

Sieglinde Klose RG-50.028.0028.01.01

Summary of Transcript

Sieglinde Klose (née Fischer) was born in February 1915. Father: Hans Fischer was born in 1888 in Berlin, Germany. Mother: Clara Fischer (née Suer) was born in 1885 in Leipzig, Saxony, Germany. Siblings: Gerhardt was born in 1912, Adelfrun, was born in March 1917 and Gisela was born in May 1922.

Sieglinde Klose grew up in Berlin, Germany, after her family moved there in 1922. Because her father, Hans Fischer, was disappointed with the church, he had left it about ten years earlier. Consequently, Sieglinde and her sisters had not been baptized as infants. When Sieglinde was 14, she decided she would join the Lutheran church and be baptized so as not to be labeled an atheist in school. Sieglinde's father held nationalistic right-wing views; he and her brother joined the Nazi party early, giving them special status as "old party members." There were many Communists in Berlin, so on election day when homes displayed either the swastika or red flags, Sieglinde and her sisters had to dodge being hit by flowerpots thrown at the "Nazi girls" as they walked on the streets. Amidst high unemployment and economic hardships, news of political upheaval filled the newspapers. Fighting in the streets between the German Nationalists, Nazis, Communists, and Socialists was common.

Sieglinde completed business school in 1933 when she was 18, and managed to get a secretarial job with Ernst Sedgwick "Putzi" Hanfstaengl. As a driving instructor, Sieglinde's father gave driving lessons to high-ranking Nazis. Through his connections Sieglinde was offered the job, although many other young people were unable to find employment. Hanfstaengl had known Adolf Hitler since 1922, and he later was appointed the foreign press chief for the Nazi party. Hanfstaengl had graduated from Harvard University in 1909, so he had many important contacts in the United States and Britain. Sieglinde loved her job working for Hanfstaengl and hearing news from foreign reporters, especially since little information from outside Germany was available under the Nazi regime.

In 1934, Sieglinde became very uneasy when she heard that some in Hitler's inner circle whom he no longer trusted were being arrested or killed. As news of labor unions and opposition political parties being banned and newspapers were being censored, Sieglinde realized that she had to be very careful of what she said and did, especially since she was not a Nazi party member nor did she support it. Sieglinde heard that mail sent abroad was opened and censored so that the outside world would not be made aware of what was happening in Germany. Hanfstaengl expressed his outrage at what was happening, and at lunchtime gatherings he would sometimes question Hitler about the news he heard from foreign correspondents. As time went on, Sieglinde noticed that her boss was being excluded from Nazi party functions and no longer given access to Hitler.

Sieglinde witnessed Hitler's racist attitude firsthand at the 1936 Olympic Games when he refused to shake hands with Jesse Owens and other Black Olympic medalists. When she was 21, Sieglinde was required to vote in the 1936 elections, but her conscience would not allow her to. She requested a postal ballot instead and never used it. She was happy to be able to say that she never voted for the Nazis. In February 1937, Hanfstaengl was ordered to fly to Spain on a mission. After landing in Leipzig due to a problem with the airplane, Hanfstaengl fled Germany through Switzerland. Eventually, he settled in

England. When Sieglinde met Hanfstaengl in London later that year, he told her that the “mission” was actually a plot to have him killed. Sieglinde suspected that she was under surveillance due to the work she had done under Hanfstaengl. This was confirmed in 1938 when she was stopped and interrogated by the police on her return from a trip to Prague. They had searched her luggage and found an address book with Dr. Hanfstaengl’s name in it. They told her that he was at the top of a list of people to be arrested upon returning to Germany. She had hidden any incriminating documents she had in her coat pockets and destroyed other items by flushing them down the toilet.

