

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Germany in the 1930s and 1940s

Personal Experience

O.H. 1014

HILDEGARD DUNKERLEY

Interviewed

by

Steven R. Ard

on

July 12, 1981

## HILDEGARD DUNKERLEY

Hildegard Dunkerley was born in the western part of Prussia on March 12, 1927. Her parents Joseph and Helene Kawaschinski moved to Berlin when she was nine months old. She remembers that when she was four or five, she saw street fighting between Nazis and Communists. She began school in 1933 and recalls the Nazi parades of the period such as the ones for the 1936 Olympics. After her father, a shoemaker specializing in riding boots, lost his business, he worked for the Nazi Government making boots for the armed services.

Although she was never pressured to join the Nazi youth movements, her younger brother was later on. She knows now that a shop where she had gotten ice skates as a child was destroyed during the Kristelnacht on November 10, 1938. At the time, she remembers that no one (adults) really explained what had happened; people just did not discuss such matters. During World War II, she worked in Berlin and witnessed the horrible destruction of the city.

She met her husband, James, when he was stationed in Germany after the Korean War. They were married March 17, 1956. They are members of the Saxon Club in Youngstown, Ohio.

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INTERVIEWEE: HILDEGARD DUNKERLEY  
INTERVIEWER: Steven R. Ard  
SUBJECT: Hildegard's childhood in Berlin, public  
education in a Roman Catholic school until  
the Nazi brought Protestants and Catholic  
schools together, the war  
DATE: July 12, 1981

D: This is an interview with Hildegard Dunkerley for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Germany in the 1930s and 1940s project, by Steven R. Ard, at the Saxon Club in Youngstown, at 710 South Meridian Road, on July 12, 1981, at 4:46 p.m.

A: Hildegard, do you want to begin by telling me when and where you were born?

D: Yes, I was born in Germany in West Prussia. I came as a little girl to Berlin, so I can tell you more or less only about Berlin, Germany. I came at nine months old, I believe I was.

A: Okay, do you want to tell me about growing up in Berlin?

D: I started school on May 2, 1933. It was the year Hitler came to power. I remember very well the Olympic Games in 1936.

A: Can you describe them to me?

D: I wasn't at the stadium, that was later on. During the games, we weren't at the stadium. But I remember the streets being especially decorated, the lamp posts. . . . I remember parades even in the night parades with lights, those torch lights storm troopers had. I remember seeing and hearing very much during the Olympics. The big thing I remember was my mother buying me a big ball with Olympic rings and all that stuff. That was a big thing, because I know the Olympic Stadium only after the Olympics because I belonged to gymnastics club and we trained there a lot even until November in track and field. So, I got to know that later on very well. I remember many things from that time.

Then in 1937, I remember in Berlin very much, we had the 700th Anniversary of the city. That was a big thing in school and all around.

A: The anniversary of the city, did the Nazis take part in that?

D: Mostly it was at that time all. Hitler was in power and very strong. There was nothing else but Nazis, no other party or anything because, as far as I remember in 1933 and 1934, everything was forbidden like the Social Democrats. I remember, before Hitler, we lived in a place. I was about four or five. I remember that I couldn't look much out the window. We lived on the third floor in an apartment building. Across the street on the third floor, there were Nazis living there. It was before Hitler, and they had all those flags always out. I remember, at that time, the police coming and marching the Communist march, and then this party and that and street fights. . . . I remember that all as a little girl. I can't tell you much details, but I still see them marching and the police coming and breaking up the fights. The Communists, they all had brown leather coats at that time; and the Nazis, there was always fighting that I remember before I went to school. Always street fighting in the area. My mother said there was over 30 different parties. And mostly were fighting at that time were the Nazis and the Communists. They were the most fighting on the streets.

At the house where we lived, in the back, on the second floor at that time before I went to school, there was printing. The Communist printing shops, they discovered. And there was Olga Luxembourg at that time. She's supposed to be a famous Communist and she was supposed to be there for quite a while. I never saw her. This is what I remember as a kid, what I was told. And I remember the police coming and fighting. That, I remember very well, as a whole neighborhood.

We lived in a part of Berlin that more or less was called a labor district. It was the lower-class. We didn't have ghettos in Berlin. They have them now, with the foreign workers, but not at that time. We had poor districts, labor districts. But really, in Berlin, people that made more money, they lived facing the streets and the lower-paid people, they lived in buildings that faced the courtyards. There was more or less in the city altogether.

A: Can you describe some of that street fighting for me? Was it just between the members?

D: More or less only party members. I remember that was only party members because I remember my mother would yell and we'd close the windows. [As] children, we were curious. We stood then, behind and I looked and I seen quite a bit. I remember, the police at that time, they had different uniforms. They came in those open pick-up trucks. The trucks were a little bigger and they were sitting. They had benches on the side and I remember them. I still hear always the sirens going sometimes at night. They were marching and then they had clashes, that I remember, that they had marched. That was all before Hitler.

A: Was there gunfire?

D: There was supposed to be, but I can't remember that, because I didn't know what gunfire was until 1945.

A: Were people killed in these clashes?

