

# How I Overcame My Inventor's Block

Hallett German

An Amazi Chronicles Prequel Story

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**[In the Amazi Chronicles, you see both Romy (later called Tammy) as a clumsy and as an accomplished female inventor in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. But how she made the transformation is not covered... until decribed below.]**

Humans are such an unhappy lot. We are always waiting for something – a mate, a child, a check, a house, a dance request, sleep, and other such things. At 17, I wanted none of those items. I just wanted

to be an inventor like my dead Poppa. He taught me so much before losing his spirit while working on an invention for the University of Vienna. My mother died of a broken heart shortly after Poppa passed away. Then my sister Katharina and myself (Romy) were sent to live in faraway Klagenfurt with my Aunt. It was so different from my dear Vienna. There were forests, mountains, and the routines of a smaller city. Many people here spoke Slovene which was new to me. My Aunt loved my mother and was kind to us. I had a little workshop in the back of the house where I worked on my inventions. How I loved to build things or at least to try to build things. Sadly, none of my creations ever worked. Poppa said that I did not spend enough time on the research and design phase. I don't see why that should matter. It is better to just start creating and see what works.

There were only two companions that I could ever share my intimate thoughts about this creation process with. One is Poppa and he's gone. And the other is my dear cousin Joseph and he was somewhere in Russia. Even though we spent one summer together, I felt that he connected with me in a way that Momma and my sister never could when it came to inventions. Although he had not made anything creative to date, somehow I still knew he was one of us. However, I also greatly hated him since he spent a good deal of time with Poppa during that last summer. Precious time that rightly should have been mine.

I went to classes and spent time with my sister whose mood alternated between hate and shock. She wanted a boyfriend badly but was too different from the local girls for that to happen. The local boys saw her as a rich Viennese snob and sought nothing but to humiliate her. She cried in her room so often. My aunt tried to console her but to no avail.

I heard about a country-wide contest open to inventors of all ages. The prize was worth 20,000 Heller. This sounded perfect for me even though I hadn't created anything yet. I decided that I would enter using an alias. There was an entry fee. So I took a job in a flower shop. I enjoyed the work. But once I saved enough for the entrance fee, travel expenses, and a large amount of extra funds for the unexpected, I quit.

I was in such a quandary – I could not decide which of my unfinished works I should complete for submission. I decided to combine two experiments. One was a suit that would allow you to go through walls. The other, at the push of a button, converted steam into a thick black or white fog which in effect made one undetectable. And if you wore my special oculars, you could see and walk through the fog. I felt it was so close but it just wasn't working.

I had three months to go before the final day to submit an entry. And I had spent a lot of time trying various combinations of gears and materials which always ended up in a half-hour of unlady-like cursing in newly learned Slovene and my birth language German.

I reached my breaking point and started to cry. The tears wouldn't help the situation but felt darn good. I was throwing in the towel – giving up. I had been working non-stop for so long and didn't realize how tired I was. I went to sleep and had a dream that I was in a field of grass gently swaying in the breeze. And in the distance there was a large oak tree. Under the tree stood Poppa and dear Joseph. Somehow though I was there and they couldn't see me. This was a good thing because they were talking about ME. I was so surprised and just sat there listening to every word.

“Oh, My cherished daughter, Romy. Joseph, she has so much potential. But she is stubborn like my wife. Has to do things a certain way even if they are wrong.”

“My dear uncle, if only she listened to you. Then she would do more planning and designing. And we both know that's how the whole thing starts.”

Together they said like a Greek chorus, “Question everything. Question your obstacles. Question your assumptions. Observe from nature. Observe from books. Find analogies in other fields. Learn from your dreams. Challenge yourself. See it in your mind first, then write up the design and the alternatives. Determine the need — your invention's function. All else will follow.”

It ended with both of them staring at me like they knew I was there the whole time. Yet they did not have a look of anger, but one of kindness.

I woke up filled with determination and could see in a new light. As I scribbled down the words of the dream, I started to see my missteps. I went outside, stared at the clouds and observed how they interacted with each other. At first I thought that I needed to make the suit turn fluid and seep through the walls and become solid again once on the other side. But while doing that, I had to retain the suit wearer's entity. Then I realized another approach: change the wall temporarily into a fluid while keeping the solidity of the suit and of the person. Scientists were just discovering these various types of rays that did all sorts of things.

Time passed and it was one month until the final day to submit. Still I did not have a working prototype. But I was closer than I had ever been to completing an invention. I could feel it.

I had designed the JL Ray (from my parents initials -- Jorg and Lotte) to “melt” any solid substance. But I needed a way to restore the wall afterwards. So I created a “substance 3-D imager” that created an image of the wall. Placing the JL Ray in Reverse mode, I was able to restore the object. The Ray and imager were completed with the working out of some final kinks. So the hard part was done. I needed to create the fog machine. I observed how fog was created in nature and soon designed a compact steam to fog converter.

