

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Nazi Germany Project

Germany in the 1930's

O. H. 522

ANNELIESE FEDOREK

Interviewed

by

Steven Ard

on

July 12, 1981

ANNELIESE G. FEDOREK

Anneliese G. Fedorek was born on March 17, 1921, to Franz and Anna Schmidt in Dessau, Germany, home of the Junkers Aircraft Factory. She was the oldest of three girls. Her father had hoped that she would work in his pharmacy but she married in 1938 after two years of school at Heidelberg. The next year her son, Klaus Dieter was born, and her husband went to fight in World War II where he would later be killed.

After she commented to a neighbor that the war should end because so many had died and the German cities were being bombed, she was put in the Dachau concentration camp. After the camp was liberated, she and her two girls escaped from the Russian zone to the American sector.

Today she is a cook for the Saxon Club Catering Service in Youngstown, Ohio. She is also the first trustee for the Ladies Branch 22 of the Saxon Club.

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INTERVIEWEE: ANNELIESE FEDOREK

INTERVIEWER: Steven Ard

SUBJECT: Bombings, American soldiers, incidents during
the war

DATE: July 12, 1981

A: This is an interview with Anneliese Fedorek for the Youngstown State University Program on Germany by Steven Ard, at the Saxon Club in Youngstown, 710 S. Meridian Road on July 12, 1981, at approximately 6:25 p.m.

Anneliese, where and when were you born?

F: I was born March 17, 1921 in Dessau, Germany. That's between Berlin and Leipzig.

A: Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like growing up there?

F: Well, the biggest airplane factory from East Germany is located right in my hometown, Junkers Airplane Factory.

A: What did your father do?

F: My father had a pharmacy. There were three children at home. I was the only one my father insisted had to go and run the place because I always helped him measure, and clean the medicine cabinets, and read some fancy doctor's writings and prescriptions that he couldn't make out. So he insisted I had to go and learn to help him assist. Some doctor's really have some fancy writing.

A: Can you tell me about your school days there?

F: Yes. I went to grade school and then in 1933 . . . in our school days everything changed when a different government took over.

A: How do you mean changed?

F: Well, instead of "good morning" you had to us "Heil Hitler".

A: If you didn't what happened?

F: If you didn't you would find stones in your windows or you would find that you were on a list somewhere and they may call on you some day.

A: Did that happen to people you knew?

F: Yes. It happened to lots of people in my hometown. So all we did was obey them and nobody bothered you. After they told you not to say "good morning," but to say "Heil Hitler" in school and to everybody on the street, also then, nobody bothered you at all.

A: When you were in school and called upon by the teacher to recite something, was there a little procedure?

F: No, nothing.

A: What kind of school did you go to?

F: I went right in the side called Martin Luther School. It had nothing to do with religion. That was just the name of the school close to my hometown, within walking distance.

A: Was it a public school?

F: Yes.

A: Can you tell me some of the things you learned in that school, after the change, when the Nazi Party took over?

F: I don't think that in school itself we learned anything about politics or anything. Our grades were still all the same, like we still learned about history, arithmetic, writing, and all kinds of whatever language or subject you took. I don't think it changed anything there, it was always the same. The only thing is that they made the boys or the girls join the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts.

A: Had you joined?

F: No.

A: How come?

F: Because I had to help my father so there was a real excuse

there and I didn't have to go. I stayed home.

A: Did you want to go?

F: Well, not want to, but if it was a must, you had no other choice. Like in the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, I don't think they forced you over there at that time.

My father was wounded from the war. He got shot and there was certain work he couldn't do. He was ailing at that time; that's why he passed away very young. I was the oldest one at home so I had to . . .

A: After the eight years of grade school then?

F: Then I went to college.

A: What year was this about?

F: I went to college from 1935 to 1937.

In 1938 I married my husband who was already in the Navy Reserve. When the war came in 1939, he was the first one . . . They crept. My son was born in 1939. My parents kept my son and raised him; that's why my son is still over there. Neither one knew that Germany was going to be divided and we would have problems getting back in, once you were out of there. That's why my son is still over there. I went over there three times and I still couldn't see him. I have had no mail for three years, nothing.

A: Can you tell me a little bit about when you were in college then? About 1937 or 1939.

F: In college, all I did learn in school, was you studied you subjects. I stayed on campus because it was pretty far away from my hometown. I went home just at vacation time.

