

**LISKA, Hermine**  
**Germany Documentation Project**  
**German**  
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### **ABSTRACT**

Hermine Liska was an eight-year old farm girl in Carinthia (Kärnten), Austria at the time of the Nazi Anschluss. Her parents were Jehovah's Witnesses and very anti-Nazi. She describes the pressure she was subjected to in school to join the Hitler Youth and to give the Nazi salute. In 1941, after her parents refused to sign a pledge to raise their children according to the Nazi ideology, she was taken away and sent to a Nazi children's home on the mountain near Feldkirchen. She continued to resist the teachers' pressures to conform and was then sent to a convent in Munich, where she remained until April 1944. She recalls how well her parents, particularly her mother, had prepared her for these trials and attributes her moral strength to their teachings and her faith in God. She also talks about her father and brother who refused to enlist, and her brother's experience at Dachau. She currently lectures in schools and encourages children to be strong and to resist peer pressure and xenophobia. Her message is that there are only two races: good people and bad people.

### **Tape 1**

**0:00**

She discusses life on a Carinthian farm in the 1930s, before Hitler annexed Austria. She recalls that they were a very happy family, despite their humble circumstances. Her parents were Jehovah's Witnesses, a very small religious minority at the time, with only about 550 adherents in all of Austria. She says that as a young child, she loved school and did not feel excluded even though she did not attend religion classes.

**5:08**

She recalls March 13, 1938, when Hitler marched in and everything changed; that the neighbors were very excited and believed that a new golden age was about to begin; but that her parents told her there was no reason to celebrate because only God was their Führer. She says that the school children were required to greet the principal with the Nazi salute, *Heil Hitler*, but she refused; that she lost her enthusiasm for school; that her fellow students began to taunt her; that she was banned from playing in gym class.

**12:00**

She says that she refused to join the Hitler Youth, though the beautiful uniforms and delicious snacks were tempting; that in January 1941, her father had to go to court where authorities tried to force him to sign a pledge that he would raise the children according to the Nazi ideology; that he refused to sign; and that she was picked up at the farm in February 1941 and sent to a Nazi training school near Feldkirchen.

**18:00**

She says that leaving home was the worst thing that ever happened to her; that she had never been anywhere except for the farm and the school; that she was terribly homesick; that she got bad marks because she refused to salute the flag, sing the Nazi anthem, etc; and that she was punished for her resistance. She attributes her strength to her parents' teachings and her faith in Jehovah.

## **Tape 2**

**0:00**

She reminisces about a teacher, who had been kind to her, who tried to force her put on a brown velvet jacket that was part of the Hitler Youth uniform. She says that she struggled with the woman and refused, but that it was very painful because from then on, the woman totally ignored her. She recalls that the first Sunday of each month was visitors day and though she was not permitted to receive family visits, that her father sometimes met her on her way to school and gave her a small token. She says that when these visits were discovered, the authorities decreed that the influence of her family was still too strong, and in September 1941, she was sent to the Adelgunden Anstalt, a convent in Munich; that the nuns there threatened to send her to a locked facility if she continued to be uncooperative; but that she remained faithful to her convictions.

**12:00**

She says that in the summer of 1943, air raids began and children were evacuated from Munich to a small town in the area of Ingelstadt. She recalls that she enjoyed being in the country and helping with the harvest; that she desperately wanted to be able to get out at night and see the stars, and that was able to do so by volunteering to work in the barn. She says that they stayed in the country over the winter; that in 1944, she returned to the convent in Munich; that the night of April 19, she experienced a major air raid; and that on April 29 she was finally allowed to go home.

**18:06**

She states that when girls reached the age of fourteen, they had to perform a year of mandatory work due to the labor shortage, and that though farm girls were allowed to stay at home, she was sent to aid an elderly couple near Klagenfurt. She recalls finding out about the end of the war by overhearing the BBC broadcasts that her employers listened to every evening and that she walked six kilometers to Klagenfurt, where family friends helped her get home.

**23:07**

She talks about her brother who was at Dachau, who was sick with typhus when the camp was liberated on April 29, 1945, and who came home two months later weighing less than one hundred pounds. She says that her other brother had been in Crete as a cook; that he never had it too bad; and that he returned in October 1945.

**27:18**

She explains why it had been so important for her to go out at night while she was in the country; that her mother knew the stars very well and told her that if they ever separated, she should look at the Big Dipper and her mother would also look at it and they would feel their connection. She talks about another brother, Michael, who died in January 1939 of appendicitis.

**34:58**

She talks about courage and how her faith helped her to remain strong. She says that her father and brother were conscripted by the home guard, refused to serve, and were jailed; that her father was released after three weeks but that her brother was sent to Dachau. She states that if Hitler had won the war, their property would have been confiscated and that they would have been sent to Russia, where experienced, hard-working farmers were needed. She says that her brother never spoke about his experiences in the concentration camp and that no one ever asked. She states that in 1978, at a Jehovah's Witness conference in Klagenfurt, several people (including herself) spoke of their war experiences and that most people had no idea what had happened.

**42:00**

She says that after the war, her parents told her that she had been very brave and that they were proud of her. She says that her mother's faith had inspired her. She says that she can understand why people believed the Nazi propaganda; that her parents prepared her to be mocked or even persecuted in school; but that they nonetheless taught her not to hate or seek revenge. She says that her mother told her that people are blind and that the devil was behind the rise of fascism; that her mother prepared her for their separation and taught her respect and the value of good work under all circumstances.

**51:22**

She says that she lectures in schools and tries to empower the students to say no, to resist peer pressure to smoke, drink, and do drugs. She believes that xenophobia is still a problem and stresses the importance of tolerance and fairness.