

Nurse Amalie Teske

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Note: The European Lutheran Deaconess Movement, which emerged in the 1800s, saw women serving in various ministries of mercy, including care for the sick, the poor, and those in need. The woman who belonged to this service was known as a *Schwester*. In German that means “Sister” and, in this case, can also be translated as “Nurse” because her service also included medical activity. I will be using the term “Sister” throughout the translation.

Information within [brackets] are comments by the translator.

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[Translation Begins]

Sister Amalie Teske

A life story, told by Ilse Meyer

Sister Amalie Teske was born on 21 December, 1868, in the German colony of Bergdorf in the Cherson *Gouvernement*. Her father was a farmer. It was certainly a shock for the parents when they discovered that their newborn child had a lame right hand. But little Amalie, who knew nothing different, grew up healthy and lively and managed as best as she could in school with her left hand when writing. Gradually, she gained such skill in it that in later years, nothing could be noted about her handwriting.

What would become of Amalie, the parents wondered, as she had been confirmed and had grown up. Then they learned about the Deaconess Institution in Sarata, and at the age of seventeen, Amalie decided to enter there as a student. In response to her inquiry, she received the answer that she could be admitted. On 25 September, 1886, she arrived in Sarata, and now a new life began for her. However, Mother Superior (*Oberschwester*) Rosine Tröster had her doubts, because with her paralyzed right hand, the new student initially gave no great hopes. She started her service in the kitchen. She worked diligently and was by no means unskilled. In addition, she attended school hours with the other female students with Sister Magdalene Kowalsky and lessons in religion, church history, and the call to serve the poor and the oppressed (*Diakonie*) with the Rector, Pastor Alfons Meyer.

On 23 November, 1890, Sister Amalie was made an Assistant-Sister, and at twenty-five years old, according to the House rules, she was consecrated on 8 May, 1893. The celebration took place on the annual festival. The rector gave a speech about John 15:5: “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me, you can do nothing.” On this festive day, Sister Amalie wore her complete Sister’s attire for the first time—it was the garment of the Neuendettelsau Sisters [a city in Middle Franconia, Germany]—and received the Golden Sister’s Cross on a Black Satin Ribbon, which was presented to her and put on her by the Mother Superior during the consecration. There were always several Sisters who were consecrated together, having previously attended the Joint Consecration Class with the Rector, and they remained connected through this experience in the future.

During the seven years of her probation, Sister Amalie worked at various stations of the Mother House and got to know them: after the kitchen duty came the laundry duty, the gardening duty, and the sewing room. Then she had to take over the mentally handicapped room, and thereafter learn nursing in the hospital with night shifts and outpatient care, and finally care for the elderly, who were temporarily housed in the Mother House. Everywhere, Sister Amalie could be considered satisfactory; she was increasingly developing into a diligent worker. In December of 1893, she was sent to her first private nursing position in Sarata with Mrs. Franz Hobbacher, to whom she was distantly related.

Her holidays, at first just two weeks a year, then as an Auxiliary Sister three weeks, and as a Full Sister she had four weeks off, which she mostly spent in her homeland, where she always loved to stay. However, it also happened that she was either invited to the Klöstitz pastoral office to Pastor Peters or to Tatarbuniar to the Isert family, both families belonging to the closest friends of the Sisters and the Institution.

Sister Amalie did not take it easy; work was not a burden for her, but a pleasure, and so she was often asked to cover for others and never declined. She always organized her daily work in a way that allowed her to finish everything, she was very practical and approached her tasks skillfully. Back then, there were few conveniences in the household and, especially in Bessarabia, one had to work hard. Additionally, the climate, due to the cold in winter and the heat in summer, was harmful to the health of many people. When a severe influenza was rampant and one did not fully recover from it, it could lead to various complications that resulted in more serious illnesses. These particularly included tuberculosis and rheumatism. After several years, Sister Amalie developed persistent rheumatic pains, which prompted her, on the advice of the hospital doctor, to go to Budaki in the summer of 1895 to take mud baths there. This was Sister Amalie's first visit to Budaki on the Black Sea. She stayed with the Gassert family from Akkerman, who took in guests at their summer house in Budaki. The bath treatment with the healing mud from the Liman [a long narrow lagoon near the mouth of a river] suited Sister Amalie well, and she enjoyed her stay by the sea so much that over the years, she gladly returned whenever she felt the coldness of winter.