D: Yes, as far as I know there was very much beating up and killing and everything in those parties. But what I remember most and what I had been told as a child from my mother too, was the Communists and the Nazis. Berlin was not a Nazi stronghold before. It was Munich, and so Berlin held out until the last just because we were the capital. That's why they moved in. Berlin is, still today, mostly Social Democrats. Social Democrats that's more or less the most in Berlin, the majority. So, it was, I believe, always Social Democrat more or less. My family was in the central party, because Monarchist. . . . They were what you call the middle class, little business people.

A: What did your father do for a living?

D: My father was a shoemaker, a lone shoemaker. He had his own shop. He made orthopedic shoes. He made shoes for special order. He made boots for people that were riding and so on. He had a few people working for him. He did some repair on the side to survive later on. He lost his business in 1934 or 1935. It was very bad, he

lost his business. And he went and worked where they make the uniforms and boots and so on for the Air Force. And he worked there in 1935 or 1936, as he was then a civil servant. He had civil servants status and he worked for them where they make the boots and shoes. He was master in his trade so he advanced and so on. During the war, he was outside the city and I remember my mother. . . . You walked outside. The departments, because of all bombings, were outside and I think he managed a warehouse. I'm not very sure about that because I was at Berlin in the apartment. My mother and the younger children. . . . He had a house, a little house that was way out in Berlin where my mother spent most of her time with the smaller children then during the bombings. My father wanted to come back to Berlin in 1945, but there was a fight and somehow he got caught by the Russians. He got sick and he went to one of their camps. I don't know how you call it in English, intern. He had papers on him but he was a civilian. I guess that's why the Russians caught him. He was supposed to have had strokes. Anyhow, after two years in the camp, he died. We know that from a Catholic Priest who had contacted us. Professionally-wise, he was a shoemaker even though he was in his own business and later on worked for the Government without being. . . . Many people say you had to belong to the party if you worked for the Government.

A: He never did?

D: Many people I knew never did. You weren't forced. He worked there long before the war. There were many people. You weren't forced. A lot of people were afraid. That's why they joined. More or less, they were frightened into it. There were some, probably, that were asked and didn't know what to do and joined. Just think about it, with only 10 million party members, the population of 100 million people. So, that means that only 10 percent of the population were really members.

A: Can we talk a little bit about your school days in Berlin?

D: When Hitler came to town for some reason or another . . . I remember in 1939, he came back from Austria when he conquered Austria. We had to stand in the streets that he drove through and yell, "Heil Hitler!" So, whole school classes were marched wherever he came through. We had to do those things. Then on special occasions, we always had to stand in school and sing the German Anthem. We had to sing that and always with our arm [up]. I remember that the arm gets

tired after awhile. We were small children. We'd put our arm [down] until we got caught. [We] supported with the left hand, the right arm.

I'm born Roman Catholic. The public school were divided in Berlin between the Roman Catholic and what you call Lutherans. But in 1939, Hitler made the Einhide school that I remember very much. So, all the Catholic and Protestant school, we were mixed up. There was no more Catholic School or Lutheran. That was in 1939, when all the crosses disappeared off the Catholic Public School. There was a black bird in front of the school. [The crosses] all disappeared and I remember that they ripped them apart.

Now, I belonged, in 1935, to a youth group of the Catholic Church. I remember we had outings like picnics. I remember our boys, like the Catholic Boy Scouts and the Hitler Youths, they would come where we meet on outings at picnic grounds and so on. I remember those fights between the boys. They were pretty good fights until it was the church-sponsored Boy Scouts were forbidden and they wanted everybody to join the Hitler Youths. Now, the Hitler Youths, that was only from 14 years up. When you were 14, you belonged to the Hitler Youths or the girls to what they called B.D.M. Then, you became automatically a member of the party, but till you were 14, you belonged to those youth groups. They were called different. You were not a party member.

During the war, they made almost everybody, when they were 10 years old, belong to the youth group. You were transferred from 14 automatically into the other youth groups, what you called the Hitler Youth groups.

A: Were you put in one of these groups?

D: No.

A: How come?

D: In 1937, it was not pressuring yet, when I was 10 years old. And in 1939, there was a little pressuring, so I went to a few of those meetings. I never had a uniform. I never joined the Hitler Youth. I went to very few meetings and I even went to the gym once. Now this was because my father worked there and there was a little bit of pressure put on.

A: Can you tell me what they did at the meetings, the few you attended? Do you remember?

D: There was a girl, maybe a year or two older. She was the leader of this special group. I don't have much

recall about that at all because I wasn't interested. I went only because my father asked. About the history. . . . They had their different history layout. They saw things different than probably was in the books. It was almost everything about Hitler's Youth and his history, I remember. But what I liked was the gym where they met once a week. I went there and I broke my leg and I never went back. I broke my foot, more or less, and never went back. I wasn't much at the meetings because girls that had no uniform had to stand on the end in line when they started the count-down. And I remember I had red little socks on and I was sent home to change them at least to white and I never went back. Once they sent me home, I never went back.

I remember that they came once to the house and asked me to come on Sunday. My mother told them, "Sunday she goes to church." They never bothered me after that. But I remember that one of my younger brothers--that was during the war--when he was 10 years old, there was so much pressure, he had to join the youth group. He was there until the war ended and that was about two years. That, I remember.

