

Johanna Krause
TWICE PERSECUTED

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*Surviving in
Nazi Germany
and Communist
East Germany*

Carolyn Gammon
Christiane Hemker

*Translated from the German by
Carolyn Gammon*

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For Johanna

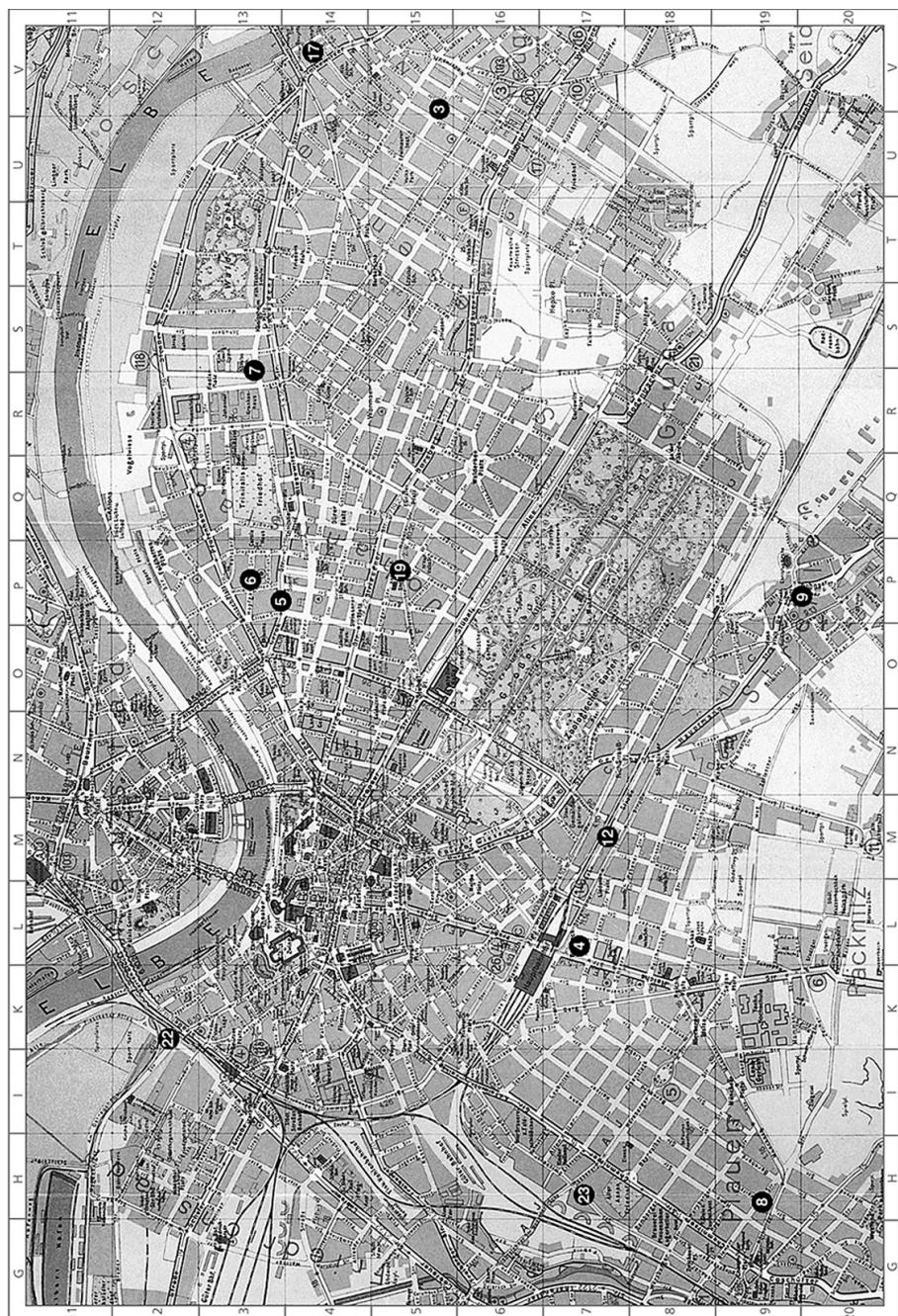
In her youth, Johanna Krause was greatly supported by Dresden's Jewish community. In Johanna's name, therefore, royalties earned by this book will be donated to the Dresden Jewish community for work with children and youth.