In the following year, 1896, Sister Amalie was sent to Arzis to take the place of Sister Sofie Baisch, who was ill and had to take a longer rest. The unit “Bethel” in Arzis, for the male wards of the Deaconess Institution in Sarata, was established in 1886 and was initially housed in a

rented building. So, under Pastor Jürgens, the Men's Station was created in Arzis for old, ailing, feeble-minded, and epileptic men, with each respective pastor taking on the role of Deputy Rector. Unfortunately, the term of the very popular and vigorous Pastor Jürgens was short; he fell ill with typhus after three years and died. He is buried in the old cemetery in Arzis.

Only under his second successor, Pastor Theophil Meyer, was the construction of a house for the Men's Station started. Pastor Meyer knew how to call the entire parish to cooperate, and so all five main congregations participated in the construction of the House of Mercy by providing labor and materials. The congregation of Arzis provided the building site on the church's land behind the church. For all these contributions, each congregation was granted a special right: they were allowed to house one parish ward in the Institution free of charge. For twenty-five years, there were always five free places for the five communities of the Arzis parish until the year 1917. On 23 September, 1892, the ceremonial dedication of the newly built house "Bethel" took place in Arzis. The dedication was conducted by Bishop Freifeld from St. Petersburg, who was then on a church visitation in the Bessarabia Church District.

On 17 January, 1898, Sister Sofie Baisch returned to her post, but after two years she was called to the School for the Deaf and Dumb in Worms, in the province of Cherson, and Sister Amalie was chosen to be her successor. This marked a decisive turn in the life of Sister Amalie. She took over the leadership at "Bethel" and worked there for twenty-one years until the end of 1919.

In this work, Sister Amalie unfolded all her shining abilities. Through vigor and caution with practical sense, she soon established an orderly, firm regime among the men; they followed her word for word and all carried out their tasks as she had assigned them according to their strengths. There was, for example, *The Old One (die Alt)* named by Sister Amalie because he, as she said, "came here like an old woman." The Old One had to guard the young chicks and ducklings every spring and summer for years, and "she" was always seen roaming around with a long rod in hand, making sure that the unreasonable "poultry" (*Ziefer*) did not wander into gardens of people or that unfamiliar people did not stray into the grounds of the Institution.

For many years, Konrad from Klöstitz was the "chief overseer" on the yard, until his strength failed him and he received a reasonable and reliable successor through the blind Gottlob. It was astonishing how the blind man found his way around the House and yard, and only when he had to go to the village, to the people, on the behalf of Sister Amalie did he have an attendant from among the younger wards. He was very faithful and diligent in his work, knowledgeable about cows and calves, about pigs and piglets, and when a horse and wagon were gotten, Gottlob regarded it as his special task to take care of that as well; indeed, he took great pride in being able to satisfy Sister Amalie. And she was, for blind Gottlob was her best support.

One day, an orphan was brought from Odessa, a boy of about five years old, of whom nothing was known, only that his name was Johannes and that he was mentally challenged. Even upon questioning, nothing could be elicited from him. Sister Amalie definitely took him in—of course, there was no talk of foster care payment—determined his birthday and year, named him "Löwa," [Löwe = Lion] because he had murmured something like that, and because there was already a Johannes. And so, Löwa stayed in the Institution. Such a renaming of the name had also been experienced by Edja, who was also named Johannes. Sister Amalie spent a lot of time

with him when he reached school age. But all the effort applied to teach him the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic failed due to his intellectual incapacity, and so it had to be given up. Over the years, Edja grew bigger and stronger, could perform his small tasks in household chores, but his mind diminished more and more; he could no longer speak a sensible word and usually had quite a sullen expression.