A: Now, when you became 14. . . .

D: When I became 14, I got out of grade school. I finished. It was an eight year education at that time, then you had to learn any trade for three years. I went out and I was sent to a school where I learned cooking, sewing, and all those things. My mother sent me to school because they had a program at that time in Germany for the girls who had graduated. They had to go one year for low wages. They had to hold either in the farm or in the household. My mother wanted to avoid that. And I was sent there in a special school. I was one year and then I was sent to a school for two years that is like a junior business college where you learn everything; typing, bookkeeping, everything. You graduate after two years and then you go working. But while I was in school those two years, after school hours--that was in the war already, 1941 to 1943--I had to go work in an office. On Saturdays, I worked in the office, which gave me much practical [experience]. In 1943, I got out of the school. I graduated. I worked in that company until the war ended.

I remember in 1939, one morning we walked to school and one girl told me there is a war on. That was September 1st. There was a way on. Well, I was 12 years old. War didn't mean much to me, only with my grandfather or my mother told me from World War I. And then, I remember the first bombing in 1941 because my sister was born at that time. That's why I remember the first



bombing of Berlin. They were British planes at night. Then in 1943, 1945, most of our nights in the wintertime were spent in the basement. We had like a little bunker they made basement of the apartment houses. The British came only at night. The Americans had no night pilots. They didn't bother us at night. They came later on in the day. But at times, we spent seven hours at night in the wintertime in the basement. I remember doing my homework. We had bunk beds.

I have seen Hitler many times from a distance in a car. I grew up on the same street Hitler. . . . Only, we were in the south end almost, in the residential area. And I remember looking out the fourth floor window--at that time, we had an apartment on the fourth floor because we were bombed out a few times--and seeing him go by. At one time in 1943 or 1944, I walked over the square and all of a sudden came this group of people towards me in uniforms and the men spread apart and I was about a foot and a half away and I passed Hitler. That's about the closest I ever. . . . But that was a big place and I was a teenager. I just came across and he had a big group of people around him in uniform. But they went their way. They let me pass, because I just walked over the square, straight over the square. There was no traffic on that square, there was on the street more. Everybody was walking. That I remember very well.

And I remember in 1944, I worked in the office and I was in the personnel section. We had foreign workers in the factory and I was sent. There was nobody there. The young men, they were all drafted and I had to take a French worker to the Gestapo Building. I was told exactly how to go there and he was questioned there. Well, I was outside in the hallway. That I remember. That's how I got to see the Gestapo Building once, which was pretty nearby. That's a few things I remember.

The war in the beginning wasn't so bad. In 1944, we started feeling it because the rations were bad. Now, I remember more in 1945 when the Russians came there.

I remember in 1938 was when they called the Kristel-nacht. The Jewish. . . . Because I went to school one morning in November, it was cold already. And on the end of the street there was a hardware store and I had just got those new ice skates not long before that. That day, it was all demolished. The windows were broken, some merchandise was laying around and I came home from school--nobody mentioned anything at school--and I asked my mother about that because I had new ice skates I was very proud of. I just got them a little bit before in that store. But my parents

wouldn't tell us much when we asked questions. And I didn't understand that until after the war. Why? They wouldn't answer many questions and we never heard anything. Nobody would talk in front of the children. So, we were really raised with what we were taught [in] school. Since my first few years were in the Catholic Public School, we didn't hear that much either.

A: Who were your teachers there?

D: Mostly women at that time in grade school. [There were] quite a few men. But the men, when they were younger teachers, they were assistant principals and so on, but the teachers when we were in the seventh and eighth grade, they were drafted. They were drafted. So, we never heard much, only what they wanted us to know in school. We were taught more or less to understand Hitler. We didn't hear much about other things. We didn't hear much.

A: Did you know any Jewish children?

D: Yes. We had some in the house and we played until about 1939. There were two boys and a little girl. There was one family living on the third floor. Until about 1939, we played. My mother never told us anything. We played together. But the two boys disappeared. That was before the war. We were only told they were sent to England. The father shortly died of a heart attack. I think they had a little business, a furniture store. The father died after, but the mother and the little child, they lived there way into the war. They never came out, very seldom, only to go grocery shopping. And one night we heard a commotion and they disappeared. Now, I can't tell you exactly, but it must have been around 1943. That long, they were there. They had the Star of David when they went out.

And I remember my mother being once in trouble that she gave her a ration card, just a little stamp, that she could buy white bread for the little girl. I remember that there was in the neighborhood a lot of talk. This was during the war and she disappeared one night. Nobody would tell us in those days. Honest to God, I was 14 or 15 and I wasn't even suspicious. The adults who knew things probably never told us because, later on I understand that it was the fear that children would tell in school or to other children. Everybody that knew something kept quiet so they don't want to go to a concentration camp. It was a fear. We didn't know much.

But in 1944, one of my friends slept over. You know, girls have pajama parties. Her father would let us

listen to music I never heard before. We liked that music. I never had an idea till 1945 and the Americans came that we listened to Glen Miller and things like that. We never knew that till then, but we liked that music.