That fantastic dream had converted me. I now began to love the planning and design phase and if I ever had any doubts on where to go, I looked at my notes that I had written down after waking up from the dream. Soon inventing became far easier to me and I felt that I could build darn near anything.

One evening later that week, I completed my prototype and using a pair of artificial machine legs that I built just to propel the invention forward, the suit went through a 6 inch wall intact and the wall looked like it had remained unchanged afterwards. Success!

After a couple more tests on thicker and thicker objects, I had to try this with myself in the suit. I knew the dangers but felt confident since the suit had made it through multiple tests without incident. And time was running out. I had to finalize this soon.

I picked my target, the walls of our local bank. I waited for late evening. After sneaking into the workshop, I put on the suit. It was not as bulky as I had thought. I headed down the street. I saw some men coming. After putting on the special glasses, I pressed the fog button. In addition to spurting fog, it knocked the men out – a nice unexpected side benefit. I made it to the bank door. I pressed the melt button on the JL Ray “gun” and the door melted. I passed through and pressed the restore button and the door reappeared. But there was a sizable hole in it. Oh well, I had to work on the restore capability. There I went to the thickest of all doors to date – the door behind which the money was kept. This was the REAL test of the invention. Once again, I pressed the correct button and made it through!

A weaker person may have tried to steal the money and precious possessions but that was not the goal of tonight. I gathered my energy and made it back through the two doors and out into the street. I felt a little dizzy but otherwise was intact. The doors were not so lucky and had some holes in them. Oh well – all in the name of creativity! I used the night as my guardian and headed back to the workshop.

The next day I looked at the local newspaper. I saw the following:

## STRANGE HAPPENINGS AT NIGHT

Was it a crime or not? Several of our finest council members mysteriously passed out near the bank after seeing some unusual creature from a distance and being surrounded by a black fog. A short time later, our local bank is apparently broken into based on the massive damage to the doors. Some citizens thought it was the work of an alien race, mountain demons, or the work of a wizard. But our new police chief thinks it is some new type of invention and would launch a thorough investigation.

There was some final testing to be done. Given that I had the police on my trail, I had to be extra careful. I created a special hiding place in the ceiling. Also I did some more tune-ups. At last, it was ready for submission. On the application I wrote my name as Krampus Karol. I thought it fitting to use as a first name that of the Christmas Day demon that kidnaps bad children in a sack and eats them later. And my last name referenced all the singing that I would do when I won the contest. I took the train to Vienna to get it locally postmarked (to throw anyone following me off) and sent in my application for submission. I just made the deadline — the last possible day for approval!

Two weeks later I was in Vienna for the show. The day of the show, I went in disguise as a bearded male in his 30s. With my extra savings from my job at the florist's, I had hired two people via mail to act as spokesperson and to demonstrate the suit (without the fog). The show had 200 amazing exhibits from throughout our beloved nation. I particularly liked the snow-making machine. The judges (three elderly scientists) looked at all the inventions with great focus and seriousness. They spent 20 minutes at my exhibit and asked to see the demo twice. Fortunately, I had anticipated this and had enough materials to complete the demos. They were a success.

The next day they announced the winners and I won first place. I walked up to the podium disguised as an elderly man, and took the prize and the check. Fortunately the suit and machines had already been sent back to Klagenfurt and to be dropped off in my workshop. As I left the stage, I was surrounded by military officials who wanted to confiscate my "weapon" as a threat to national defense. Also the Klagenfurt police were somehow there and wanted to question me on the bank break-in. Fortunately, I anticipated this happening and turned on the newly added green fog button and disappeared into the crowd. A weapon? It was no such thing. Just a simple invention.

When I got to the train station, I saw the police there checking all the passengers. I put on my realistic mask of an old woman and limped my way forward to the check-in line where I had the police staring at me. They asked me questions, looked carefully at my forged papers and let me on the train. Four and a half hours later, I was at the Klagenfurt station. Before exiting the train, I checked carefully and saw no policemen. I went into a local building and changed out of my disguise and walked carefully back home. I burned all of my disguises and suitcases. I carefully broke up my prize winning inventions into various parts and threw them away at numerous locations.

The Vienna paper mentioned the Inventors show and how the police and the military were after the first place prize winner. There was a description of me (as an old man) and police were on the constant lookout to stop this criminal that could break into anywhere. They mentioned what happened in Klagenfurt. Things were getting hot and in spite of my best efforts, something might lead them to me. I had to leave.