All my life, I fought and fought and fought again.
It's been decades that I've been fighting the Nazis.
Actually, all I've done is fight fascism. And to think
I'm just a small, unimportant woman.

That's just the way it is.

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Dresden: overview. See legend, page x.

Dresden maps legend

- 1 The Old Market Place, site of Café Altmarkt, where Johanna confronted the SA in 1933.
- 2 Am Hasenberg 1, site of Dresden's old Semper Synagogue and today the New Synagogue.
- 3 Behrischstrasse 9, corner Eisenacher Str., site of the Eisenacher Hof restaurant. Max and Johanna lived above the restaurant from 1946 to 1975.
- 4 Bismarckstrasse 16/18, Gestapo Headquarters.
- 5 Gerokstrasse 61, site of the fish shop Suchy, and where Johanna and Max Eisenhardt ran their print shop.
- 6 Hopfgartenstrasse, Johanna's hiding place after her first deportation.
- 7 Trinitatis Strasse (today Fiedlerstrasse 3), site of Dresden's new Jewish cemetery, where Johanna and Max are buried.
- 8 Kaitzer Strasse 29, site of the clinic in the Plauen Quarter, where Johanna was aborted and sterilized, 1944.
- 9 Kreischaer Strasse 20, where Johanna did slave labour at the steam laundry, 1944.
- 10 Kreuzstrasse 11, where Johanna lived as a child with mother and stepfather; also site of the bar called Katacomben.
- 11 Ostbahnstrasse 1, where Johanna and Max lived in a studio apartment with other artists, including Otto Griebel. Hans and Lea Grundig lived a few houses down. The street no longer exists.
- 12 Neuen Gasse 32, site of the Adolf Bauer cardboard factory, where Johanna did forced labour before being sent to the concentration camps, 1944.
- 13 Palm Strasse, site of Else Baghorn's bar, where Johanna worked under cover (without saying she was Jewish) during the Nazi occupation.
- 14 Rampische Strasse, corner Schössergasse, police station where Johanna was taken after the brawl at Café Altmarkt.
- 15 Rosenstrasse 43, Johanna's first little room to herself, circa 1923.
- 16 Schiessgasse 7, police headquarters, where Johanna was imprisoned numerous times under the Nazis and again under the communists.
- 17 Schillerplatz 9, Blasewitz. Schiller-garten, the HO Restaurant where Johanna worked in the 1960s and 1970s.
- 18 Schloßstrasse 1. Johanna and Max lived here from 1975 onward. Many interviews for the book took place here.
- 19 Stephanienplatz 4, where Johanna lived with mother and stepfather. Her mother was picked up from this address for deportation.
- 20 Viktoria Strasse, where Johanna stayed above the marriage broker's office in 1934 and was picked up by Herbert Ossmann for deportation.
- 21 Waisenhausstrasse, Fashion House Johanna Hunger, where Johanna apprenticed as a saleswoman.
- 22 Weisseritzstrasse 3, cigarette factory Yenidze, where Johanna worked in the late 1920s.
- 23 Zwickauer Strasse 40/42, site of factory Koch & Sterzel, where Johanna worked from 1925 to 1927.

Introduction

by Freya Klier*

There are biographies that embrace an entire century. Johanna Krause's is such a biography. This small woman from Dresden lived in the time of the German Empire, the Weimar Republic, the Nazi period, forty years of East German communism, and then the unified Germany.

There are human fates that make your breath catch in your throat. Johanna Krause's is such a fate. She lived and suffered through two dictatorships. Two dictatorships: that means imprisonment for "insulting the Führer"; imprisonment for "defiling the race"; concentration camps, including Ravensbrück; and, after all that, imprisonment for "acts against the state" in East Germany.

While interviewing Johanna for our project of making a documentary film of her life, I often asked myself, how does a person stand all that? One answer I found is that the person must be protected by a bevy of angels.

And that is true of Johanna. For example, in the spring of 1945 when the SS drove more than one thousand women and girls on a death march through the Egerland in the Czech countryside, there were only three survivors. The Jewish woman from Dresden—Johanna—was one of them. She was a victim of typhoid, dysentery, starvation, and a severe blow to the head delivered by the rifle butt of an SS man. That she survived was a miracle.