Then I remember the Kristelnacht in 1939. I didn't know it at that time, but they smashed all the store windows of Jewish shops, all over Germany I believe, that night. The SS troopers. Now I remember the brown uniforms and the black uniforms very well. During the war, all my uncles on both sides of the family were drafted. My father was never drafted.

A: Can you tell me about some of the parades you went to?

D: What I saw?

A: Yes, what was the typical parade like that you saw?

D: Everybody in uniform.

A: Which uniforms, the brown or the black?

D: The brown uniforms. I never saw many military police. I never saw military police during the war. I remember the brown uniform, marching goose step and the brown polished boots. Flags, especially when they had certain--I don't know what they were. Go back to the Olympics, I remember those parades.

There were thousands and thousands of brown uniforms in columns marching and then, a few black uniforms, the SS. They were so shiny, those boots. As a child, I guess that was the level I looked, more or less. You were taken somehow. It was really spectacular as a child because you saw all those uniforms and those men they were all just so straight and the flags and the torch lights at night. . . .

A: How late would some of these things go on at night?

D: I couldn't tell you, but I remember that my father took us to look at it. My father always wanted us to see everything. It must have been at dark, 11 o'clock, maybe. I don't know how long they went. We never saw the whole thing because we were taken home. We were cold. You know how children are, getting cranky. My mother never went, but my father took us' places. He wanted us to see everything. I don't know why, but always wanted us to see everything.

A: Did you ever go to any of those big party rallies?

D: No. I never saw them.

A: Did you hear about them?

D: No. I know only about what was going on what I read later on in history books.

A: Did you ever read Hitler's book Mein Kampf?

D: I thumbed through, because my mother's younger sisters were married during Hitler time and when you were married you got that book. I remember being on vacation and looking through that, through a few pages. It was raining and I was about 14 at the time. I didn't understand it at that time to tell you truth. What I read there made no sense to me. I didn't understand it and never looked at it afterwards. I know only from Mein Kampf--I read later on in history books what he's supposed to have written.

A: Did you read any of the other material that the Nazi Party put out?

D: No, nothing during that time. I heard only a few things. I know my father's brothers belonged to the Nazi Party, two of his younger brothers, before Hitler came to power. My grandmother that was in East Prussia and that my grandfather was hiding them at times. That, I know. I didn't understand it at that time to tell you the truth. I was a child. I didn't understand it at that time. I understood all those things that I remembered later on when I read about it after the war. Then, it came back to me. But I had no understanding at that time of what this was all about.

I know only that I didn't like to be ordered around. That's why I didn't go to those youth group meetings. I didn't like that a girl who was in the same school and who was maybe a year or two years older, was telling me what to do. I didn't care for that. I only obeyed my parents and my grandparents. I didn't care for that because I knew some of those girls and how smart they were in school. They were dumber than I and I didn't like that. That, I know. I never liked that.

A: You had mentioned that maybe the reasons that parents were afraid to talk to the children was because you might go off and tell other children et cetera. Were you ever told in school or anyplace else to tell things that your parents did?

D: No. I never was told.

They assumed we were all right in anyway. I don't know. I know my father was no party member. He didn't sympathize. My mother didn't either. None on my

mother's side of the family, only my father's side; two uncles I know of.

A: Let's go back to the bombings. Was the area that you lived in bombed out pretty badly?

D: Yes, yes. We were in the middle of the city. The first time we were bombed out, we lost our apartment was December 29, 1943. And then, we moved in another house and our apartment was pretty much. . . . With the fire bombings, those small bombs they had. . . . It was on July 20, 1944. That's when the English called it. . . that was that torch light parade like the Nazis used to have. But we could still live there after that. But we never had glass in our windows all through 1944. We had just cardboard because they gave up after awhile because we were always--from the bombings. So, I lived for over a year with cardboard.

A: How bad were the fires?

D: Very bad. I believe, in all of Berlin, there was about 20 percent of the buildings were completely destroyed by bombing. They were so destroyed that nobody could inhabit them. And that was mostly in the inner city but our cities are not like yours. Ours are all mixed up, business districts and apartment buildings. Our cities are different than in Europe than you have here. So, about 50 percent of all the residential buildings were pretty much damaged so that you could live only in part of them. On February 3, 1945, is when the Americans came. There was about 1,500 we've been told. Anyhow, it lasted only a half an hour and they destroyed in the inner city. I don't know how many blocks, 200. Anyhow, in that half hour, 25,000 people died in the inner city. When we got out--I was in the office--they dug us out and we had to walk through three or four streets where everything was burning on both sides. The streets and the. . . . You could see the people black. They tried to call out. They were cut. It was terrible. There was 25,000 just in that half hour. The bombing was, in 1945, very, very bad.

A: Would you say those bombs were trying to hit residential areas or were they hitting factories or businesses?

D: Well, they were supposed to hit businesses and factories, but 10 percent maybe hit some businesses and factories. Like I told you, in Germany, it was so built that you couldn't. . . . Unless it was a great big factory. . . . We had all those smaller factories in the courtyard in the inner cities in the business streets. There were the stores and then, all above was apartments for for floors and the bottom was stores.