And now there was Hannes [Johnny], who was the only one of his name to retain it in the abbreviation. He was a quiet ward, feeble-minded, and his special task was to carry water and sweep the yard. He did this not only daily at the Institution but also earnestly and faithfully every Saturday at the parsonage. For this, he earned a little pocket money, which he always gave to Sister Amalie. With it, she bought him “a little rose-colored shirt,” which was his joy and pride to possess. At Christmas, there was regularly a piece of “scented soap,” a small bottle of perfume, which Hannes called “Chi” (from Russian: *Duchi-Perfume*), and a handkerchief at his place next to the plate along with the pastries and sweets that everyone received.

Häuser was and remained a big child. He was always cheerful and smiled at everyone. He possessed extraordinary physical strength, but also an extraordinary appetite, so that he had to do all the work that required physical exertion. The sacks of grain, when the collections from the communities were brought in during autumn, the big, strong child lifted like a toy to the ground. His particular passion was playing the harmonica, and there was no greater joy for him than someone listening to him play with enthusiasm while he thumped his foot against the door to keep the beat. At Christmas and after the harvest time, when he had diligently helped a farmer, he received his beloved instrument as a gift. He managed to get through the year with these two.

These and similar patients spent their lives in the Institution and were known throughout the village. They came from all communities, mostly epileptics and the mentally handicapped, but also old and sick individuals. There were sometimes severe cases among them. Sister Amalie cared for each one, attending to the bedridden patients, often for years, keeping the healthy in discipline and order and engaged in daily work. Pastor Peters once said about her: “The Sister who rules the men.” Yes, she understood this with firmness and calm, with a sure instinct, but also with a heart full of generosity and kindness. She was assisted by two younger Sisters, who were often rotated, especially when they still had to attend classes at the Mother House. Sister Amalie had to continually train the young assistant Sisters again and get accustomed to them. Station “Bethel” was referred to by the Sisters who had to work under Sister Amalie as “the test of fire.” She expected a lot from them, especially what she demonstrated herself: loyalty and self-sacrifice, the same from the housemaids. Despite her strictness and somewhat rough nature, Sister Amalie was a true mother of the House, who cared for the large, mixed family to the best of her ability and attended to every emergency. And what difficulties she had to overcome along the way, the disputes she had to resolve, the unreasonable behavior of those half or not at all rational people! What infinite patience was needed and daily renewed endurance in teaching them to work! Sister Amalie never despaired, she was never seen without courage or heard complaining. She knew the source of strength and the refuge in the hills, from which help comes to us, and the eternal God did not forsake the faithful maid. He helped her over and over again so that she could confidently fulfill her tasks. She did not talk much about it, she went her way like a child holding the hand of her Father, from whom she knew that He would provide for them all. In all the irregularities she had to deal with, her quick wit and maternal cleverness often

helped her; she could simply brush past a difficult point with a few words of her dry humor and make the contentious issue disappear as if it had never existed. This was a great gift of hers.

In this way she completed her tasks with the wards entrusted to her, with the students, the young Sisters, and the housemaids. The household ran like clockwork, there was order, cleanliness, and punctuality. Sister Amalie assigned the work herself, she was present everywhere in the kitchen and cellar, in the yard and garden, in the stables, and nothing escaped her sharp eye. In larger economic matters, the House Father assisted her. For many years, Johann Maas served this duty alongside his duties at the church. He was always ready when Sister Amalie needed help or advice, sometimes also to threaten with the stick or to give a beating if one of the wards had done something wrong. Even Häuser was no match for him, for he was most afraid of the stick and trembled before it, just as he did before the “*Pelzmärtel*”, who appeared every year on the evening before the sixth of December in the Institution. This role was always taken on by one of the young Sisters, and the success was overwhelming.