A: Did you talk about politics there?

F: Not in college at all.

A: How come?

F: No. In college there was never even anything mentioned about politics. All we talked about was that we knew there was a war coming on pretty soon. We didn't talk anything about Hitler or politics to a professor or anybody, nothing.

My husband graduated; he was an eye doctor from college. The war came and I had children so I couldn't finish

college. Then my husband got drafted and after 1944 he didn't come back home. I had the news that he got killed in France on an American torpedo mine. He was on a submarine boat. So I hung out the diapers. He got killed on August 9, 1944. In November I finally heard the news. We had no washers and dryers. I hung out the diapers and one neighbor lady said, "I am sorry to hear about your husband being killed." I said, "Yes. Why don't they quit? We're going to lose anyhow. All our cities, everything gets bombed."

A: Was your city bombed pretty badly?

F: Very much because I had to help. In fact, there was ninety-percent destroyed, everything. There is one judge right in Youngstown who showed me pictures. He went right in my hometown and showed me pictures, Judge Morley. From Dessau, my hometown, they put bombs there. There was a target because the airplane factory was there.

A: He was the pilot dropping the bombs?

F: He was the lieutenant, yes.

A: He has pictures that he took?

F: Yes. We had a dinner here once and he asked me why I have an accent from Germany and where was I from. I said from Dessau. He must live right behind here somewhere because ten minutes later he came back and showed me all the photos. He felt really bad about it, but it was his duty and things happen like this.

So I hung the diapers out and I said to the neighbor lady, "Why don't they quit? We're going to lose anyhow. The Americans are coming closer and Germany should give up because everything is getting ruined. All the men get killed." I didn't know she had an SS boyfriend, but four days later they came and took me with my two little girls and put me in a concentration camp.

A: Where at?

F: In Dachau, right by Munich. They said I was against my own country; I was talking against my own country and I shouldn't do that. After they found out when they entered me . . . They didn't ask all the routines; they thought I was just a plain soldier's widow and didn't really know my background well. They found out that I studied medicine so they put me in a quarter where they had more people doing medical work. That's where I really had to do some dirty work. It was not very pleasant.

A: What do you mean?

F: I had to take all the gold fillings out from the Jewish people, out of their teeth and places before they got cremated. One of them, a big lieutenant or whatever he was, from the SS, collected all that gold and melted it maybe; I don't know what he did with it. If you weren't going to do this he stood behind you with a gun.

My youngest daughter was born in 1942. We didn't have much to eat during the war. She was three years old before she made it up the steps. In the concentration camp I only saw her maybe once a week in a tiny little window. She was getting skinnier and smaller. I thought, "I'm going to lose her." She finally grew and got heavier.

A: Can you describe some of the camp to me? What was Dachau like?

F: They were all small, little barracks, like a primitive set up of barracks. Then one great, big building where the gas chambers were. The room had real small--every six or seven inches--pipes on the ceiling.

A: Did you ever think you would be going into those gas chambers?

F: No, but I've seen them. I was right in it. They showed us to frighten us. They showed us there.

A: And they told you what they were doing?

F: They told us what they were doing. All they had to do was push a button with all those people packed in there like sardines. Then they turned ice cold water on them coming out of these pipes with full strength needle holes, puncture holes. Then a half hour later they put them in another room where they had pipes again on the ceilings and on the walls, everywhere where the gas came out. Then they had a disposal button that they pushed to this underground where they just opened up sliding concrete pieces and all the bodies fell in.

A: How did the bodies come to you where you were working, removing the gold fillings?

F: They were not bodies; they were still alive when I had to do that.

A: You took them out before they were dead?

F: Before they gased them, yes.

A: How hard was that? Certainly they weren't cooperating were they?

F: No, no, no. Lots of them, one old, Jewish lady offered me anything and offered me all kinds of addresses from her family not to take it out. You couldn't even whisper. They couldn't do anything. Those officers went right back forth, up and down, with their guns and with a club in their boot. One lady wasn't going to do anything. She was an eye doctor and the one officer kicked her so bad in her ribs and kidneys and spit on her. He made us see it too. He pulled her hair and everything. You were so frightened to death, you just had to do what they asked or you would never see your children or anything again.

A: Did they treat you different, because you were German, from the other people?

