

Chapter 7_ Autobiography ...

Chapter Summary:

In this chapter, Howard W. Campbell, Jr. recounts significant moments from his early life in Schenectady, New York, where he was born on February 16, 1912. His father, an engineer with General Electric, was rarely home due to the demands of his job in the Service Engineering Department, which involved the installation and maintenance of heavy equipment globally. Campbell reflects on his father's single interest—an enormous picture book on the First World War. The significance of this book is somewhat of a mystery, as his father discouraged him from viewing it, stating it wasn't for children. Nevertheless, the young Campbell secretly looked at the disturbing images within, which foreshadowed his later experiences.

His mother, Virginia Crocker, was an amateur cellist and housewife, who Campbell describes as a beautiful yet troubled individual. With a tendency toward alcoholism, she often created strange demonstrations, such as a fire involving a mixture of rubbing alcohol and salt, which terrified her son, leading to a breaking of their bond. That period marked a shift in their relationship, as she withdrew, fearful of her own eccentricities.

In 1923, Campbell's father was assigned to Berlin, leading to a significant transformation in his life—he adopted the German language, made friends, and eventually became a playwright, marrying Helga Noth, the daughter of a Berlin police chief. Unlike his parents, who left Germany as World War II approached in 1939, Campbell remained. He became a writer and broadcaster for Nazi propaganda, recognized as an expert on American issues within the Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda.

His life took a dramatic turn toward the end of the war when he was captured by Lieutenant Bernard B. O'Hare of the American Third Army on April 12, 1945. Found in mufti, he was taken to Ohrdruf, where he was confronted with the stark realities of the Nazi death camps. Faced with the gallows designed for executions, the grim sight of six dead guards left a lasting impact on Campbell, who anticipated his own execution. A photograph capturing him during this moment became famed, nearly awarding a Pulitzer Prize for its haunting representation of the complexities of his past and the war he had been a part of.