The pastor was of course also part of the management and administration of the “Bethel” House. Every week he held a devotion in the dining hall, where the harmonium stood, an old instrument that sometimes failed. Usually, a younger Sister played along with the singing of the gathered House community. Sister Amalie could do everything, just not sing! She did try, but always a quarter or a half tone off. In addition to the already miserable singing of the residents, their false tones were too much even for an only moderately musical ear, but what comes from the heart is pleasing to God, and He surely did not despise the praise of these poorest and their guiding Sister. During Lent and on an Advent Sunday, Holy Communion was also celebrated here by those who were confirmed and the elderly.

Sister Amalie had a friendly relationship with the pastor and his family. For twelve years, she worked with Pastor Karl Artur Hanson and then with his successor, Pastor Rudolf Meyer. She saw the children grow up in both families, she was one of the favorite friends of the parsonage and for all domestic celebrations, everyone gathered together here and there. Sister Amalie took joy when the whole family of the pastor came to the birthdays of the Sisters in the Institution; only then was the birthday truly a celebration for her. She often said, “We Sisters have no weddings, no baptisms, no confirmations, so we want to celebrate our birthdays beautifully!” There was always wonderful sweet bread, fluffy and soft like wool, and depending on the time of the year either an apple and plum cake or a *Riebeleskuchen* (*Streuselkuchen*/crumb cake), prepared especially fine. Sister Amalie was a cook and baking artist like no other. After the coffee break in the dining and work room of the Sisters, one would sit and chat together in Sister Amalie’s cozy room, which was divided into a living and sleeping area by a curtain. And Sister Amalie told stories from the life of the Institution. And it was delightful how she narrated in her fresh and lively manner, with the resolute tone that was characteristic of her. It was a world, set apart from all the busy life, which had its own distinct character, and in the quiet sitting room of the Sisters with the flower pots by the window, one could forget worries and the unrest of the day for a little while. How beautiful it was!

The health condition of Sister Amalie was not always the best; she often suffered from rheumatic pain. Her first stay in Budaki had to be followed by others. In the summer of 1903, she went back there to take mud baths after she had spent her vacation traveling with Sister Magdalene

Kowalsky the year before. Since it was not so easy to cover the accommodation and treatment costs in Budaki—although the Sisters received a subsidy from the Institution's fund, it still was not enough—Sister Amalie was looking for a solution. And it came to her just in the right moment when old Mr. Gassert gifted the Sisters a little spot by the seaside, which was indeed no larger than for a weekend cottage. Sister Amalie then developed her plans and diligently gathered all the materials of wood, glass, bricks, and so on for the construction of a small modest garden cottage during the winter. She then went there herself early in the summer, took a strong Sister with her, as well as Edja for handyman tasks, and with a fully loaded cart, they arrived in Budaki. Here she sought an inexpensive worker, with whose help the small cottage was built, so that the Sisters could move in. Every year, the facility was completed both indoors and outdoors, and during the course of the three summer months, several Sisters were able to stay there, take their baths, and recover in the air and sunshine or in the wave bath of the Black Sea. This was the achievement of Sister Amalie, who tirelessly ensured the small summer home in Budaki and always used it herself, until the Sisters were able to build a much nicer and larger recovery home for Sisters and children in Bad Burnas in 1928.

Since the First World War, and even more so, since Bessarabia was annexed to Romania, all those Sisters who had their homes over there could no longer travel to visit their relatives [east of the Dniester River]; in fact, they did not know anything about them for years. Sister Amalie was also affected by this. That is why she was doubly happy to have a place in Budaki where she could spend her holidays undisturbed, and she returned each time strengthened and grateful. The war and years of hardship did not pass Sister Amalie by unnoticed. The work increased due to the rising number of patients. When she started, there were twenty patients, but now there were already thirty-six, with many new applications waiting for placement; and the renovations and expansions of the buildings of the Institution placed a lot of heavy work on her shoulders. She felt that her strength was declining and longed for a quieter role. She hardly allowed herself a moment's rest in Arzis. If she was not busy in the kitchen—she always cooked for everyone—or occupied at the House, and there was nothing special to do in the garden or elsewhere, she made her sick visits in the village, and only rarely on Sunday afternoons did she go over to see her friend, the old Mrs. (*Frau*) Katharina Rudel, who had been a Sister in Sarata for ten years.