More or less what, was hit were a few churches. The big companies, they survived more or less. But the residential area in the inner city was completely demolished. And what the bombing didn't do, the Russians did during the fight. There was about a week fight just for the inner city. More or less the bombings in Berlin, which I witnessed. . . . They demolished the Americans. They tried to keep that quiet today, but now they try to see what they did, what they really did. There was no factories burned, just the people full of refugees and civilians. In Berlin, what I seen mostly was residential areas.

A: Okay, now as you left the place where you were working they took you through that three block area?

D: Yes, I ran until I found home. At home, it wasn't burning on our street, only a few buildings.

A: Can you describe more of what you saw as you were going through there in terms of what happened to the people?

D: Yes, it's very dark. We had those five story buildings, this street. It's very dark when everything is burning, everything is flying. I couldn't even get myself wet. There was nothing. Sometimes, you could walk maybe three, four houses along. Houses are about 25 yards or something. I can't tell you exactly. And you had to go in a zigzag thing because there were many bomb craters. You would see a lot of people that were laying on the street that were cut or tried to climb up those craters and they were black because they were burned or something from the heat of those bombs or they were killed. You would see people all over. And it was dark. It was for hours. The inner city was dark and you'd see the red sparks. And it smelled terrible. To this day, certain things as the sweet smell of the dead people, and the burned people, it's just a terrible smell. When you come near a cemetery--here it's different, you embalm people--but it was terrible. I seen people sometimes with the head split open and you could see all that. And after two days. . . . It took days to clean up the dead people. The flies, they were that thick. You don't look up much when you run through those streets. You just look where you walk and you think that no wall will cave in. That's all you think about, that you make it, run through the street. I was 17 or 18 at that time. That's all you think about. You think only about survival. That's all you think about.

A: Had you followed the war effort like the African Campaign or the Russian Campaign?

D: Yes. That was a big thing at the time. It was something everybody was happy about because Hitler did pretty good in the beginning. And we followed that. We followed everything in the beginning, the Russians, the Blitzkreig in Poland. When we started thinking about that it. . . . It was Stalingrad. It was a teenager I'd say, and I had girlfriends that had brothers fighting there. So I heard then, that was 1943, 1944, 1945. I heard a little rumors here and there because we were growing older and some of the girlfriends, they heard this. I don't know of all the stories were right.

A: What kind of rumors?

D: That we were losing in Russia after Stalingrad. I remember the 20th of July 1944 because a friend of mine, she came and we wanted to go and have some sandwiches somewhere and we couldn't walk far from our house to the corner and there was the SS with their machine guns. They said . . . had tried to assassinate Hitler. That, I remember, July 20. We couldn't go where we wanted to go because we had to go home because all the street corners in the inner city where we lived. . . .

A: When could you go back out then?

D: The next morning? Everything was fine.

A: Were the soldiers there or gone?

D: It was SS soldiers. There was no Army soldiers.

A: Were they still on the corner?

D: No. [The] next morning, we walked. Nothing was. . . . They warned that we had to stay in the inner city, off the street and that was all. But I seen them with machine guns on the corners. We couldn't go. On the street corners in our area. . . .

A: Now, towards the end of the war when the Russians came in, can you tell me about that?

D: It was in April. We heard the gunfire, that the Russians were coming and we had to move in the basement, what we called like bunkers, where we were for air raids. We moved all down there and we lived for a week in the bunker until the Russians came one day. So, for two days they were fighting. I know we had a lot of people dying, soldiers, but we never took them in the basement. We were told then already, "Don't take the wounded soldiers in toe basement." When the Russian soldiers come, they kill you for that. So, we couldn't

take care, but we went outside and helped some of them. And some of them, there was a bunker up the street, a hotel, that took the soldiers.

The rumors were flying that time already, that the Americans were going to come in. Well, the Americans never came in, all those rumors flying. Because when we didn't hear the bombing, we would come out. And one day before the Russians really came, my mother needed something. We were in a house two houses away from us and my brother and I, we volunteered [to get it]. We ran out. We had to run to our house and get a sweater for my younger brother. We were running, my brother and I, while there was gun fire with pistols, they could fire. We didn't know that. Anyhow, we ran two houses away in the apartment houses, ran up and there was a bombing. My brother ran down. How he got two houses away to the bunker from where we were, I don't know. But I wouldn't make it because they were shooting so much rifle fire. It was rifle fire.

And we had, from one house to the other, later on, I found out that they had tunnels that you can go from one basement to the other. Somebody came after me because I didn't come. I wouldn't run through that rifle fire anymore. I was so afraid. And one of the men, older men, came and got me, because at that time, you had only real old men and women and children in the neighborhood. I went then through the tunnels back in that house. And then I remember everything was quiet and then all of a sudden, through the holes, the windows, the Russian soldiers came in and they made us all stand against the wall with our hands up in the basement of that house. [It was a little like] a bunker. They caught us, and with our hands up, they searched us. We were standing there and they were clicking those tommy guns, those funny rifles. They were not machine guns that the Russians had. They were clicking and we thought they were going to shoot us standing there. And I couldn't tell you--we had no watches--how long we stood there. But we were dying, I guess, all of us a hundred times there. And then, they told us to sit down again. That was a very bad experience for all of us. My mother was pregnant.

