

Oral History Project: Lily Casey and our own family

Student A writes:

I talked to my grandfather's cousin Raimund M., born in 1937, and his sister Gertrud M., born in 1940. The following text is the result of this conversation.

The First World War started in 1914 and ended in 1918. An uncle of Raimund and Gertrud, Emil M., fought in this war, and he was very proud of fighting. He did not survive the war, and the family got a letter that he had died. For his family that was very hard because they had lost their son, Five years after the war had ended, there was an inflation. People had to buy food in the evening after work, because the next morning the money would have lost most of its purchasing power. Times were hard until 1933 and then everything seemed to get better; but it turned out to be a lie, because in 1939 the Second World War started. Every able-bodied man had to fight in this war, so there were almost just women and children in the cities.

At this time in the war, about once a day there was a bomb alert and Raimund and Gertrud had to run with their mother to the bunker to be safe. Raimund was six years old, and he liked bomb alerts, because he did not have to go to bed in the evening and was allowed to play with the other children in the bunker. The children did not realize that their mothers were worrying if their houses were left standing. At that time there was nothing to buy any more. Raimund and Gertrud were sent to their aunt, my great-grandmother who was living in the countryside, because she owned a farm with her husband, who was still in the war, and there was at least something to eat for everyone. They came back to Stuttgart in 1944, because Raimund had to attend school, but they still used to go to the countryside in their holidays.

The war ended in 1945 and in 1946 the Americans started to give the students food called "Schulspeisung", which was mush. Because the men had been killed or were POWs, most of the teachers were women, just like Lily Casey during WWI. At secondary school, students were separated into groups of boys and girls, and in each class there were about 40 students. After school Raimund and Gertrud started to work because they could not afford to go to university.

Conclusion: In contrast to Lily it was possible for women to study and work, it was just uncommon and for most women too expensive. However, having a child without being married was as difficult as for Lily's sister Helen. Lily's daughter Rosemary was very shocked by the news of the atom bombs in summer



1945, but people in Stuttgart were not interested in this topic. They were just glad that the war had ended without the use of atom bombs in Europe and they had enough problems of their own. Like most of the teenagers at that time, Raimund and Gertrud were members in a sports club, and with this club they had their first bus trips. Going by car or even by bus was something special, because it was fairly expensive. Most boys had a moped, and they dreamed of and saved money for a car. To them, learning to fly like Lily was quite out of the question. (538 words)

Student B. writes:

[...] For my grandmother and her family the war was not as hard as for people in the city. Mainly because they lived in a village and also were farmers who always had a little something left to eat. So during the Great Depression years her family had it relatively good compared to others. Sure, they had to pay

taxes but the authorities often turned a blind eye and were easy to corrupt [...].

Like every girl at that time my grandmother was in the "BDM" too but she and her family did not share the enthusiasm of others. They were not allowed to help foreigners and from time to time there were pogroms against Jews and also raids on Germans who were against the regime. They were taken to the concentration camps. [...].

When the victorious Americans came, the majority of the village surrendered instantly with the exception of a few fanatics who wanted to fight to their last breath but finally also surrendered when they were surrounded. The only thing my grandmother told me about this surrender, and which really touched her again was that one young man was running away. He had already thrown away his rifle but they noticed too late. After one shot he instantly dropped to the ground and remained there motionless. Telling me this my grandmother broke down in tears [...]. It seems like she still hasn't overcome some of these memories [...].

The main thing my grandmother learned from the war was to save – to save everything. Sometimes it almost looks like an obsession to me. Even if it's just an empty cup, used aluminium foil or a spoonful of butter, she keeps it for the time she may be able to use it again. But she has noticed that some people who had nothing during the war either throw away everything today. I think when you have nothing, you have nothing to care about or to save up and today where they have enough, they are relieved that they have the "luxury" to throw things away.

(351 words)