



# In a Matter of the Heart- The Story of Little "Corina"

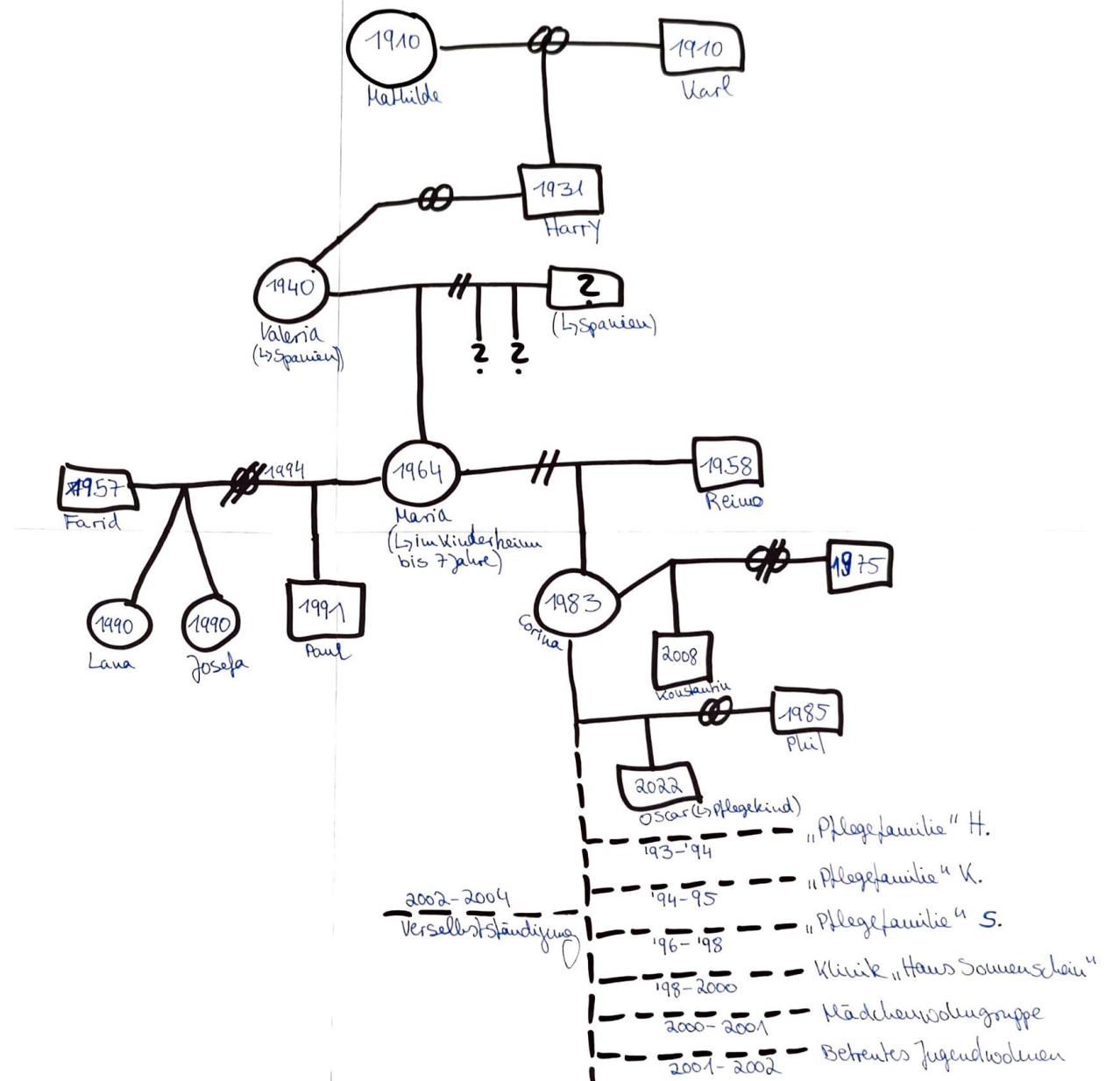
by  
Jennifer Höfler

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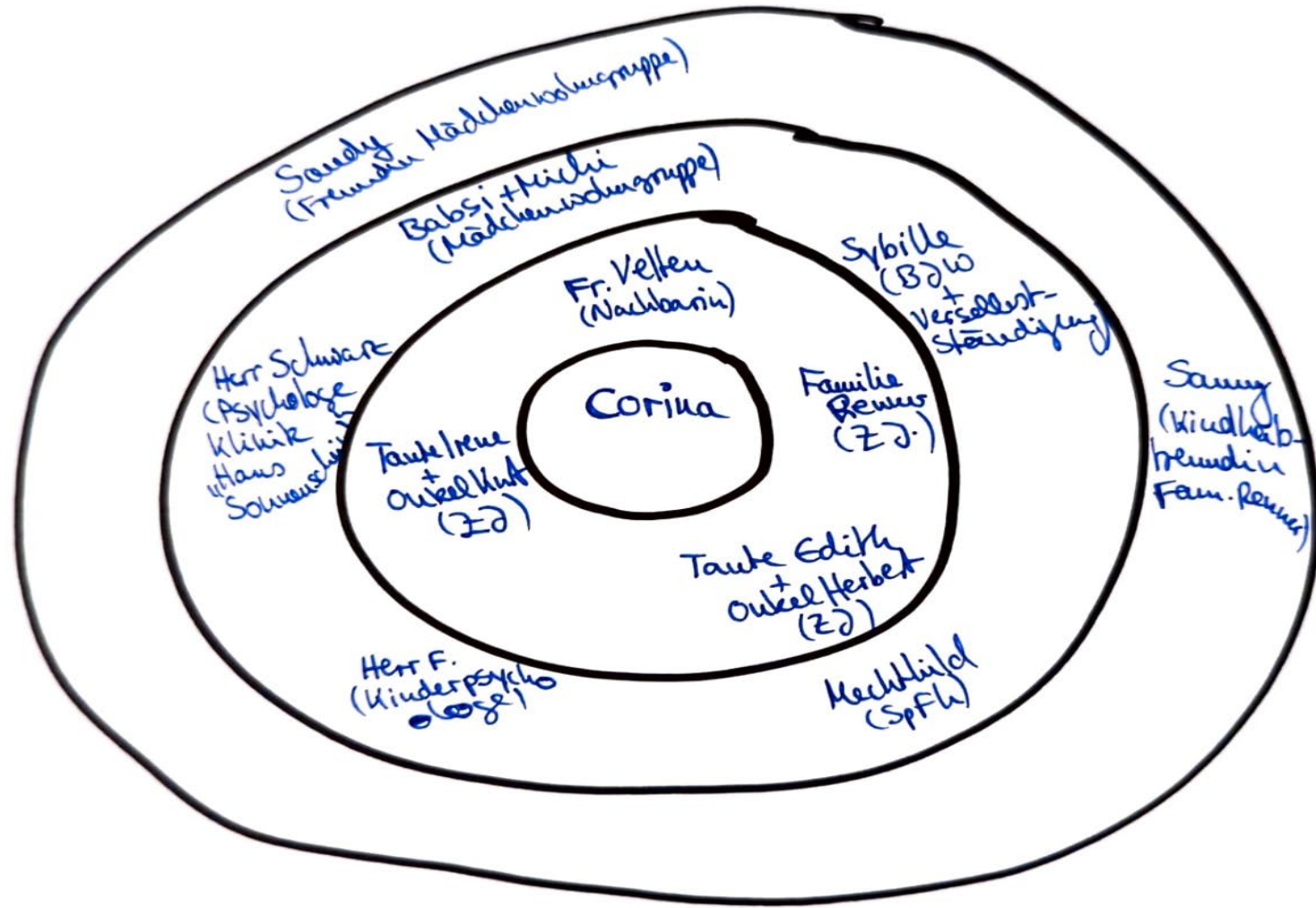


# Words & Pictures

## Corina's Genogram



# Netzwerk:



# Prehistory

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During her lifetime, Corina's mother Maria had good and healthy people around her, who accompanied her temporarily.

Maria was a victim of abuse and violence through her mother Valeria. Despite this, or in fact because of these traumatic experiences, she also became a perpetrator. Maria might have had opportunities, but not the potential and resources to come to terms with it in a holistic way. She was not able to break the cycle and do things differently with Corina and her siblings.



# Birth

Maria gave birth to Corina at the age of 19. In the first few months, Maria was alone with little Corina, so she was supported by Harry (partner of her mother Valeria) and his parents. Maria had met Reimo (Corina's father) when they were homeless.

Together, Maria and Reimo often consumed alcohol and drugs, and because of that Maria had to report regularly to a social welfare office during her pregnancy.

As a baby, Corina was left alone a lot by Maria, who sometimes didn't take good care of her. Ms. L from the youth welfare office regularly visited Maria and her little daughter at home until Corina was about three years old.

