation started in India, Suri's nephew Chander was working for Pioneer in Indonesia. After his graduation from Sophia University in Tokyo, he had attended Drake University in Des Moines to obtain his master's degree. He and his Japanese fiancée, Rumiko, were married there in 1985. Chander worked for Pioneer briefly in Des Moines before becoming the company's country manager in Indonesia. Suri's influence on Chander's life had been huge. When he heard about the situation at PSCL, Chander resigned his job and immediately

rushed to India to join the six-person team in Delhi to help Suri get the company back on its feet.⁴⁵

Soon the Dehli court again ruled in Suri's favor and ordered Pioneer to hand over the seed, the precious germplasm, they had taken. But despite the favorable rulings in India, the attacks on Suri didn't stop. The company's legal strategy was to keep Suri tied down in the US with depositions or court appearances while aggressively pushing further litigation in India.

Suri provided his fledgling team with as much technical leadership as he could in these circumstances. He was subpoenaed for depositions and was forced to return to Des Moines. While he was back in the US, Pioneer went after Roger Sawheny, to find a way to force him to leave India. Suri would travel back and forth to India a half dozen times before the end of the year.

Suri's deposition in early June 1988 lasted ten days, during which time Suri learned about the existence of a secret tape recording. The tide was about to turn.

As the facts began to emerge in the depositions, it became clear that Suri's firing was in fact the culmination of events going back to 1982 when certain corporate-level leaders at Pioneer were bent upon breaking up Pioneer Overseas Corporation and merging it with domestic operations, giving them full control of overseas business, and Suri.

The previous fall, when Suri had been explicitly told by Urban to implement the new centralized regional structure, he had become very discouraged. No longer enamored with his position at Pioneer, he had started to explore other alternatives.

The only other person from India on Suri's overseas team in Des Moines was a young man Suri had taken a special interest in helping with his career. As a close confidant, the ambitious young man was well aware of Suri's frustrations with the direction Pioneer was going. Eager to further his own standing with Pioneer's CEO, even if it meant betraying the man he often referred to as his mentor and "like a father,"

45. A few months later, when Chander's help was no longer needed, he returned to Japan and went into the restaurant business, eventually owning and operating several successful Indian restaurants in Tokyo.

Suri's protégé exaggerated what he thought he knew in order to convince Tom Urban that Suri was plotting to set up a competing business. Urban and his CFO planned to foil the imagined plot and finally get rid of the man who was an obstacle to their plans for Pioneer's centralization. The guns pointed at Suri in this particular instance were figurative.

At the end of February 1988, less than a week before Suri was fired, Suri's protégé had been given a tape recorder and some scripted questions designed to lure Suri into admitting his conspiracy against Pioneer.

At the time, Suri was preparing to leave for a meeting with France Maïs people. On his way to France, he stopped in Boston to meet with a group of venture capitalists. He was seeking funds for a seed venture he would either do alone or with Pioneer, a prime opportunity he had described to Pioneer's CEO and others, even saying at one point, "If you don't do it, I'll do it myself."

With a tape recorder hidden in his briefcase, the protégé had brought the papers Suri needed on the day he was leaving for Boston. But the report now contained newly inserted proprietary information about germplasm that had been added intentionally by the protégé, in spite of Suri's explicit instructions never to do such a thing. The expectation was that Suri would pass along the confidential papers to the venture capitalists in Boston, and Pioneer would then have "proof" of Suri's duplicity.

The first recording attempt was foiled when the tape machine malfunctioned. Later in the afternoon, a second attempt was made when Suri's protégé connected the tape recorder to his phone and called Suri at home just as he was about to leave for his trip. The protégé asked Suri the loaded questions as instructed, hoping he would blurt out something incriminating.

However, other than a few candid and choice disparaging remarks Suri made as he was rushing about before leaving for the airport, the tape didn't include proof of much other than his annoyance and frustration with the changes happening at Pioneer, which was no real secret.

Nevertheless, the company attorneys played the tape again and again for other employees at Pioneer, after Suri was fired, to justify the firing and to convince Suri's overseas team that he had tried to sabotage the company.

The CFO and in-house counsel kept insisting that Suri was guilty. They were so sure of it that they hired a crew with listening devices, housed them in a van, and monitored other employees as well.

The new information discovered in depositions about how Suri was set up prompted him to file a countersuit against Pioneer. The news coverage continued, and the case was now referred to as David and Goliath in the press.