Sieglinde was sad to see some of her Jewish friends emigrate abroad in 1938 after they were banned from operating businesses in Germany. In April 1939, there was a parade to celebrate Hitler’s 50th birthday. Sieglinde and others in her office were told on the morning of the parade to attend the parade route. They all went, but Sieglinde decided that she would hide in a bathroom rather than take part in the celebrations. When her co-workers asked what had happened to her, she said she couldn’t find them when she had returned from the bathroom. Her conscience would not allow her to support Hitler or the Nazis or to say “Heil Hitler.” Sieglinde “turned white” when she heard the report that Germany had invaded Poland because she had friends and relatives in the military and a boyfriend in the Navy. She heard it reported on the radio that 10,000 Jehovah’s Witnesses were being banned for refusing to salute “Heil Hitler!” or perform military service. Sieglinde was in awe that this relatively small group of people had the courage to stand up to Hitler and the Nazis and wondered how they got the strength to do so.

Sieglinde hated to hear her father cheering the news of Nazi victories. He disapproved when she would sarcastically point out that the Nazis could not be doing so well in the war because there was little available to purchase in the shops. Sieglinde said that her father was 200% Nazi. One day, Sieglinde’s father announced that he wanted nothing to do with her and that he was disowning her. He threatened that he would have her sent to a concentration camp to be politically educated if he heard her say anything against “our great führer.” She loved her father, but the political situation divided them. Desperate to hear news from outside of Germany, Sieglinde secretly tuned in to foreign radio stations to hear news in English. A friend had warned that she should turn the radio dial back to the Berlin radio station when she turned the radio off, in case it was checked. Sieglinde knew that there were spies everywhere and that it was a capital offense to listen to news on foreign radio stations and share that information.

Sieglinde wanted to have a church wedding, but was very shocked and disappointed when the pastor came to interview her dressed in civilian clothes with a swastika on his lapel, indicating his party membership. Sieglinde felt betrayed at seeing the church’s support for Hitler and the Nazis. Sieglinde was married in 1942 and their son, Hans Henning Klose, was born in 1943. Sieglinde’s husband fought in the war while in the Navy, but he never voted for Hitler. He didn’t oppose Sieglinde and allowed her to express her views to him against Hitler and the Nazi party. When conscripted for work, Sieglinde chose to volunteer at the local fire department rather than in a factory that manufactured warplanes so as not to go against her conscience and support Hitler.

At the end of the war, Sieglinde ended up in East Germany under Russian control. She and her sister decided that they and their children would go by foot to the line of demarcation, which was 50 to 60 miles away. When they got there, they managed to board a train heading West that was repatriating British prisoners of war and other displaced persons. Although German people were not allowed on this train,

Sieglinde spoke in English to a British officer who allowed them to board the train. They left the train in Hamburg, and in time, Sieglinde was reunited with her husband.

In 1948, Sieglinde met one of Jehovah's Witnesses when he called at her apartment. She asked him if he was part of the group of people who had been banned in Germany and put in prison. She said to him that she wanted to read about Jehovah's Witnesses; she found the Bible-based magazines he left her to be very interesting. She asked a Witness whether they believed in the Trinity doctrine, which she had always found to be illogical. She also asked if her mother, who had died when she was four years old, was in heaven. Sieglinde had always hated the idea that her mother was in heaven rather than on earth caring for her three small children. The Scriptural answers to those questions satisfied her; Sieglinde began to study the Bible and attend Witness meetings. She met several Jehovah's Witnesses who had survived the concentration camps, including a Danish Witness who survived Auschwitz and had settled in East Germany. He told her that in August 1950, when the Witnesses were banned by the Communist government he was sent to prison. He explained how the Witnesses shared food and had helped one another in the concentration camps and prisons and managed to smuggle in Bible literature. Sieglinde also recalled meeting **Annette Lubinos** who had also been arrested several times before being sent to Ravensbrück and Auschwitz concentration camps. She told Sieglinde how a group of female Witnesses that had been assigned to tend fields were trusted by the guards because they did not try to escape.

Sieglinde and some of her family members became Jehovah's Witnesses. She was eventually reconciled with her father who realized that Jehovah's Witnesses were never a threat to the government and that they had been unjustly persecuted during the war. Sieglinde's son, Hans, became one of Jehovah's Witnesses and a full-time minister and congregation elder. Sieglinde visited the museums established at Dachau and Auschwitz and was very glad that the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum was set up to educate people on how people were persecuted under the Nazi regime.

Keywords:

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