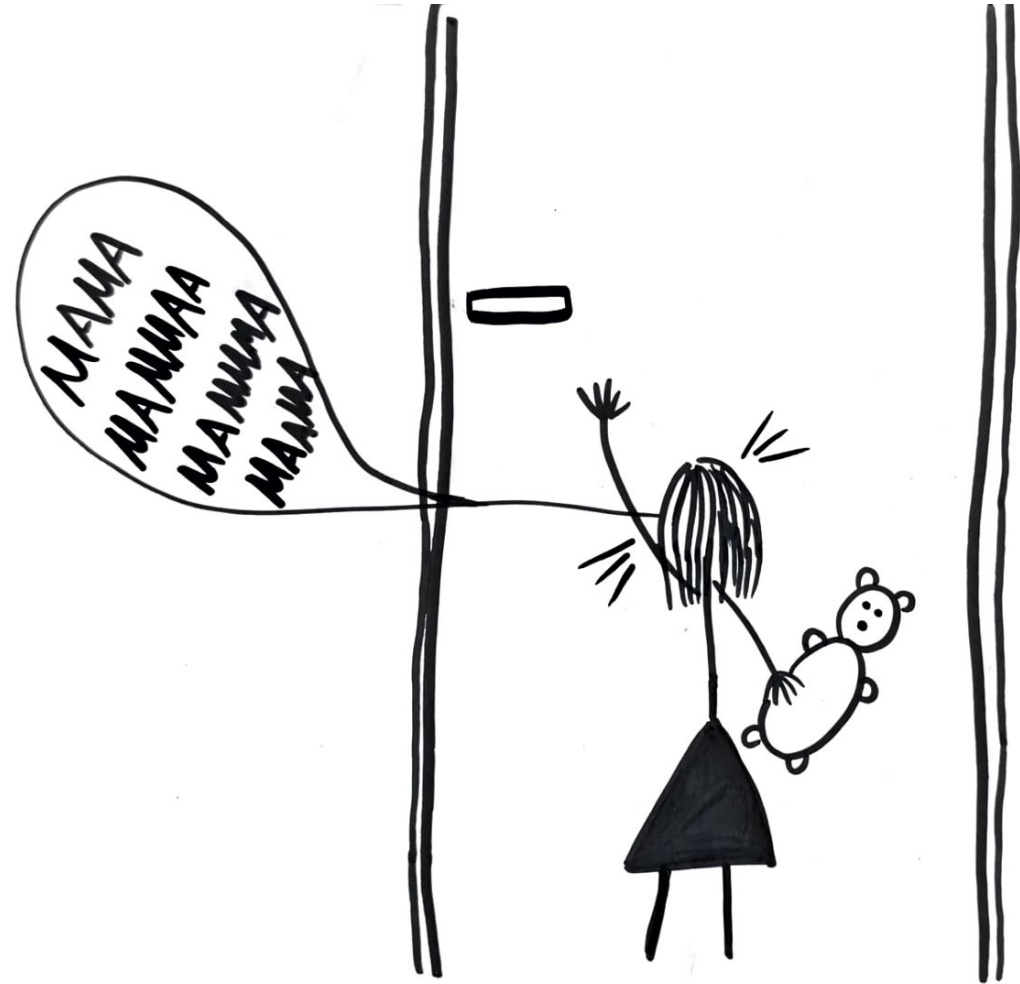


# First 4 Years of Life

When Corina was a few months old, Maria separated from Corina's father Reimo.

Since the age of about two years, Corina often woke up at night and knew: "Mum isn't there." Corina would shake the locked front door and cry. When Corina screamed loud for her mom, Maria would hit her when she returned.

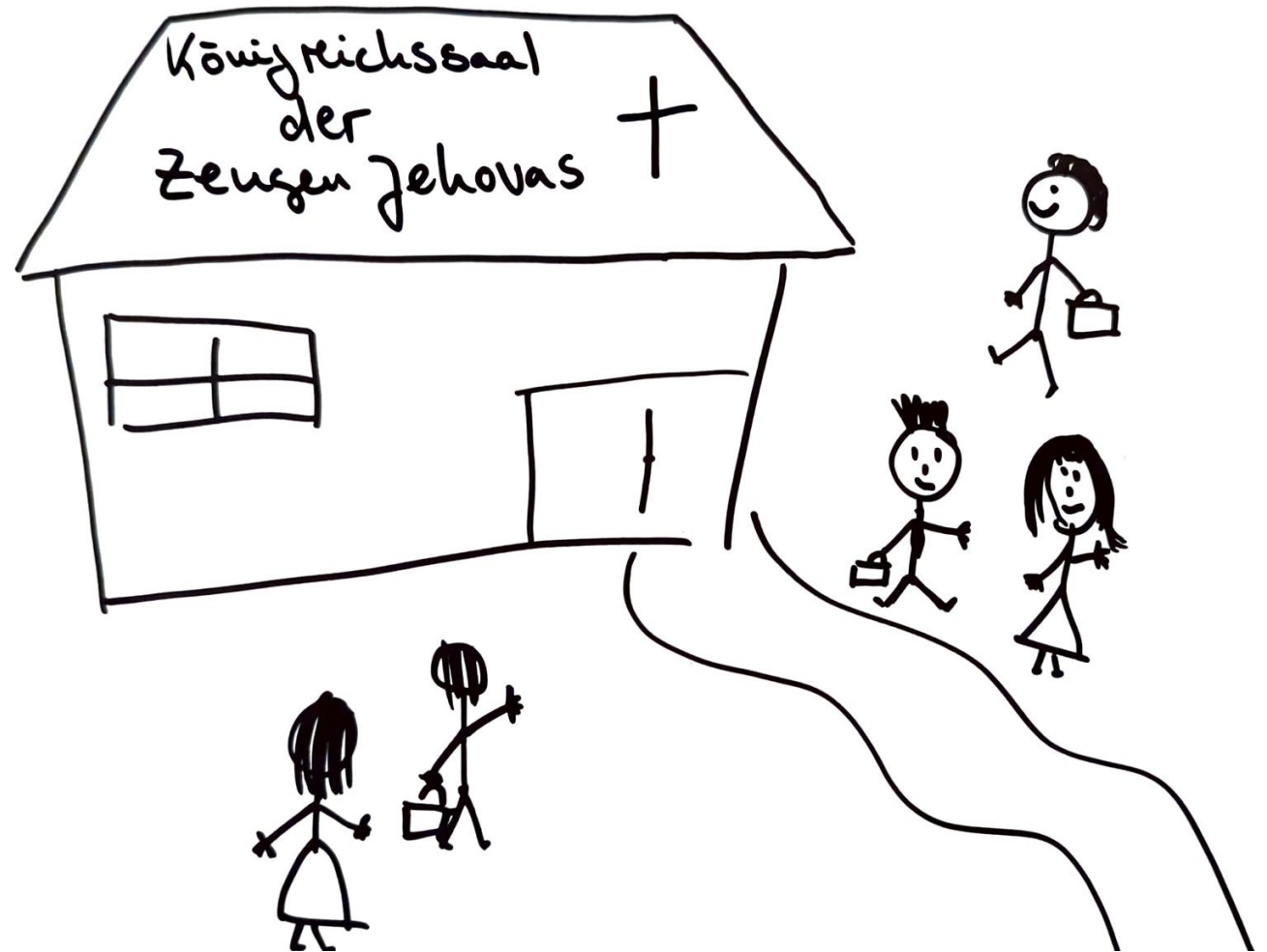
Corina therefore tried not to cry anymore when Maria was out at night. Corina then lay down in the hallway on the floor with her blanket and wait for her to return - she hoped. Corina can't remember how often this happened, just that it happened frequently.



