

## **RG-50.285.0023**

### **Summary**

Margarete Gager was born on April 3, 1931, in Raiding, close to Deutschkreutz, in eastern Austria. That is where she was raised and lived as a child for 9 years. After that she and her family lived and the parents worked on the "Paulshof" [PH], an estate of the Esterhazy family, close to Deutschkreutz. From there it was an hour's walk to the school in Deutschkreutz. As a child she did not know any Jews, also no Jewish children, in Deutschkreutz, but she heard about them and her older brother knew some. However, one heard about Jews being evicted and deported to camps and being mistreated. In the early 40ies Jews were driven through Deutschkreutz and taken to the train station for deportation. There also was talk about gas chambers and killing. People talked about their suffering and commiserated. Some Jews emigrated, for example to America, if they had the means. She learned all that from her parents. Yes, her parents knew Jews. They owned shops, for example textile shops, where the mother often went. One bargained with the Jews.

She started school in 1938 and, yes, she heard about the "Anschluss" and, in that context, that there would be war. Many people were enthusiastic about the "Anschluss". Times were hard, a lot of people were out of work. On the estate where the parents worked things were not so bad; they had the food they needed, but people in the cities suffered. Many people were enthusiastic about Hitler, in school one had to stand and salute the flag etc. Hitler portraits were set up in school. Her older brother was recruited to the Wehrmacht and was killed in 1941.

She remembers having to say "Heil Hitler" in school, saluting the flag and celebrating Hitler's birthday on April 20th. Schoolchildren had to learn texts and sing, for example "Die Fahne hoch, die Reihen fest geschlossen...." Most teachers strongly supported Hitler. The school organized the collection of mulberry leaves, which were fed to silk worms, to produce silk for parachutes. Children learned that that was important for the war.

When the Jews were evicted their property was sold or torn down. The synagogue in Deutschkreutz was blown up in 1939. We did not see it, but we heard the explosion, even though the estate where we lived was outside of town. There were many fanatics in Deutschkreutz yelling antisemitic slogans ("Deutschland erwache, Jude verschmachte"). The destruction of the Synagogue had been announced. A young woman was killed in the explosion, Ms. Gager new her. - Yes, one heard about what the Jews did on the Sabbath; they prayed and did not work. Yes, she saw the rubble and he place where the synagogue was when she went to school. - HJ and BDM wore uniforms, but she was too young to join. The HJ and BDM sometimes paraded, but mostly played games.

Yes, there were people who opposed Hitler. They predicted hard times ahead. Some who opposed Hitler were jailed. One such opponent was the director of the school by the name of "Englisch" [PH]. He was in jail for quite a while. He returned after the war. - Nothing happened to the Hitler fanatics after the war.

Yes, there were Roma close to Deutschkreutz (in Girm). They were poor and came begging. She had no contacts with Roma children; they were very timid and were not allowed to go to school. They begged and lived in straw huts. They were also taken away to a camp ("Lattenhof" [PH]). Many died there. Very few returned after the war.

During the war they had forced laborers on the estate, for example Italians, then also Frenchmen, Russians and Ukrainians. They worked the fields. Ms. Gager's father organized and supervised their work. They were mostly men, but also a few women. Communication with them was difficult. They were eventually taken away by the Gestapo.

In 1945 the Soviet Army came. Women went into hiding because they were afraid of rape. Later such things did not happen anymore. The first soviet soldiers were rough, later the occupiers were friendlier.

An experience during the war: On her way home from school she passed by the Jewish cemetery and saw that a group of "Nazi fanatics" unloaded about 8 or 10 emaciated bodies, which she thought were Jewish, into a large grave in the cemetery. The guards chased her away. She did not know where these bodies came from, but talked at home about it. These things, she says, were known.