F: After they found out more, that I was not spying against my country; that I was merely making that statement because I was very sad about losing my husband and my home. It got bombed three times. So did my parents' half of the drugstore, and half of the house was gone. So after they checked into that they knew that I was not a spy against Germany, that I just made that statement because I was upset. So then they didn't treat me too badly.

In May 1945, when the war was over, the American GI's came marching in and said, "Whoever has a home or a parent to go to can leave the camp immediately. If not you will have to wait for some kind of special discharge papers."

A: In the camp itself how well were you fed?

F: Not too good. I know the children just had toast and coffee and powdered milk. And we mostly all had soup made from either lots of onions or lots of potatoes. Not too many good ingredients in it because there were too many to feed.

A: Can you tell me about how the camp smelled?

F: I say that they kept it pretty sanitary.

I was one of those lucky ones that didn't have to get a number put on me because they knew, after they checked all of my records and everything, that neither one of my parents were in a party that belonged to the Communists or anything. So they kind of mildly understood. But some of them we saw got treated very rude. I saw one lady sitting next to us,

peeling potatoes and she said, "I don't think my baby's going to make it until tomorrow. It's going to be gone. It's going to be dead." The officer heard her and went by her and claimed that she said something about him. He pulled her out from the row of potatoes and beat her up so bad, injured her so bad, that the next day the baby was not dead, she was. We saw that happen.

A: Was that a German lady or a Jewish lady?

F: A German lady.

A: Were there any Jewish people in with you?

F: Yes. There were anti-Nazi people and Jewish people in that room.

A: They didn't separate them? They just kept everybody together?

F: They were all mixed, all together.

A: When they were going to take somebody to the gas chamber . . .

F: They wouldn't even tell you. They just called them all by numbers. They got them on grat, big, old Army vehicles. They used the Army vehicles and really jammed them up there. You couldn't even turn left or right. We already saw, but they made us see them again too, very cruel. There goes another load again. You heard them screaming from all over, fighting. They didn't want to be on there. A lot of them wanted to commit suicide before they had them, but they had no medication or chance to do it. They had to follow them wherever they took them. The whole place was guarded very heavily with all those big police dogs all over. They even chased dogs after people and attacked them. Tear gas, we saw all that.

A: What else did you see?

F: Really, how they killed them I didn't see. They just showed us what they do with them and we saw when they transport them to the shambles. But how they come out or what they do after, how they destroy them, or what the bodies look like, we did not see.

A: When you said they showed you, did they show the German people this or did they . . .

F: They showed all of us. All of us who were on duty there, certain ones who have kitchen duty or certain ones . . . like when they found out I studied medicine they had me in a Red Cross barrack or something. They took us all

there and showed us only once, so that we would remember what was going to be done.

A: But you were not worried that they were going to take you and actually put you in?

F: I was worried too because you never knew what they would do. I was worried too. It could have been my turn also. I did not know yet that they shipped my records already and that I was more on the easy side than any other one. I wouldn't feel steady every minute every hour; could have been my turn just as much.

A: Did you have any other jobs while you were at the camp?

F: No. First I had kitchen duty. So one officer came one day and said, "How come you didn't tell us you studied medicine?" I said that I was not asked when I got entered. At first he thought I was smart. He kind of looked at me very mean and I said, "Absolutely sir, I was not asked. I was not finished with studying medicine so I didn't call it a profession." He said, "But you did study for two years, and your father has a drugstore." They check everything. "You know medication don't you?" I studied dentistry so that was why they got me there to take all . . . with a pair of old, rusty pliers, no injections or anything, nothing.

A: What did you do, pull the whole tooth? You didn't take the filling out, you just took the whole tooth?

F: Just the whole tooth, yes.

A: Did somebody have to hold them down?

F: One of the officers did it. I guess the one who collected it all. He had some kind of old, clear bottle container full with all the gold and clamps and everything. The Jewish people and lots of the anti-Nazi people years ago, they mostly all had gold fillings. It's out of style now, here a lot, but your people still have a lot of gold places and fillings in their teeth. It was a very soft gold, and if you weren't careful it wrecked just like glass. They think you're some kind of professional to do it here, right with a gun behind you and it's loaded too. Whatever they have in their boots really hurts whenever they hit somebody. It had like steel bullets on the bottom and a little sting. These are how they beat that one lady and she was black and blue all over. This really hurts.

A: When the Americans came and liberated the camp, can you describe that in a little bit more detail?