# Jehovah's Witnesses

Maria lived alone with Corina until Corina was 4 years old. The Jehovah's Witnesses rang Maria's doorbell when Corina was still a small baby. They started a bible study with Maria and when Corina was two years old, her mother was accepted into the Jehovah's Witnesses church membership.

Certain members from the Jehovah's Witnesses helped Maria and Corina over the years. "Aunts and uncles" took care of Corina, picked her up and looked after her and allowed her to sleep over at their houses.



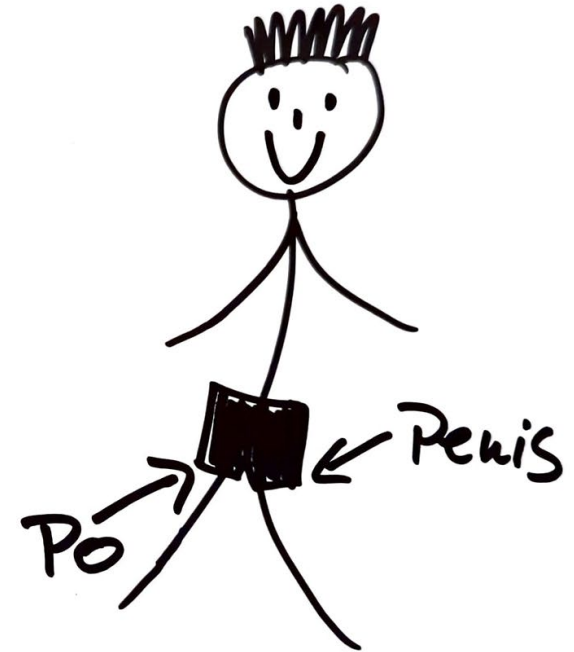
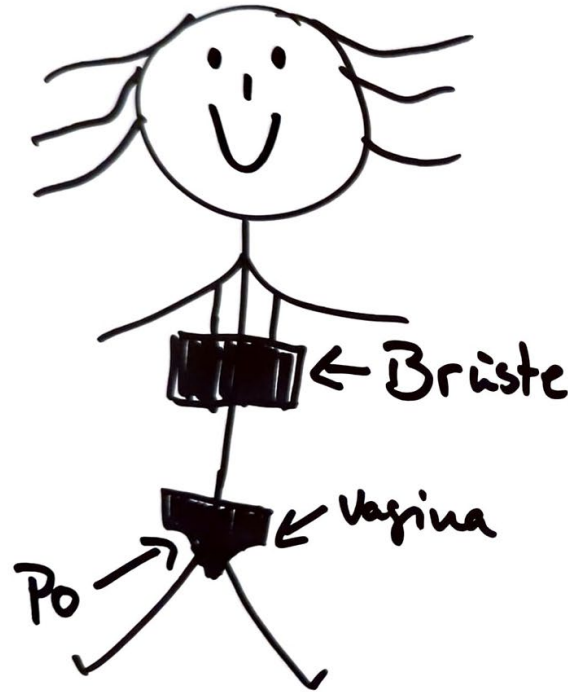
# Private Parts

Corina also remembers that during the time when she lived alone with her mother, they often played the princess game. Maria would dress Corina up as a princess and Maria would be the prince. During that game, Maria touched Corina's private parts again and again in a sexual ways that is not okay. Corina also had to touch her mother's private parts.