So, they kept us for another day, I think they said, and then they told us we had to get out of the basement. They had to get out because there was so much fighting. When we got out there was only the Russian. . . . They had horse-drawn wagons, funny looking wagons and tanks and dead people. I remember that we had to climb over dead horses and over a tank. The streets were full. And I remember that I once hit the ground and there was about blood up to my ankle almost, blood maybe mixed with water. And my mother



had to climb out and all the people from many apartment buildings, too. I lost my mother and my father in all the people when we were pushed out. And then we walked all evening. And I walked about 12 miles the next day. And one evening after it got dark there was no more fighting in that area. Some people took me in, in a basement and tried to hide me. And I walked about 12 miles. It was like refugees. Everybody was walking and I asked if they knew people from that street and they had seen them. Anyhow, I was walking about 12 miles and I came to a bunker and they hid me. That was in the Red Cross bunker and they hid me there for two days. And I walked back to the city and I finally found my mother and she had given birth to a child in the meantime in the bunker. Most of people in that bunker were raped. The women were raped right after they had given birth to a child. The Russians were waiting. I hear today, I was lucky because I ran around as a boy. I was very skinny and with my two other brothers. . . . We had our ski suits on. We were dirty, filthy, and I was very skinny so I was taken as a boy. That was my luck. But I hear women screaming, and the rapings. That was very bad. That, I think, you never forget. You hear at times, even in your ears because I was a teenager. Probably that's why I took it in more or less.

That's when the Russians came in. The Russians were in for two and a half months and the Americans, they came in July. The American troops came and what happened to us then. . . . What we heard in the basement from the Russian soldiers, which we never knew before was that Berlin will be divided into four zones. We don't know anything about that until some Russian soldiers that spoke German, told us.

A: Back in April of 1945, when Hitler committed suicide in the bunker, were you told about that?

D: No, not at that time, no. And I tell you the truth, we lived about three or four city blocks away from the. . . . That's why we were in the area of the most fighting. We heard that only afterwards. We had no radio, no newscasts. There were no portable radios at that time, and there was no electricity in the inner city during the fighting when the Russians were. . . . There was no water, running water, no electricity and no gas and things like that. We heard that only afterwards. And that didn't surprise my group of people because all I could hear from my parents. . . . That was no surprise to us. We didn't care really that much. We thought about that. We had no food and nothing. My mother sent my brothers and us then, out for food. We went to basements. We found flour with worms in it. We didn't know. Our mother made us

bread. Some people took us in because we lost everything. There was only survival for everybody, in Berlin at least. Now, in West Germany, it was different where the Americans came in. With the Russians, it was a different story. You thought only about survival. You thought about, maybe you could sleep somewhere. You found a place to sleep. We were dirty. We hadn't taken baths for weeks. We were dirty, filthy. Most of us had only what we had on our bodies, the clothes.

Now, my mother gave birth to a little girl and she lived [for] 15 days, I believe, without food practically; just water and a little milk. Then, we put her in a cardboard box [that] we found in that apartment house where we were staying. We got some flowers from a bush in a park and put on top and we took her to a cemetery in a cardboard box. I carried her like this under my arm. My mother could hardly make it, just my brothers and me, we took her.

You thought only about survival. You didn't care much. All the things about concentration camps. . . . People won't believe it, but I didn't know. I knew there were war camps where they sent people who we were told that were lazy. I believe people that came back out of those camps, they didn't talk. Otherwise they probably thought if they talked too much and it got around then people wouldn't repeat what they hear because they were afraid that was the adult population. I heard about all that in 1945 and I believe it, but the thing is, I believed it, but it's on your conscience. You lived there. How come you didn't know? And that's what my mother asked herself. That was a funny thing. We believed what we were told afterwards. Of course, there were people that knew. I guess they didn't talk.

So, the only thing, we had one French soldier. He was a young man, 22 years, and something happened. Anyhow, they sent him to a war camp and then he came back to our factory and he looked like a 50 year old man. That's the only thing--that was in 1944--that makes me think. . . . He just was a young man when he went there. They sent him for disciplinary action because he wouldn't come to work or whatever. And he came back and he looked like a 50 year. . . . That made you think, but since nobody answered questions, you didn't know how to put it together. Later on, you knew what it was.

I must say I was one of the people who didn't hear much. There was a few rumors that you heard from other girls in school. But I read an awful lot and I read an awful lot after the war and then, I knew what was going on. My mother claimed--I asked her after the war--my

mother claimed she didn't know much. She didn't know all the things. She couldn't believe what was going on. And I could never ask my father. And I asked other parents of other girls. You know how you talk after the war when you heard those stories and in the papers what the allied fighters tell us. And I don't know if they didn't admit it, but everybody knew something wrong was going on but they couldn't pinpoint it. It's survival. I believe it's just survival. If you live in a dictatorship, you only try to survive. It's your survival instincts. You go along with whatever is done evil or bad or good.