Sister Amalie was also a faithful churchgoer; she always saw to it that all household members, including the wards who were rational, regularly attended worship services. She herself conducted the devotions in the House in the mornings and evenings by reading from a devotion book, then there was singing and praying, and afterwards it was time for work, each at their post or to rest in the evening.

In 1919, after twenty-one years of work in Arzis, Sister Amalie resigned her position, celebrated her quiet farewell in a small circle with Pastor Rudolf Meyer and his family, Mrs. Rudel, and the House Father, Gottfried Schuh, and then left the place of her life's work. What a person had to thank her for became alive again after her departure among those who continued her work. In the Mother House in Sarata, Sister Amalie took on the significantly quieter work in the cloakroom, soon settled in, and was satisfied. In addition, she assisted with the sick and deaths, substituted for a Sister, and whatever Sister Amalie took on and did, one could rely on it; it was accomplished, and everything worked out well.

On 17 October, 1926, the “Evening Peace” (*Abendfrieden*), the Rest House of the Sisters, was dedicated in Sarata under the Rector, Pastor Gotthold Winger, and Sister Amalie took over the House management. Together with her, Sister Anna Weber moved into the “Evening Peace,” and of the six rooms, one was furnished as a guest room, and in one, the night nurse from the hospital could rest peacefully. How grateful the Sisterhood was for this quiet, peaceful home, which was built with the funds that the Sisters had received for private nursing.

When Sister Amalie had been at “Evening Peace” for a year, she experienced the changes in the Mother House brought about by the change of the leading Sister. When the long-time Mother Superior Rosine Tröster passed away in August of 1919, Sister Magdalene Kowalsky took her place. After a few years, she felt that her strength was no longer adequate for the great task, and she moved to “Evening Peace”, and in 1927, Sister Lina Farr from Germany took over the leadership of the Institution. It was a brief blessed service that God the Lord had granted through the beloved “Mother Lina” to the Sarata Institution. A year later, she passed away at the blooming age of thirty-eight, from typhus, deeply mourned by all the Sisters, the Sarata community, and all the other circles she had come into contact with through her joyful work.

The area of work for Sister Amalie had expanded to the house and garden of “Evening Peace”, but she was happy to be able to care for everyone, and the pretty Sister Home looked very inviting inside and out. People were happy to come here; it was a little piece of “peace on earth” that one could gratefully enjoy. Here, Sister Amalie led her quiet, secluded life, and she participated in the joys and sorrows of the Mother House, especially when the new successor to Sister Lina arrived. There was also a Bible House Sister from Germany, who returned [to Germany] after three years. Now Sister Cäcilie Tröster took on the position of Mother Superior, and there was hope that the turbulent years would lead to a peaceful course. The Lord fulfilled this hope and bestowed some peaceful years on the Mother House until the Resettlement in 1940.

As long as her strength allowed it, Sister Amalie still enjoyed her visits not only in the village and at the Mother House and in the other houses of the Institution, but she also liked to visit her friends and acquaintances, especially joyfully in Arzis. However, a worsening arteriosclerosis slowly became apparent. In 1936, it came to the point where one of her legs had to be amputated. She decided to do so in firm trust in God, who guided her on this difficult path, and willingly and patiently surrendered herself to His further guidance. All who knew and loved her carried her distress in their praying hearts. The operation was performed, Doctor Dobler hoped that the illness would now come to a standstill, but the heart of Sister Amalie could no longer withstand the great demands. The following day she gently passed away, without having regained consciousness. It was a hot summer day when the body of Sister Amalie was placed among many flowers in the Prayer Hall of the Institution. Pastor Winder delivered the funeral sermon at the coffin, and then the Sisters and all of us accompanied dear Sister Amalie on her final journey to the cemetery. She was now allowed to rest from her work and be at home with the Lord whom she had served in her life: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on; yes, says the Spirit, so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them”... (Revelation 14:13.)

[Translation Ends]