We want Corina and all children to know that this is not okay!! Corina felt that she had to trust her mother, but she also felt that something was wrong. But Corina also remembers that she didn't dare to say "no". And that she even laughed sometimes when it happened.

We all want Corina to know that this is called "sexual abuse" and that her behaviour as a child was normal. This is often what children do when sexual abuse happens to them, they get the feeling that they have invited the adult perpetrator.

Also, many children "block" their memory of things that have happened to them due to trauma. But children are never to blame!



# Corina 4 to 10 Years Old

When Corina was four years old, Maria met Farid. Farid was not from the Jehovah's Witness church and Maria and him used drugs together. Therefore, Maria was no longer allowed to be a part of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Maria became very aggressive after getting to know Farid. Not particularly against Corina this time, but against Farid. Maria screamed at Farid and beat him. The police often came to their home to separate the two. Sometimes the neighbours who called the police took Corina with them for a few hours, comforted her and calmed her down. In 1989, Maria and Farid got married.

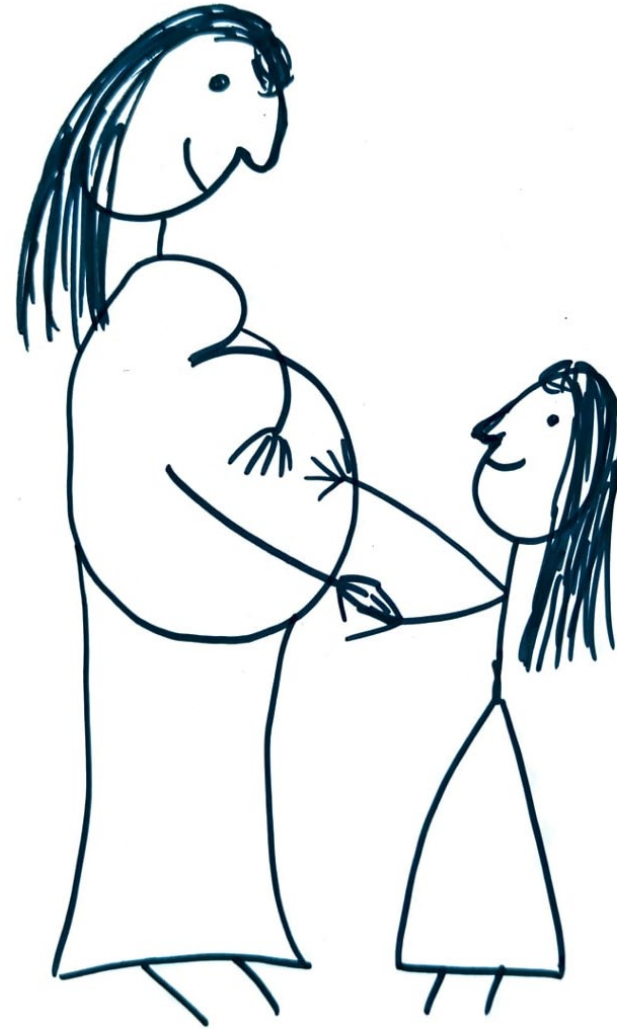


# Corina 4 to 10 Years Old

Pretty soon Maria was pregnant with twins. During the pregnancy, Maria was loving and even motherly towards Corina.

Corina could touch Maria's big baby bump and feel how the babies moved in it. Corina was delighted and happy because Maria was happy too.

During the pregnancy with the twins, Maria re-established contact with the Jehovah's Witnesses. She went to church with Corina and everyone there was very kind to Corina, and she was allowed to spend time with the other children there. She was also able to spend time with Aunt Irene and Uncle Kurt and his made Corina very happy!



# Corina 4 to 10 Years Old

In March 1990 (when Corina was 7 years old) the twins Lana and Josefa were born.

Sometimes when Farid hit Maria, he would run out of the house and drive away in his car. When Farid was gone, Maria would get very angry towards the children and beat them. Corina didn't understand why Maria hurt her so much.

Corina remembers that Maria then started beating the crying twin girls. After that, she left Corina and the little ones alone. Corina pulled the babies towards her when they were lying on the floor. She stroked Lana and Josefa and hugged them. Corina was relieved when they started crying again. That meant they were still alive.

At the same time, Maria apologised often to Corina and then they went on fun trips, and she gave her sweets. Most of the time, the babies were left at home alone. Corina was worried about that, but still, she was so happy about spending time with her mum!



# Corina 4 to 10 Years Old

When Corina was 7 years old, she met the neighbour Ms. Velten. From then on, Ms. Velten was the most important person in Corina's life. She was often her lifesaver. Ms. Velten helped Maria and the children with money and clothing and food.