When Gritzner uncovered the truth about Suri's protégé, Suri was crushed. To be stabbed in the back by someone he had taken under his wing and felt such affection for was hard to accept. He received a phone call soon after from a guy who went to college with the young protégé. Suri learned then that the "slick" man's college nickname was "Sweet Poison."

Fighting a case that promised to be protracted was an expensive proposition, so Gritzner suggested to Suri that it would be more practical for him to transfer his case to a team of lawyers willing to do the work on a contingency basis. The transfer was made, and the work continued.

The lead contingency attorney, a man named Glenn, later described what he and his colleagues saw in Suri. "Suri was clearly a very bright, well-educated man who had lots of motivation, and a wife behind him who fully supported him. That was very important. He had been groomed by the preceding chief executives of Pioneer, Bill Brown and Wayne Skidmore, particularly Brown, who had recognized that Suri had the ability to expand Pioneer's reach by going overseas and setting up international operations. By the time the lawsuit happened in 1988, Pioneer was worldwide. Their problem was that the whole overseas operation, the entire non-US operation, was loyal to Suri, because he was the guy who built it."

While Suri was in the midst of depositions, he received a call from Geert Van Brandt on behalf of a company in Belgium. He asked to visit with Suri in Des Moines to discuss what his company was doing in biotechnology. Suri agreed to the meeting.

Plant Genetic Systems (PGS), in Belgium, had been established in 1982 by a molecular biologist and professor, Marc Van Montagu, and a

venture capitalist, Gerard Van Acker, for the commercialization of biotechnology inventions. Van Montagu and Jeff Schell at the University of Ghent were among the first to demonstrate a practical method (agro-bacterium mediated transformation system) for the genetic engineering of plants. Van Montagu imagined the potential for genetically modified plants to help the rural poor by increasing crop productivity and protecting people and the environment from the overuse of chemicals in agriculture.

PGS had developed the world's first genetically engineered insect-tolerant plant by inserting into tobacco a gene from the soil bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) coding for a protein that is toxic to the larvae of certain crop pests. Tobacco was used for this testing because the plant was not part of the food supply.

The resulting "Bt tobacco" showed it was possible to induce plants to produce their own environmentally friendly and natural microbial insecticide. Just as antibiotics could be broad spectrum or very narrow spectrum, Bt toxins could also be very specific and targeted to specific larvae. The technology would make it possible to reduce the use of poisonous insecticide sprays in crop production.

The company had other products in the pipeline as well, including a novel plant-hybridization system, called SeedLink, and genetically engineered plants that were tolerant to the broad-spectrum herbicide glufosinate. The challenge for PGS was to tap into the vast commercial potential of their breakthrough technologies.

Van Montagu had heard about Suri from colleagues at a professional conference at Iowa State University and had suggested to the CEO of PGS that he should contact Suri.

Coming from a classical breeding background where developing new hybrids was done in the field, Suri recognized that PGS was like a biotech boutique for biologists—the "grail" itself. The promise of this cutting-edge technology offered a new world of possibilities.

At the end of the meeting, Suri asked Geert, "So, what can I do for you?"

The company wanted to hire Suri, if he was available. His long record of success in the commercial world, delivering good products for the international markets that he had been instrumental in creating, would make him an exceedingly attractive asset to PGS. The brilliant

scientists of PGS worked in their labs; they had no business experience or the know-how to market their products. Suri had the exact additional skills the company needed.

As fascinating as the offer sounded, Suri said he wasn't looking for employment under the circumstances; he was just too busy.

The PGS representative replied, "Look, you may not be looking for a job, but I am looking for a boss." He pressed Suri to come to visit PGS in Ghent.

Suri agreed to a brief meeting on his trip to India in September if the company paid his fare from London to Brussels. The PGS representative agreed.

In Belgium, Suri found that PGS was indeed doing "beautiful" things in biotechnology. The people he met presented an attractive and heavy sell, insisting that Suri must join them. Suri was particularly impressed by Marc Van Montagu's interest in sustainable agriculture and his sincere desire to help developing countries with the technologies developed in his lab.

At the insistence of the company CEO, Suri canceled his evening flight, stayed for dinner, and met with more key people. But he remained undecided. He was concerned that he really didn't have time for work with PGS along with his responsibilities in India and at home and the ongoing lawsuit, which was a long way from being settled.

The PGS people responded, "If you end up with an injunction against working in the US, we don't care."

