

based on the True Story about
Sophie Scholl and Fritz Hartnagel

WITH YOU THERE IS LIGHT

by Alexandra Lehmann

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The most important thing to know about *With You There Is Light* is that Fritz Hartnagel wrote at least five letters to Sophie Scholl in which he informed her about German Army and SS atrocities.

Due to a deep familiarity with German culture (both my parents survived the war in the Eastern territories) and native language fluency, I was able to ask difficult questions during my research in the language that this history happened in. “Did the German people know?” or “how much was the German Army involved in the Holocaust?” were intensely personal questions. I base my answers evident in this story on my family of origin’s individual history and the long, difficult hours spent speaking with family, German university professors, and archivists, as well as interviews with several eyewitnesses, including Elisabeth Scholl and Thomas Hartnagel.

Over ten years ago, I overcame an incident in graduate school when a professor asked if my grandmother deserved what happened to her as the Red Army descended upon Berlin in 1945. Twelve years later, when I guest lecture at colleges and universities on German resistance history during the Second World War, I get to answer different questions. Today’s students are asking about what it was like to live under a dictatorship. I see this as a new and important concern for understanding what it is like to live in a totalitarian society and a sign of appreciation for living in a free one.

Captain Hartnagel was an extremely brave man. Like Fritz, both my grandfathers fought in Hitler’s Army on the Russian Front, and my father, mother and aunt, as children, experienced the

horrors of war up close. Writing this story was often painful. My mother's father never returned from the POW camps in East Germany. Like my family of origin, Hartnagel was confronted daily by death as the Red Army surrounded the Sixth Army at Stalingrad and as it stormed through the Eastern territories, seeking revenge.

Fritz Hartnagel risked his life by writing what he saw to his best friend. Because he was an officer, his letters were not censored. Because Sophie's family was punished before the war by the Gestapo for subversive acts against the Party, she was careful in writing her letters.

Her resistance is most evident, therefore, through her actions, but Fritz's resistance must not be underestimated or minimized.

Here were two people caught on opposite sides of war—convinced of their moral imperative to not only know the truth but to bring it into the light.

I am honored to have written Fritz and Sophie's story and appreciate your interest in it.

—Alexandra Lehmann, Ridgefield, CT