When Maria was angry with her eldest daughter, she would choke and beat Corina, often until Corina's face was covered in blood or Corina lost consciousness. Maria also pressed the pillow on Corina's face at night so Corina could not breathe. She also showered Corina in hot and cold water, banged her head against the sink until her teeth broke off and held her head under water for a long time. Sometimes Corina managed to escape through the front door.

Fortunately, Ms. Velten let Corina into her apartment! And she said to Corina: "Don't be afraid. I will help you."



# Corina 4 to 10 Years Old

Ms. Velten spoke to Ms. M. from the youth welfare office on the phone. Ms. M. visited Maria and the children at home a few times.

Maria became pregnant again when Corina was 8 years old. Maria's mental state worsened during her pregnancy with her little brother Paul. Farid shouted at Maria and hit her even more often than usual. Even when she was heavily pregnant with Paul, Maria lay bleeding on the floor and crying. Corina watched this and couldn't stop screaming until she lost her voice.

Paul was born in April 1991. Maria tried to look after all her children but couldn't manage it on her own. She was often unable to get up during the day. Corina looked after the younger siblings, changed their diapers, made their bottles, cooked porridge and fed them the best she could for her young age.

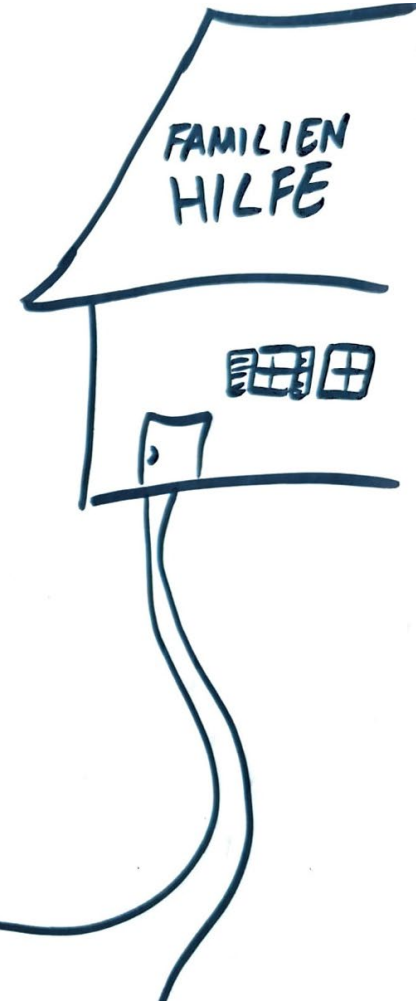


# Corina 4 to 10 Years Old

When the little siblings were about one and two years old and Corina was 8 years old, family helpers came to Maria and the children. But after a few visits from the helpers, Maria got angry with the women and didn't allow them to come into the house anymore.

Corina thinks that it was because she sometimes showed them the injuries that Maria had inflicted on her and the little ones.

One day a social worker called Mechthild came to the family after Maria had hit Corina again, and she took Corina into her home. She was allowed to stay there for a few days, and she was so happy to be able to be with Mechthild. Corina remembers how comfortable and safe she felt in Mechthild's family with her children, and she would have liked to stay with Mechthild.



# Corina 4 to 10 Years Old

In the summer of '93 (Corina was 9 years old), she was taken in by the H. family because Maria was having delusions and had to go to a clinic. The H. family were Jehovah's Witnesses. But the H. family accused Corina of stealing and lying.

Corina didn't know how to behave differently. She often got stomach aches and fevers. She was taken to the children's clinic where there were lovely doctors and nurses who looked after Corina. Corina was taken there several times by the H. family. She really enjoyed being in the children's clinic.

After eight months, all the children came back to Maria when she was discharged from the clinic. Even though Corina wasn't feeling good within the H. family, she was very afraid of going back to Maria.