F: What they really did was give orders that we all could go home. In my hometown the American GI's were in for about six weeks and they left and then the Russians came because they took so much on the river. I was there when it happened.

A: You were there when the Russians came and took over the town?

F: Yes.

A: What happened to you then?

F: My sister and I had to hide in the cellar with our children. We were afraid. One asked us something about our men and we couldn't understand in Russian what they were talking about. So somebody told us to show with our hands laying on the side that they were dead. So then they didn't bother us. They touched the children a little bit and then they went back out again.

All the stores were closed for four days; we couldn't get any milk or anything for our babies, nothing. Naturally, then, everything had to be dark by ten o'clock, just like it was when we had the war. Air raids; everything had to be blinded, the windows. The Russians did the same thing. Otherwise, they left us alone--if you followed your rules that you be in the house by ten o'clock.

Then I met my second husband and he was sorry that I had two little girls because my parents had my son, and kept my son. He begged me to go with him over the border and escape to West Germany. And that's what we did. That was before the Berlin Wall came up.

A: Was it hard getting out?

F: Yes. It was very hard to get out. Machine guns and high towers with watchmen, and everything in between. We were three days and two nights on our feet with no food. We lost our shoes. We went through mud. My daughter, I couldn't catch her before she crossed a creek, and she fell in the water. She screamed so loud. We thought they were going to hear us. We were in no-man's-land where we didn't know how far we were on the American side and then somebody told us on the border side that they catch you either way. If the Americans catch us they chase us back and if the Russians catch us they keep us for sure and never let us get out. So we didn't know where we were. We saw some old farmer lady and a gentleman with a bicycle with a little pick. They were going to go to the black market on the border. Where we crossed the border on the American zone was still being highly guarded. So they told us to go to

the edge of the woods for three miles and then there would be a bus that takes working people to a big train station early in the morning. We tipped the bus driver very high because he knew that we all came from the border line and he would take us to the train station and protect us. So that's what we did and when we came to the train station we looked so muddy and dirty they wouldn't even sell us a ticket, but they did anyway. So with the ticket we went to Munich and from Munich was went to Rosenheim. That was where my husband was stationed once, and he knew the farm people over there. He was an engineer. So they make bridges across Italy and things. He was stationed there. So then that's where we stayed and got married. We just met each other and just left. I left my family behind and my son. He promised me it was going to be better there in West Germany and some day I would get my son.

I tried in 1947. I went over with a passport to get my son after I was married. I married in 1947 again.

A: This was your third husband then?

F: Yes. The one had just died within the year.

A: He was American?

F: The third husband, yes.

A: Was he a soldier stationed over there?

F: Are you talking about the one who took me over the border?

A: No. I'm talking about in 1947.

F: That is a German husband. He was stationed over there. He was a German. The third one, I came with him over here and he died over here. So when I went over there and wanted to get my son, my fiancée, he said no. My dad said, "I promised George who got killed in the war the boy is not going to have a stepfather and I'm going to keep him and raise him. You cannot have him." [George was my first husband]. So I went to the minister and he said, "Go to school and take him out of school and put him on the train." I had a special passport for my son to take him back. I took him out of school and when I got to the train station I had to change different trains to go over the border from East to West Germany. I had to wait for this train and while we were sitting there in the train station to wait--only once a day a train crosses that border in Leipzig--the German police came after me and they said to give my son back to my parents or they

were going to take me to Siberia. I had no choice, I gave my son back. I know my parents wanted him so bad. I couldn't fight it, so I gave him back. Then when my dad passed away in 1957--I was already here in the States; I came here in 1951--he cried in the hospital and hollered for me, "Why doesn't she come now? She can have him now." I could never make it back over there now.

In 1951, I came with my husband and my two daughters to the United States. I had no relatives or anybody here. The First Baptist Church in Warren, Ohio was wonderful. We came over here sponsored from the church organization. What we were was not Baptist or anything. Then I lived in Warren, Ohio. Neither one of us could speak English. We all learned. My two daughters kept their real father's name-- who got killed in the war. Both of them went to school and I was housecleaning and doing odds-and-ends jobs to learn how to speak English. Then I made the mistake and started working in St. Joseph's Hospital in Warren. I thought I could maybe work myself up to my medicine and then later I would go back to college. Here was a lot of difficulty; they put me in the emergency room and I had difficulty working there because some of the girls made fun of me because I couldn't speak English and so I was very upset and the Father from the hospital said, "Go home, my child. You're too young here in this country. Do something else first and then come back and study your medicine and finish. This is kind of hard when you can't speak the language. Go right away and go ahead." So I just gave it up all completely. I just did housecleaning and odds-and-ends jobs. Then I worked afterwhile in Trumbull Memorial Hospital in Warren as a cook. My two daughters got married and had families. My husband passed away. I was a widow. I remarried again, and my husband passed away again. Unlucky I guess.