* Freya Klier is a civil-rights activist, author, and filmmaker. Originally from Dresden, she was expelled from East Germany in 1988. In 1996, she made a documentary film about Johanna Krause entitled *Johanna: Eine Dresdner Ballade* (*Johanna: A Dresden Ballad*).



Portrait of Johanna Krause
by Christoph Wetzel. (Ravens-
brück Concentration Camp
Memorial Museum.)

How does a person live through all that?

The next answer I found: perhaps if the person is supported by an extraordinary love story, as was the case with Johanna and her husband, Max, an artist who was waiting at the prison door on the day she was released.

“My life was a never-ending roller coaster,” this small woman from Dresden said toward the end of her life. Yet her voice was full of astonishment.

Johanna was the oldest person I had the pleasure of being friends with. At the age of ninety-three, her back making a rainbow to earth, she died.

She was the opposite of a cuddly grandmother. Even in her diminishing body there was such a fervent Hungarian temperament that she found peace only with her last breath.

Like all those who live close to a century, Johanna suffered from loneliness. She survived her husband and long-time friends by many decades. As a Jew living in the “wrong place” at the “wrong time,” she was not al-

lowed to have children. In 1943, after German doctors cut a seven-and-a-half-month-old fetus out of her body, the nurse told her it was a boy. Johanna was young and still might have many children, she said. She meant well, but did she not know that the Jewish woman had been sterilized? "After the war," Johanna said, "my husband gave me two small puppies."

My encounter with Johanna, this vital and courageous woman, was for me a gift. I learned a lot from her about sincerity, bravery, and loyalty to one's friends. What hit her the hardest? The lies told by many of her contemporaries—a certain opportunism that, if necessary, rolled over dead bodies.

I hope this book is widely read because Johanna's courage and human decency can serve as a compass for future generations.

Carolyn Gammon and Christiane Hemker recorded Johanna's turbulent life story before it disappeared into the shadow of history like so many of the other stories we could have learned from. For their commitment and meticulous work, they have earned my utmost respect.

4 Deportation and Return

After the four months in prison in 1933 for insulting the Führer, I was jailed again for a few weeks because of supposed irregularities with my documents. I was born in Dresden, so I had never needed a passport and had only my police registration certificate. My mother was married to a German, but I was considered Hungarian. Thanks to her bad German, she had registered me incorrectly everywhere. At first she registered me under the name of her first husband, Pollack. Then she had Samel adopt me. Under the new laws, the adoption was no longer valid; the Nazis annulled it. So even though I'd never visited the place in my life, I became a Hungarian citizen once again.

By the time I was released from jail, fascism was in its heyday. In 1934, I was once again taken to court for irregularities with my documents. I was convicted, but this time I was able to serve the sentence on probation. The authorities decided that I was to be deported to my "homeland" as soon as possible—that is, expelled over the border (toward Hungary) to Czechoslovakia.

One morning I was picked up by a police officer named Herbert Ossmann, who would come to play a big role in my life. I was supposed to have spent the night at Ostbahnstrasse where Max Krause had his studio apartment. Max had invited me to sleep at his place the night before. When I asked him why, he said, "I have an odd feeling."

During this time, I was often at Max's place. He was really happy about that because Otto Griebel and all the other artists who lived there wanted to get to know me. From time to time, I still had to go to my print shop. I had not yet signed it over to Eisenhardt, but it more or less belonged to him because Jews weren't allowed to own anything anymore. Eisenhardt

always arranged things to suit himself. By then our friendship was over. I came and went as I pleased. My only remaining possession at the print shop was a large wicker trunk—my hope chest.

Many artists had such a trunk. I had bought mine with marriage in mind and used it to store my dowry collection: five hand towels, bedsheets bound together with ribbons, and dishtowels. In those days, you didn't just go into a shop and buy your dowry things all at once. Whenever I managed to save a couple of marks, I would go to Heckel & Partner and buy a few things. You never bought yourself a complete bedroom set. You went to a carpenter and bought a piece by a journeyman. You made friends with the carpenter in case he had another such piece. That's how you collected the furniture for your home, piece by piece, because the carpenter knew what he had already delivered to you and knew what fit.