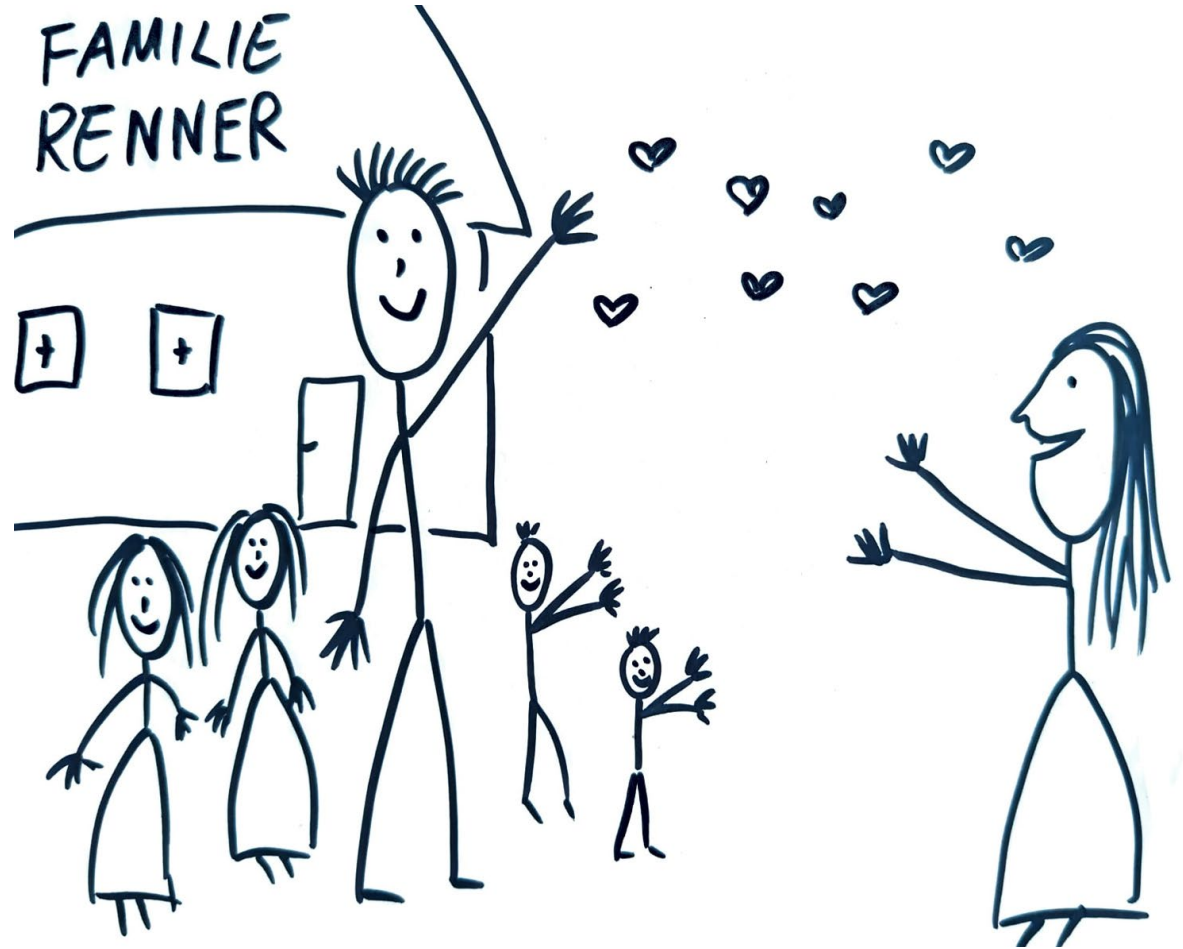


# Corina 4 to 10 Years Old

It went well for a few months, and sometimes it was nice to be at home with Maria and her children. But then Maria and Farid divorced in 1994 and Maria stopped taking her medication regularly. Maria started hitting her children again, especially Corina. Farid moved to England in 1995, and only came a few times to visit and pick up the children.

During this time, Uncle Herbert and Aunt Edith, as well as Aunt Irene and Uncle Kurt (all Jehovah's Witnesses), were very important to the family. Corina asked if she could live with the other families forever because she was afraid of Maria. Corina learned that the Witnesses could only protect her for a short time.

Corina's fondest memories are of the Renner family. Maria has known the Renner family since Corina was a little baby and spent a lot of time there with Corina back then. Corina has so many carefree and happy memories of spending time with that family!



# Corina 10 to 14 Years Old

In 1995, Corina came to live with another family of Jehovah's Witnesses (family K.). Before that, she had only been back with Maria and her siblings for a few months. Corina lived with the K. family for a year, then she also returned to Maria.

Corina remembers one of her worst experiences when she was about twelve years old. Maria forced her to strip naked and ride her bike through town to the R. family. Corina did this because Maria threatened to kill her otherwise. After this experience, Corina did not have to go back to Maria's home.

Corina was taken in by the S. family - they were also members of the JW church. Corina lived there for a year and a half and after a few months the pressure from the Jehovah Witnesses became very high for Corina. She endured hours of interrogation by their elders, as well as accusations and threats. Corina saw no way out of her situation, so she took sleeping pills at school. People were worried and took her to the hospital and she did not have to go back to the S. family. This time Corina was allowed to stay in the children's clinic for almost three weeks.



# Corina 14 to 16 Years Old

Haus Sonnenschein, a psychiatric clinic for children and young people was Corina's next stop. She was alone and only had a garbage bag with some clothes in it, but Corina remembers that she was still excited and full of hope. She could feel inside herself that her life would now be different and better. Corina lived at Haus Sonnenschein for 14 months.

Corina was able to have completely new and important life experiences there. Her therapist and the carers believed her when she told them about her experiences with Maria and the Jehovah's Witnesses. They recognized Corina and took her seriously. Even though she often couldn't eat, and she sometimes hurt herself and inflicted many wounds on herself, she met other young people and made friends. She celebrated her birthday there for the first time in her life and for her this was a version of life that she had never known before.

In January 2000, it was time for Corina to say goodbye. She had just turned 16 and was fearful. However, the therapist, Mr. Schwarz and the carers encouraged Corina! This time no taxi and no garbage bag. The bus was full - with Corina and with her new life!