Before Suri boarded his plane home, he had agreed to consult with PGS for ninety days in the coming year.

Almost immediately upon his return home, another job inquiry came from a German seed company, KWS, which was primarily in the sugar beet seed business, but now also in corn. They wanted Suri to help them develop their business strategy in seed corn.

Attorney Gritzner explained, "Suri got those offers from two European companies, and we told him there wasn't any reason he couldn't accept them. That gave him good income. He just popped right back up, and away he went!"

Suddenly Suri was earning twice the income he had in the past. Money was no longer a problem.

The public drama of the lawsuits would last for another fifteen months. The snare that the company leadership had laid for Suri would eventually recoil back at them.

Gritzner explained, “In the beginning, it looked as if Pioneer had some dirt on Suri. But, as it turns out, they were wrong. They underestimated Suri significantly. Before he met with the venture capitalists in Cambridge, he had looked over the document, noticed the added information, and quite appropriately withheld it from them.”

In addition, Suri’s personal reputation within his team and circle of work associates was beyond reproach. Although there was a lot of kinship in POC, and some well-deserved celebrations, Suri had always kept his business and his social life separate. Despite frequent invitations, he had never even joined his team when they went for drinks on Fridays after work.

Nobody could demonize Suri, be it for character, finances, or ethics. There was no indiscretion to pin on him. He had always been focused on business, and work came first.

A weakness in Pioneer’s argument had stood out immediately. No one could offer an explanation as to exactly how Suri planned to do the things they accused him of trying to do. The seed stocks were locked up, and Suri had no access to them. Once Urban acknowledged in his deposition that he had handed the tape recorder to Suri’s protégé, and it became known that Pioneer’s lawyers had provided the questions, the tide turned in Suri’s favor.⁴⁶

That the protégé inserted the confidential information into the report and gave the report to Suri—in the hope that he would pass it on to the venture capitalists—was “pure entrapment.” And the fact that they fired Suri first, then demanded that he sign a covenant not to compete, was an antitrust violation (restraint of trade). In addition, Pioneer’s leaders had been telling other companies not to employ Suri—another restraint of trade violation and cause of action, along with breach of contract and tortious interference.

After the series of depositions of key players from September to December 1988, and especially the “bombshell discovery” of the tape

46. In a conversation with a colleague from Australia who was in Des Moines on a routine business visit, Suri’s protégé had openly divulged his role in trying to entrap Suri.

recording, Suri's legal team spent the next few months preparing their case against Pioneer, which was scheduled to go to trial on August 31, 1989. Before that time, there was plenty of haggling and attempts at settlement.

When the judge ruled on the pretrial motions, the issue was that Suri was being sued for endeavoring to take trade secrets. But no one could articulate what they thought he was trying to take, except as mentioned in the protégé's testimony, which had come across "weird." The judge pointed out that, because Suri didn't physically take anything, the case was an "empty shell."

During his remarks, the judge added that one of Pioneer's attorneys had behaved in a shameful fashion in a meeting with Suri's attorneys. He had made threats along the lines of, "When we're done with Suri Sehgal, the only thing he'll be able to plant are flowers in his backyard. That's the only genetics he'll be concerned with!"

Then there was the issue of the tape recorder and the questions.

After the judge's ruling, just before the trial was to start, the judge again asked the parties if they would be willing to confer about settling the case. This time Suri agreed.

The unseemly drama ended in a settlement that day between Pioneer and Suri. All charges were dropped. Suri was reinstated as vice president of Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc., and as president of Pioneer Overseas Corporation.

He immediately resigned.

Suri had two different compensation options in settlement discussions. He was offered cash, or a lesser sum plus Pioneer's shares in the company in India. Included in that offer was half of the germplasm developed by PSCL in India—some of the very seed stock Suri had been accused of taking in the first place.

In the end, Bill Brown's prophecy came true. The attacks on Suri ended up haunting the perpetrators. A few company executives were just happy to have Suri gone. After all, he had already put in place the highly lucrative worldwide business for Pioneer, and now he would no longer be an obstacle to centralization.

However, the India settlement continued to be an ugly fight. Suri's lawyers had to go to the judge at least a dozen times to get documents turned over properly. Pioneer attorneys were fined a couple of times by the judge in the US, all of which was described in the *Daily Business Record*.

The newspaper coverage turned around in Suri's favor now, but the articles were no longer on the front page.