A: Well, I don't think that. Let's go back to Germany in the late 1930's and 1940's. Did you ever see Adolph Hitler anywhere?

F: Yes. I saw him in my hometown. Every town has a mayor and every state has a governor. A big governor passed away. He was a big Nazi man and there was a big state funeral. Hitler and all of them came with their big automobiles, so naturally we all stood in line to wait for the big parade. Like how you go when there is a big parade. And I saw him again when he went in a big train with Mussolini and somebody else to sign some kind of papers from Russia I guess -- was it Roosevelt? Yes, I think so -- a great train and we had to stay on the train where everything was barricaded up. The train went real slow and they all waved out the windows. And I saw him at that airplane factory where my hometown is. He came there and greeted and cut ribbon for one of the great, big new

bombers we had. I don't know if you've ever heard of it. It had the biggest bombs.

I saw Adolf Hitler three times. Not close enough to shake hands with him, but fairly close that I could see what he was doing. He liked children. People greeted him. People went crazy for him. They would meet him and everything. I say some of his doings, what he did for the people, were not all bad. He made sure that all people had food and discipline. Nobody had guns shooting everybody like mad or killing. Everything was pretty good in order.

A: Would you say most people were impressed with Hitler?

F: During the time when he was . . . I guess yes. Until the end of the war, when people got disgusted. I guess dictators. Everybody wanted to go his own way. That's mainly why people kind of turned away from him. When he was the commander, when he first took over, people I don't think had any complaints. Nobody was starving or anything.

A: Did you ever read his book or part of his book?

F: I had it and destroyed it when I found out my husband got killed. They all gave it to you when you got married. I married during the Hitler times when you get it right from the courthouse. You cannot dare refuse it.

A: What did you think of it as you were reading it?

F: I still have a marriage certificate book--the man in the social security office was very impressed about it--with all the birth certificates in there from my children. I have the original mail stamp right in there from Hitler with the emblem on it. He took copies of it. He wanted it for himself, to keep. He asked if I would give him the book. "No, my daughters want that." I don't know how I happened to bring it over here; how I hung on to that so bad.

A: What was the significance of that?

F: If you get a birth certificate here in the courthouse with a stamp . . . that's what this is. It's stamped from over there from the courthouse, but it had the Hitler seal on it.

A: What he was concerned with was the Hitler seal? The fact that it was on the document, is that it?

F: Yes.

A: What was your impression of Hitler's book, the part that you read? What did you think of it?

F: A little bit too much fanatic, I thought. He wanted too much, too selfish, everything his own way and everything created the way he wanted. A little bit too selfish.

A: Did you think what he was talking about was possible?

F: It might have been if he didn't have too many dictators around him. If they would have listened and not betrayed him too many times, he might have made some of them possible.

A: Did you ever hear any stories about Hitler?

F: Yes, about Eva . . .

A: What did you hear?

F: I heard that over here. Over there I never saw or believed anything. We never saw Hitler over there with a lady, in a woman's company.

A: Really?

F: No. Just with his big German Shepherd dog. In that book it was even in there very much and very outspoken. Hitler was wounded in the 1914-1918 war and he had a tuck, so urination and everything . . . he could not even have sex acts with ladies. So what we know is that he was never even involved with lady companions. Maybe for a partner, to talk to or something, but not, how they say, that he was a sex fiend. Because we never believed it. When he was over there, and especially when I was a medical student we talked about it in college. So we knew that it was possible that he was wounded right there. Maybe he had a lady just for cooking or something, but not in love. He was never married to Eva. We know that, never.

A: What other kinds of stories did you hear about Hitler? Did you hear any at the time about the things he did?

F: We never knew that he entered concentration camps. All his concentration camps he never did enter them himself. They were all different organizations, different leaders, like a different boss. Not himself.

A: Did you know any of the other personalities?

F: No. All I heard of was Hitler.