# Corina 16 to 18 Years Old

Corina lived in the girls' residential group for a year and a half. Corina tried alcohol and continued to self-harm there as well.

The carers continued to support Corina and did not reject her even though she broke many rules, committed juvenile delinquencies and was often absent from school. She still managed to get her first school leaving qualification there!

At the age of 17, Corina found out that her siblings no longer lived with Maria. Maria tried to kill herself and her three children. The police and Ms. M. placed Josefa, Lana, and Paul in foster families.



# Corina from the Age of 18

At almost 18 years old - in the summer of 2001 - Corina wanted to move out into a shared apartment. Ms. M. from the youth welfare office agreed: Corina would be looked after by Sibylle in a small shared apartment. In August 2001, Corina moved into the shared apartment.

Corina lived in the shared apartment until February 2003. Corina still had trouble eating regularly, sometimes cut herself and began to take drugs regularly. But after a while, life there improved for Corina.

Corina had great trust in Sibylle and shared her thoughts, joys, worries and wishes with her. Sibylle accompanied and supported Corina as a young adult until she was 21 years old.

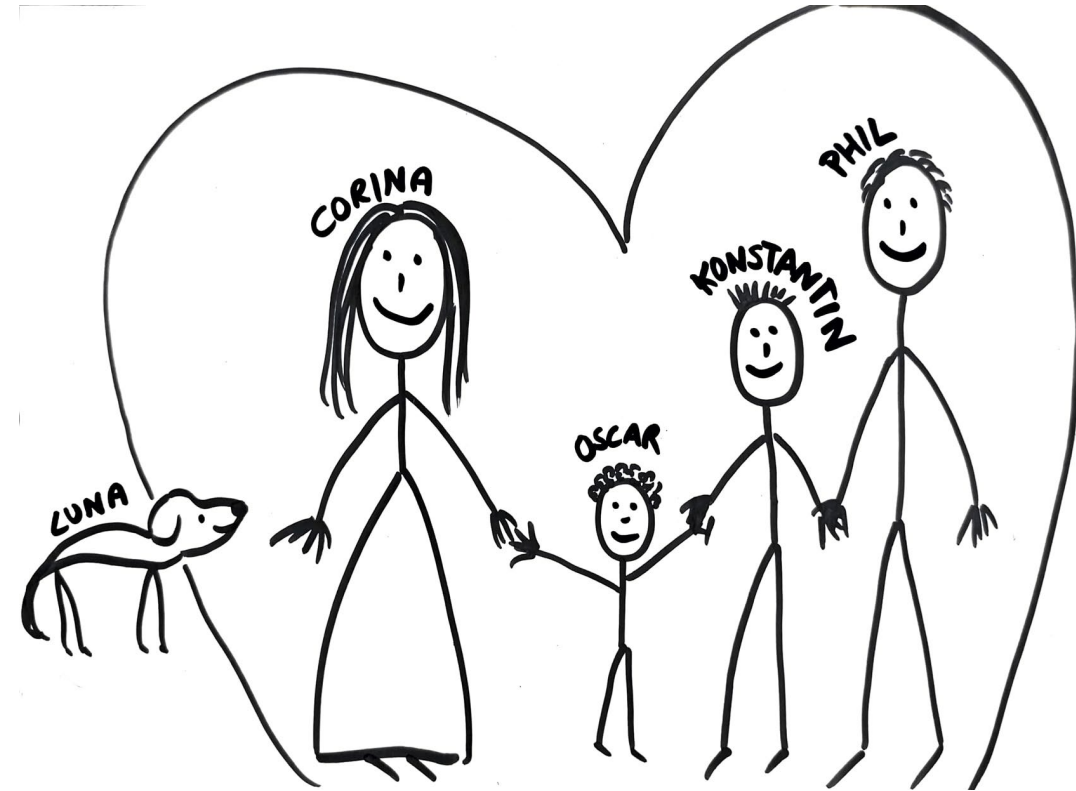


# Epilogue

Corina gave birth to a son in 2008. When Konstantin was born, Corina remembered so many things from her childhood and felt very burdened. She reached out for help, first from Dr. Schwarz, who had already been treating her at Haus Sonnenschein and then Corina began trauma therapy which accompanied her intensively throughout her life for the next ten years. The professional support enabled Corina to work through and heal many experiences from her childhood.

Corina then met Phil in 2015, after living alone with her son Konstantin for some time. Phil gave her his heart and that gave Corina a lot of strength, courage and hope.

Phil and Corina got married and took baby Oscar into their family as a foster child. Corina now works with children and young people who share their life struggles. She now tries to bring hope to these young people and into their lives with her daily work.





# Messages by Jennifer

and her companions



- Faith!
- Unconditional Acceptance
- Still - Life is beautiful!
- Sometimes we are not only professionals - also just humans.
- In between all the broken glass - recognizing the positive.
- Guilt and shame are paralyzing.
- In every children's story is truth.
- Be brave!