

THE OTHER SIDE OF MY LIFE

By Gerda Dwyer

I was born in Germany and lived there all through World War II. The war started in 1939 and ended in 1945. I was the same age as you children are today. Right from the beginning, when Hitler came into power, he dictated the German people.

Right away we had to go to teacher's homes and were taught about Hitler's policies. I was put into a group which was similar to the Girl Scouts here in America. If anyone did not attend the meetings, she would be picked up by the police. It was a very bad time for us kids.

As the war progressed, we had to be alert for air raid sirens warning of the Allied bombing attacks. We had to go to neighborhood shelters to escape the bombs. In my hometown we had a big mountain, and underneath they built a shelter, which was like a very long tunnel right through the mountain. There were benches and emergency power lights on each side. There was standing water, and this attracted a large number of rats.

When the air raids came, we were not allowed to take anything with us, except for a small box containing our identification papers. Then came the food shortages. For a long time, we had only yellow cornbread and brown sugar, if we could get it. Sometimes the butcher shops opened up, and we could get some broth. Broth was used to make soup. I was in line for the broth one time when I collapsed because of hunger. Another time, we had a surprise attack, and people had just come out of the shelters. My friend and her sister, mother and father died in the attack. I found my friend's head after she had been dismembered by the bomb. My dad and uncle both died in World War II, also.

Sometimes we had to retreat to the woods to hide. Often times the weather was bad and my family and I had to huddle under the big trees for shelter. Most of the time, we had no food. We had stamps for food. We were allowed 50 grams of butter for two weeks. For my entire family the allowance was one half of a pound for two weeks.

Those were terrible times. That's why I can't understand why other countries don't appreciate what America has done and is doing for them. There's so much hatred among the leaders and they are mistreating their people. I realize now that America is doing something right. I can tell the truth because I live in America.

I'd like to emphasize that not every German was a Nazi. The Nazi's were just a certain group of people selected by Hitler. They were usually rich people, and they had everything given to them, and they acted like they were dictators. We had to be very cautious about what we would say, otherwise we could be thrown into jail.

Now, I'd like to speak about the Holocaust. The German people, including me, did not know about the Holocaust until the war was over. The American MPs went from house to house after the war and made all of us get into the movie theater and see films about the catastrophe which had befallen the Jewish people. I had Jewish friends and played with them. They were the same age as you kids are now. I knew two Jewish girls who disappeared overnight, along with their entire families. These were girls I played with regularly. They were my friends. Their parents owned stores. The SS secretly broke all the store

windows and covered them with wood. No one knew what was going on. Everything was done in secret. I never saw any of those people again! But now we know what happened to them! I could tell you more and more, but it would take a long time. Here's so much more to tell. Hitler completely took away all of our freedoms. He controlled us mentally, spiritually, and financially. We had no food, and I received no education for 2 years straight, because of the war.

I married an American GI. That is how I came to live in America. I arrived in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1955. I taught myself how to read, write, and speak English. I'm still learning today. I've been a citizen of the United States since 1959.

I'd like to share with you some of my thoughts about America:

I'm an American Citizen by choice. I am convinced that America is the best place in the world to live. Peace in the world is essential for the survival of the human race. The 23rd psalm had been a frequent prayer, and has brought me through much hopelessness and despair. The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.

I also have a poem I wrote:

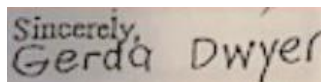
AFTERTHOUGHTS

Of love I dreamed at my young age. For me life wrote a different page. Was it fate or plain divine that changed the words line after line? The chapters read not as I planned, I never knew how it would end. It was a puzzle and a mystery, why I have lived this part of history. I often wonder what's ahead. What haven't I experienced yet? What is it that's not written yet?

My dear people, I could tell you so much more, but I hope I've given you a little input into what happened years ago in Europe. In my time, there was no modern technology. We've come a long way. I hated beautiful days, I preferred rainy and foggy days when the airplanes couldn't see us, and therefore couldn't bomb us, and hurt us.

Thank you for listening.

May God bless you. You have a wonderful privilege to live in this great country!



Sincerely,
Gerda Dwyer