That day I told Katherina what happened. She agreed to leave as she also wanted a change. We had more than enough to live on: Poppa's safe money, my prize money and the earnings from both our jobs. We left that night using more disguises. Around the same time we got on the train leaving Klagenfurt, I used an explosive that blew up the workshop and left no "clues" that we had escaped. A tragic ending that never happened. Since my Aunt never used it, the ruins of the workshop were soon covered by grass or snow.

We could have gone anywhere in Europe so we did. Our stops included Munich, Paris for a year, and London. I took my most important possession – my designs – with me. We then decided to go to America while we still had funds so we could be really safe. This took some doing. We had to create forged documents passing us off as English children staying with our American Aunt. Katharina became Jane and I became Tammy. We had an English tutor growing up so we had the accent part down pat. After several weeks of travel, we made it to America, safe from the Austrian officials that very much wanted us. We soon bought ourselves a nice house with a perfect inventor's basement. Jane got a job to keep the money coming in. I just worked on my inventions knowing that I would create something that would astound the world.

At last, I wanted something: to make New York my home and to become a great inventor. I knew that it would happen because that was Poppa's dream for me as well

**[Learn more about what happened to Romy/Tammy, her sister, and her cousin Joseph, in the Amazi Chronicles. Book #1 Automatons for Non-Violence now available on this site.**

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### **The following is from Amazi Chronicles. Book #1 Automatons for Non-Violence**

After an uneventful twenty minute ride, we made it to my new home in New York, right off of A Avenue. This new home consisted of a building of six levels, which later I learned it was called a tenement building. Many large extended families lived together in these dark, unappealing buildings. My host Isaac and his family lived on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor. The bathrooms were outdoors, lighting was based on gas lamps, and as I would learn that winter – a coal stove was used for heating.

Isaac's living quarters consisted of four rooms. There was a Front Room for socializing during the day and sleeping for the men at night. It had some beds that converted to chairs during the day, some pictures of Saint Petersburg, and a small closet overstuffed with clothes. At one end of this room there was an entrance to the kitchen. The kitchen had a small stove, shelves for a few pots, pans, and dishes, a sink, an icemaker which Tomas the iceman kept filled, and a small table for eating. Through the kitchen there were two backrooms: one for Isaac and his wife Annie, and the other room for the girls. It was crowded but manageable. Isaac and Annie had two girls Jennie and Fanny. They also had a boarder named Matilda, nicknamed Tilly. Tilly with her green eyes, flowing red hair, and deep voice immediately caught my attention. In Russia, I had no time for women since I was too busy spending hours with my current or would-be friends. Isaac and Annie also had three boys – Morris, Louis, and Herman. I would be sharing a bed next to Herman. Exhausted I fell asleep. The next day, Annie woke me up from sound asleep. I had breakfast which was some sort of stew and was then sent to work.

I was expected to work at a clothing factory as a sewing machine operator for five dollars a week. Out of these meager wages, I would give one dollar a week to Isaac and Annie to pay for my rent, food, and clothes washing. Herman and Tilly also worked in the same factory. We worked from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. with a forty minute break for lunch. This went on every day, Monday through Saturday.

From the start, the factory was an unwelcomed and unpleasant work environment for me. One walked into a room where two hundred people – male and female, healthy or sick, sat in close proximity to each other, squished like sardines. The room had little light coming from multiple broken windows high above the ground. The factory floor had an overpowering ever-present musty smell. The little ventilation allowed temperatures to soar and the unrelenting heat felt muggy and oppressive.

When at the point of exhaustion, the lunch bell rang. I bought an apple for five cents at the pushcart outside the factory. I then started looking for someone to eat with. I tried to find Herman but

he had disappeared. So I just listened. I overheard some men talking about “sweatshop conditions “ and “the need to form a union.” I stopped listening -- I didn’t need any new trouble in my life.

Someone tapped gently on my shoulder and said: “So your first day here and already oppressed -- such a sad fate for someone so young, tall, and handsome.” I turned around and saw Tilly in a friendly mood. She then started to tell me the story of her life. She had been here for two years and stayed with the Taroffs (Isaac and Annie) because they had been friends with her mother in Saint Petersburg. “I never knew much about my father other than he wasn’t Russian and had been visiting for a few days. Momma had forgotten his name and had no way to contact him.” We talked a little bit more and then went back in. Before she headed back to work, she told me that she was 21.

At closing time, Herman was already gone but Tilly was waiting for me. “Do you want to walk back together? It isn’t always safe walking around here alone especially for single women. You look like a strong, well-built young man and I would feel safer with you. Herman is always rushing somewhere so I rarely walk back with him.” I said yes and we walked together. She continued her story about how Russia was pressuring woman to marry early to make more soldiers. Tilly would have nothing to do with that. “I choose those I wish to love – not the State. I do not wish to bring children in the world only to see them injured or killed. I had read Tolstoy and the American named Thoreau’s thoughts on how to resist the state’s attempt at war. I do not want to see any more unnecessary deaths. Have you read Thoreau?” I said no and had read Bakunin and others preaching violent resistance instead. She gave an understanding look and pulled out of her bag a copy of Thoreau in Russian. “I’m always re-reading it. Please read it and let me know what you think.” I said that I would. Tillie also said that she would teach me English. I gathered that she didn’t make friends easily for some reason and was kind of lonely. Maybe it was because she looked physically different from the other ladies. She also seemed unbeaten by the circumstances of life.

Walking back home with Tilly made the trip more bearable. We walked in the door together. Annie saw this and gave us a disapproving look. I wasn’t sure why. We all had dinner followed by a little conversation by the men speaking in English and Russian. I then went to sleep against a backdrop of horse carts, cursing, and someone singing loudly and out of tune. This place feels so alien. I am not sure if I will ever succeed here or feel at home.

The next few days followed the same pattern. I was awoken up by Annie, worked most of the day, and spent as much time as I could with Tilly. I don’t know if I was attracted to her because she was smart and pretty or if I just needed someone to bond with to help overcome the alienation and loneliness of this new life. In any case, she was helping me learn some English and know more about the USA.

Annie seemed upset with my time spent with Tilly. One evening, about three months later, when Tilly had gone to see a play at an amateur theater, she told me why. Annie had been friends with Tilly’s mom Molly but had always disapproved how friendly she was with the opposite sex. “One night she had relations with a non-Russian man that was passing through town. She never saw him again and had to raise a child by herself. Molly went to another village far away because no one knew her there. Once there, she met and married another man who promised to raise Tilly and hopefully some new children

with Molly as well. Molly reluctantly agreed. Tilly was ignored by the other children because she looked so physically different. She made few friends and retreated into the world of books with dangerous ideas. When Tilly was old enough, she was sent to America and unwillingly, I agreed to give her a place to stay. Please do not talk to her. I see now that that it is time for her to leave so she doesn't corrupt you. I know a place where she can stay with proper unmarried ladies so she can perhaps learn better ways and make herself less of a threat. If you are lonely and need someone to talk to, my daughters, sons, Isaac or myself are glad to do that. Do you agree?"

I was upset that in this land of equality, where so many tried to escape discrimination, I had my first of many brushes with prejudice and ignorance. I unwillingly agreed with her on the condition that I could talk to Tilly one last time to say goodbye. Annie reluctantly consented.

During the factory's lunch break, I told Tilly what had happened. "I'm really torn. You are the only non-relative friend that I have here. Everyone else here is into their own lives or causes. They don't have time for me and I feel very alone. But I do not want to lose my lodging nor upset my cousins. I am always getting into trouble. I want a fresh start here."

Tilly smiled "I understand Annie. And I understand Momma as well. Momma said to me that one true moment of connecting with someone was worth more than a lifetime of security. She never had any regrets about what she did. She saw me as a happy reminder of that night and loved me the best she could. When we moved to a small village near the Black Sea, we were shunned by all but my step-father. He saw my mother's plight and offered to marry her. He was kind and loved me as he did my half-sisters that soon arrived. He encouraged me to read, learn, and think for myself. I loved the life with Momma and my new Poppa and sisters. When I was 19, Annie had written to Momma that now was a good time to come to America. And so I came. Annie and Isaac found a job for me in the factory and I used my extra time to read, learn, and attend the theater. Let's talk some more on the way back – one last time."

That evening we walked together until stopping in a nearby park. Tilly said what I was thinking: "There is some unseen force that keeps pulling me to you and you to me. I felt it the moment you came in the door that first night. I know you feel the same way. I see four options for us:

The first is to never see each other again. But I don't think that is possible for either of us.

The second is to send letters to each other and meet in secret. But then you have the fear of always being found out. (Annie will always be suspicious even if we never see each other again.)

The third is that we both move out and find housing near each other so we can continue meeting. We will have some freedom that way.

The fourth is that we get married move in together, save on expenses, and have our maximum freedom.

I am asking you to consider option 4 and get married. You do not have to give me an answer right away. "

There was no hesitation in my answer. “Of course I will marry you. This is the only one real option. You know me well – I am attracted to you. You are very smart and beautiful and I’m thrilled you like me so much. However, I don’t have a ring or lots of money. I will do what I can however to make you happy.”

Years later I learned that women in America didn’t ask men to get married. But I did not know this and many other things.

One week later, we moved out, and lived across town in a neighborhood that I hadn’t heard of before called Greenwich Village.

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