A: After the war, when you were in Berlin, which part of the city did you eventually go to?

D: American. We happened to be in the American sector at that time. So, everything was pretty well done. In the American and British sector in August of 1945, I remember that they lined up all the women that were raped in the Army hospital and checked them out for sicknesses and treated them, I believe. I have been told 100 percent that some women had abortions at that time. And maybe an American helped them because they were pregnant from raping. And that, I remember. Later on, I understand why they did that. They didn't want their troops infested with VD [Venereal Disease]. That's why they probably lined up all the women.

Now, in Berlin, when the Americans and the British. . . . Every month, our rations were from one of the allies. They had to take over. When the American and British came, we got our ration card fulfillment, we got it. But when the Russians came, we didn't get it all. The French did very well, too. Then, we had typhus and other disease. And the Americans, I remember, what saved Berlin was what we called the Canadian flour we made soup and bread, the white bread, and that stopped all our intestinal flu and disorders and what we had. I mean, the Canadian flour saved Berlin. That's what we think. American rations, that partly saved our population. And then, later on the blockade, in 1948 when we had the blockade. . . .

A: How long did you stay in Berlin after the war? Were you there for the blockade?

D: Yes, I was. I left in 1959. I married in 1956. My husband, he was stationed then, in Berlin and he came back as a civilian in 1955. I met him in 1952. He was three years stationed after he was in the Korean War. And in 1955, he was discharged. In 1956, three months later, he came back to Berlin and we married and he stayed there as a civilian. So, I stayed there until

1959, till I came to America. I was in Berlin all the time. I wasn't born in Berlin, but I lived 32 years in Berlin.

A: Okay, can you tell me about the blockade?

D: We lived close. We had an apartment we got then. We lived close to the border of the sector, the Soviet. We had power during the whole time. Most of the western sectors had only power for a few hours and day because coal at that time for electricity . . . everything had to come in by planes. Everything was brought in. Now, we had power through the whole time because it happened that we got it from the east zone. We lived about four or five blocks from the border and this section, they couldn't do anything anyhow. We got power from the east.

Our rations, everything came through the planes. I remember the planes coming in every two minutes night and day. On the other hand, we were close, too, to the airport where the American planes landed. I happened to see one night at 11 o'clock we came from a dance. . . . We call them raisin bombers, the planes. They brought us the food in. And only one plane I saw once. There were many planes coming down, but only one I happened to see. We came from a dance and waited for a streetcar and I saw one coming down. I never saw it touch down, but I saw it tumbling down at 11 o'clock at night.

We were very grateful for the Americans at that time, because they saved us, the whole western zone. The British and the French, of course, had their planes coming in, too. They had airports in Berlin, smaller airports, too. But the main thing was the Americans that brought everything in.

We were so used to do without rations, that whatever we got, we were thankful for. We worked. We tried to build our city up. We didn't have much heat. I always had sores, frostbit on my hands. But we survived.

A: Was there a lot of tension or fear in the area when the blockade. . . .

D: Always, there's still fear today. There's a whole generation of Germans who grew up in Berlin with the fear the Russians can come any day because they surround the city. There's always fear.

During Hitler time, I really remember a lot, but I couldn't really remember certain things. There was fear all the time. I believe people never, in Berlin, relaxed. First with Hitler. . . . Now, I have Jewish

friends even here. They are former Germans. I have to do work here. I have met a lot. They told me a lot. They usually left before. In the 1930s, they left Berlin or Germany, because they could afford it. Not too many German Jews were caught. They were mostly East European Jews. Because the German Jewish people mostly had businesses and they could escape long before the war.

They told me things about school time. Now, we didn't have Jewish people in our classes. In 1934, Hitler said they had to go only to Catholic schools and things. They weren't allowed to go to public schools anymore, only to private schools and he took them out.

Now in our neighborhood, there was just the one Jewish family. There was not too many Jewish [people]. I know of one aunt, one of my mother's brother's wives worked for a Jewish family who was a professor at the Berlin University. He left. He was the last. His children were sent long before, in 1937, I believe. He was teaching at Berlin University and in February of 1939, he left. I remember that because they left a lot of their antiques. They couldn't take them with them and they gave them to my aunt who had worked there for many years for them as a housekeeper.

There are things I remember being told, but I don't remember details on them because I was still too young. I remember more or less during the war. But fear was always in Berlin. It was fear for the bombing, fear of the Russians coming and fear if we survived if the Russians don't take over West Berlin. There was fear in one way or another, but the Berliners, they always think about surviving and things. It's still there today. They don't know when the Russians are going to march in and who will stop them.

Let's talk about the news reels and where and then you saw them.

D: News reels, we were going at least once a week to the movies. News reels were shown before the movie, every movie. There was at least 10 minutes of news reel. Now, I saw all the things on the news reels like in Nuremberg when they had those party days, those great gigantic. . . . Oh, I don't know what they had. There was thousands of people there and you saw that. I saw that all on news reel. I have seen almost everything that was going on at that time when he took over Czechoslovakia and Austria when he marched in. I think it was in March of 1939. My birthday is in March, that's why I remember those things. I seen all those things, but they showed only our side: the fighting when they went over to Norway, when they went into Denmark,

Dunkirk, the whole Blitzkreig in Poland, France, and Russia. I saw everything on news reel. I have seen everything on news reels in those times because I went--there was nothing else to do--I went to a lot of the movies in those days and there was always a news reel before every show. So, I've seen everything on news reels, but only our side. I remember even now, that I see later on, the Yalta Conference. But I remember that they showed something, but we weren't told what it was.