Max Krause and I had grown very close by then. In the end, what brought us together was our shared political views. The house on Ostbahnstrasse had been built specifically for artists; it contained many large, beautiful studios. I would go to Max's and feel right at home. I couldn't live there myself because, as a Hungarian Jew, I was no longer officially registered; it would have been too risky. So I found myself a room nearby on Viktoria Strasse. There was a marriage broker's office in the building and so many people coming and going that I didn't stand out. The SA were marching everywhere at that time. I was living illegally in Dresden and was supposed to be expelled because of my previous convictions. I felt pretty secure in the room on Viktoria Strasse, so I had not stayed over at Max's that night.

The police officer, Herbert Ossmann, picked me up at my room on Viktoria Strasse at around five in the morning. Ossmann had taken part in a big shooting competition in Austria and won a prize as the best shot. He was one of Hitler's boys right from the start—a fanatic to the last breath. He began his career as police officer and duty officer at the police station on Portikusstrasse. Later he was an overseer in a Jewish ghetto. Actually, he was a good-looking man.

Ossmann picked me up and took me to the guardhouse at the train station. I spent long hours in a tiny cell. Finally, another police officer—an older man—approached me. "You're about to be picked up. Don't bother crying. Nothing is going to happen to you."

"So you say," I replied. "Are you married?"



Otto Griebel, circa 1927. (Otto Griebel, *Ich war ein Mann der Strasse. Lebenserinnerungen eines Dresdner Malers* [Dresden 1986, 2nd printing 1995], front cover.)

“Yes. I lead a respectable life and I am married.”

“You know,” I went on, “I have a funny feeling that I’m going to be thrown out of Dresden—out of Germany. You’re never going to see me again. I have a key. It belongs to my boyfriend. He’s one of the artists living at Ostbahnstrasse 1. That’s just a couple of minutes from the main train station. I don’t want to keep this key.”

“Why do you even have that key?” he asked. “You were searched, weren’t you?”

“Let’s just say I found a very embarrassing hiding place for it.”

The police officer laughed. “Okay, give it to me. I’ll take it over there.” These were dangerous times. Such an offer could have cost him his job and God knows what else.

He arrived at Ostbahnstrasse 1 to find all of the painters sitting there with Max. “I’m supposed to give you this key,” he said. “Your girlfriend said it belonged to you.” Max knew immediately what that meant—that I was to be deported. Otto Griebel and the other painters left, but Max ran to the train station and waved to me as I was leaving.

Ossmann took me by train to the Czech border. First we went to a restaurant to wait and see if everything was in place for my border crossing. All I had to do, I was told, was walk on over and just keep walking. But when I arrived on the Czech side of the border, I was approached by the border

guard—a Yugoslav who spoke Czech. He asked where I was planning to go. I showed him my police registration certificate from Dresden. He looked at it and said I should go right back where I came from or else he would be obliged to put me in jail.

When he found out that I had not eaten all day, he sat me down on a rock and found a woman who brought her youngster with her. She gave me a loaf of fresh bread.

"I want to give you some good advice," he said. "Go back over there because if you don't I'll have to arrest you. This is Czech territory and you have no papers. You're hardly the first person I've given this advice to—it's going on every day and every hour—but you're the youngest one so far."

Not long after, I walked back to the German side of the border. It was dark by then. Herbert Ossmann was furious. As we stood by the Elbe River, it was obvious that he wanted to get rid of me as soon as possible. "Can you swim?" he asked. When I said no, he threw me into the water. I swam back to the bank. As he pulled me out, he said to me, "And you're a liar to boot."

He took me back to the restaurant at the border. I sat there in my dripping wet clothes on a circular bench surrounding a card table where skat was usually played, and I awaited my fate. It turned out that since the last train had already left, I was to spend the night there. Ossmann asked me how much money I had. "Thirty marks," I said.

The thirty marks would pay for my room—which was as sparse as it was cheap—and something to eat. The next day Ossmann would take me to another border crossing at Bad Schandau.

There was a steep set of stairs leading to my room. It had a bed, a chair, and a table with folding legs. I wanted to lock the door before turning in but discovered there was no key. So instead of taking off all my clothes, I removed my coat and hat and threw myself on the bed.

Over beer and schnapps, the landlord and Ossmann had cooked up a plan. I was not to be given a key. That night the two of them came up to my room and tore my clothes off. Ossmann was on the verge of raping me—he had everything out of his pants—when the landlady called out, "What is that racket? What's going on up there? Get down here this instant!"

I was yelling like someone being roasted alive, and that's why the landlady woke up. The landlord and Ossmann, both in a rage, left immediately.

The next morning at breakfast I met a man who was delivering *The Freedom Struggle*, the Nazi newspaper for the district of Saxony. The man, who delivered all the Nazi papers to the villages, sat at my table. It was just the two of us. From the thirty marks I still had money for a cup of coffee and a roll with butter.

After a while, the man spoke. "I'm going to take you over the border. It's going to work this time because I deliver the papers. You were handed over to me by Herbert Ossmann."

I scrutinized the man. There's a crooked number, I thought. My time in prison had given me a feel for such people. In any event, during the night I had come up with a plan. I always dream up my best plans at night.

After breakfast, Ossmann, the mailman, and I went to the train station. After Ossmann left, I asked the mailman, "Do you have children?"

"Yes," he said, "four of them."

"Do you want to earn some money?"

"Why? Do you have some hidden somewhere?"

"No, but I have a print shop and there's money there. If you take me back to Dresden, we can go there and I'll give you a few hundred marks. We can't talk here anymore. I'm hanging around the train station even though I'm supposed to have been deported. We're in the same boat. We have to keep it to ourselves. You say you took me over the border and that's that."

He agreed to the plan and fetched me clothing, high-heeled shoes, and a large hat. I put on a bit of makeup and did my hair differently. He brought me back to Dresden—to Ostbahnstrasse and Max Krause. Max wasn't at home, so I went to Otto Griebel's fine house at Pillnitzer Landstrasse 93. He wasn't home either, but his wife—Margarete—was there. She was breastfeeding her little son, Matthias, and was totally shocked.

"Janka! Are you crazy?" ("Janka" was the Hungarian version of "Johanna.") "I'm breastfeeding. My milk will block up on me. What on earth are you thinking?"

"Your milk isn't going anywhere, Gretel. I wasn't here. I was deported so I couldn't have been at your place. You don't have to be afraid. I'm here with someone I've promised money to."

"But how did you get back in? You're going to get us all into trouble."

"Don't be afraid. When Otto comes home, just tell him to send Max to the print shop right away. And remember, you never saw me."

"Okay, I'll do it," she said.

Gretel was glad when I left. They were not heroes. They all trembled, but I'm glad they only trembled. Later they were all called heroes.

Several hours later, Max Krause came to the print shop. The key I'd arranged to have delivered to him opened my hope chest. Max Eisenhardt would have had to destroy the trunk to get at the money inside, but he refused to let me have it—that is, until Max Krause threatened to throw him across the high-speed press. "You just used everybody and everything," he told Eisenhardt.

During my last stay in prison, Eisenhardt had sold all my dowry items. He sold my linen because he had debts all over the city. He was a live wire, that one, always up to something.

At last the mailman received his money. He was relieved to be rid of the situation. We shook hands. Done, over, fini. Max Eisenhardt kept the trunk; the key remained with Max Krause.

Now I was absolutely illegal in Dresden.

Appendix and Acknowledgements

Carolyn Gammon

It was March 1994 and I had been in Germany for two years when I came upon a notice in a Berlin magazine about a weekend seminar at the Ravensbrück concentration camp memorial site. Until then I had to forego such interesting seminars because my German was just not good enough for me to participate, but finally on this weekend I decided to go.

Growing up in Canada, I learned about the Second World War from a Canadian perspective. My mother's first boyfriend had been killed in the war, and this or that relative had fought. Every November 11th, on Remembrance Day, the veterans would march and we would lay wreaths at the local war memorial. But Europe and the realities of war seemed far removed. I had heard of the Holocaust and the concentration camps, though I could probably have named only one: Auschwitz. Then, while I was doing my M.A. in Literature and Creative Writing at a university in Montreal, I joined a politically active student group that was engaged in the struggle against racism and anti-Semitism. Alongside Jewish friends we learned some history, held seders where stories written by survivors were read out, and organized workshops aimed at fighting anti-Semitism. Moving to Germany to live with my Afro-German partner sensitized me to similar issues, but still, nothing really prepared me for that weekend in March 1994.

I had never been to a concentration camp memorial site. I had never knowingly met or spoken to a Holocaust survivor. I had a lot to learn about the workings of fascism. Arriving at Ravensbrück for the first time, I remember the shock—almost like a fist to the stomach—that the concen-

tration camp buildings literally began where the village ended. Despite my education in Canada, I must have still harboured the belief that most Germans didn't really "know" what was going on. And yet from the shores of Schwedt Lake where the ashes were strewn from the crematorium, you could see the village church and hear its bells. The trains bringing prisoners had arrived in the village; the prisoners had then been marched through town to the concentration camp. When I later learned that a Siemens factory had been built nearby for the explicit purpose of exploiting the workers of Ravensbrück, any remaining illusions I might have held vanished: atrocious crimes against humanity had been committed a mere stone's throw from "civilization."

I remember meeting Johanna Krause for the first time. She was the honoured guest and witness to the events of the time, invited by one of the memorial site organizers, Mr. Eberhard Dentzer, who became her good friend and supporter. When I entered the room where the thirty participants had gathered, Johanna was already seated. The chair beside her was empty. Perhaps the German women present were too respectful or too shy to sit beside her, but I, in my friendly Canadian way, went right up to her, offered a handshake and a smile, and introduced myself. She responded warmly and said I should sit down beside her. We started talking, and it seemed there was an automatic affinity. I learned later that I had a bit of an advantage in that Johanna reserved a special place in her heart for foreigners! When I said I was a writer, she replied, "So that's it—my husband was a painter." And so we had another affinity.

At one point, Johanna expressed her concern that she wasn't up to the challenge of the seminar: "There are so many intelligent people here!" I assured her that she undoubtedly knew more than all of us put together.

The remainder of the weekend, we barely parted. Arm in arm we walked with other participants through the memorial site museum. "That red triangle," Johanna would comment, "that's just what I had to wear." At the crematorium she said, "You could smell burning flesh night and day." She spoke about her suffering and about the hard truth that Jewish prisoners did not enjoy the solidarity from other prisoners that communist survivors often reported—a distinctly unpopular view from the perspective of the former East Germany. At Johanna's side that weekend, I learned more about fascism, about the Nazi terror, and about survival than I had in all my thirty-four years.

Christiane Hemker

One winter evening in January 1998 I met Johanna. Freya Klier's film, *Johanna: A Dresden Ballad*, was to be shown, and Johanna Krause herself was to talk about her life.

When the film came to an end, the audience was quiet. On the women's faces you could see expressions of empathy and awe. I felt the same way. I looked at Johanna. She was a small, bent woman sitting in a wooden armchair. She was wearing black pants and a black leather vest over a colourful pullover. Her black hair was dyed and cut short. I looked in her face, ninety years young, and saw an energy and curiosity in her lively eyes. At that moment, I understood what it means to venerate someone.

I met with Johanna many times over the next few years. Most of the interviews took place in her apartment. In her tiny living room overflowing with memorabilia, she sat opposite me and told me about her life. On her voyage into the past, I accompanied her through all the phases of remembering, through all the emotions and moods that evolved.

There were times when the memories were too traumatic, and she couldn't go on. When that happened, I would shift the focus or even discontinue the interview. There were times when neither of us could go on. But when Johanna spoke of the Nazis, she did so with a relentless and unyielding fighting spirit. Her suffering, which lasted nearly a lifetime under various German political systems, had not broken Johanna down; it had made her even stronger, even more courageous and inventive. She never gave up.

Johanna was a woman of the 20th century. She was especially affected by the societal shifts and political events of the first half of the century. She liked to describe herself as small and unimportant and yet, in truth, her honesty, her courage and tenacity, and her profound sense of justice have inspired me and countless others. I believe that through this book she will serve as a model for future generations.

Johanna, you were never small and unimportant! I miss you!

Johanna: A Dresden Ballad

a film by Freya Klier



A 28-minute documentary film in German (with English subtitles) that summarizes the life story of Johanna Krause.

Review in a Saxon newspaper:

“The film does not attempt to explain but leaves the telling entirely up to Johanna. This gives it a forceful authenticity and dignity. The scenes are selected sparingly. Documents and photographs add the historical accent. And the camera lens avoids all sentimentality...”

Sächsische Zeitung

The DVD can be obtained by contacting:

Edition “Nach-Lese,” M. Scheibner

Email: edition-nach-lese@web.de

Further information: www.freya-klier.de