I remember another thing that they were talking about, Roosevelt's wife at that time as a character, too. Roosevelt's wife, Eleanor Roosevelt was supposed to be part negro. Because with the races, that was the thing we were taught in school. We were told, especially in business college later on, how to see the different races, the side profile of the Slavic and the Germanic and the Roman, the Latin races. [We were taught] how to recognize them. That was a big deal.

A: How do you recognize them? Do you remember what they told you?

D: Yes. I remember vividly the Slavic because I looked at that bone here. Now I'm sad, but at that time. . . .

A: Are you talking about the cheekbone.

D: The cheekbone, yes. The cheekbone, I remember that profile in school. And I remember that we had, in business college, an assistant principal at that time. When he took over our class for something and he went to all the people that had. . . . He told us he was a Nazi. He told us he could tell by our name where our ancestors came from. And my name is Kawaschinski, Britian-German way, because my grandparents are mostly German. But somehow, the name sounds Polish. He looked at me--I was blonde at that time, dishwater blonde--and he couldn't see. Now, next to me, my girlfriend, she pronounced it the Russian way: Pionkevich. She was real blond, blue eyes, perfect looking German girl. So, she made fun. She had the father that let us listen to BBC. And she would say Eviline Pionkevich. He just looked at us two and he couldn't tell. He went by. I remember those things and we were laughing. He couldn't tell us where we came from. He looked at us and he couldn't tell us. Those things, you remember in school. Because everything was the history. They taught us a lot of history, but especially the German history, it was all one sided. It's just like here. The English see your history, their American history is different than you see it, and so on. But everything was very much to be Germany, which

we couldn't understand. Hitler wasn't a German himself and everything was on Germany. That much, we knew about him. What they wanted to know about, that was very big.

I remember school examinations when they would ask what is Milt. Milt, he was a general of the air force, and all those tricky questions they would ask us. Well children, we talk to each other and say watch out when they ask you for school examinations, tricky questions. And I remember Milt, they asked me Milt, and I happened to know that he was the General of the Air Force. Those things, they taught us what they wanted to know very much. But we never had to learn in school, we never read Mein Kampf or anything. They never asked about that. Now, they might have donw it younger generations, but my brothers never told me. They are two and four years younger than I am. They never told me about that. And my brothers, both of them belonged to the youth, before they become Hitler Youths, between the 10 and 14 year olds. Both belonged to it. Only the oldest had the uniform, the other one didn't. He joined by his own will because he was interested in model airplanes and they had one group with just the model airplanes and he was interested in that. He built model airplanes. He had a uniform, but he went and joined on his own. But the younger one wa more or less pressured--that was during the war--to join. But you know he wasn't interested.

It happened to be we were church going people, Catholics at that time. I probably grew up with other friends. We were the same type of people. We were all going to church and that was more important than anything else at that time. It happened to be that my parents weren't party members although two of my uncles were.

A: The elections that took place. . . .

D: Elections during Hitler time?

A: During Hitler time.

D: My parents went to every, because that I remember, they told me they had to go. That's why probably Hitler had 99 percent. I think everybody was afraid not, to go. Election day everybody went. Everybody I know, every adult went.

A: Did they vote for or against him?

D: Oh, for him, they wouldn't vote anything else. They were afraid. That wasn't like here an election. That much, I remember. They were registered--as far as I

know from my parents. They were registered and they were afraid that somebody would look. It was paper ballots. They probably were afraid that they would look, that they were marked somehow, those papers so they could tell who it was. No, they were voting all for [him]. They just have been because he always said he had 99.9 percent voting for Hitler. It was always told. So, they must have voted. Now, in 1932 and 1933 elections, Hitler was voted in. But Hitler didn't win in Berlin. Hindenburg won. Hitler was only a vice chancellor. Only when Hindenburg died in 1934, Hitler became the chancellor. So, who voted Hitler in, those people today are almost all dead; that generation that was 21 in 1933.

Now, I don't know about that, but during Hitler time, I definitely remember that my parents and every adult I knew went to every election because they registered you. And I believe that they were all afraid if they didn't go to vote and vote for Hitler that they would be. . . . There wa nobody else on there, there were no other parties. He eliminated every party. Before, there was Communist Party and Central Parties and the SPD, social democrats. They were all eliminated. There was nothing else you could vote for but Hitler. But I know when there were elections, everybody went to them. That, I remember definitely. And they voted all for Hitler, because that was all. You had to be 21, at that time, to vote.

But everything was registered in Germany and it still is. When you move from one place to another, you file a report with the police department and they'll file your new address and everything so everybody knows where everybody is. That I think they had since the iron Chancellor time way back in the 1870s. They had everything registered.

A: Okay, thank you very much.

D: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW