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**Interview Transcription**

**MAGGIE NEUMANN - VO**

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## MAGGIE NEUMANN

Q: Whenever you're ready.

A: I was visiting my grandmother in Crisout (? sp.), a small village in East Germany, now Poland. Grandmother was sitting in a rocking chair, just staring at me. In her hands she held the awful notice that her youngest son had been killed somewhere on the eastern front. Feeling somewhat uncomfortable I keep thinking, "Why isn't she crying?" "Grandmother," I said, "I want to go home." "Why? So close to end, why?" she kept saying. Later that day my mother came to take me home. She explained something to me about evacuation. That didn't mean much to a 9 year-old. All I understood was that we were going by train on a long trip. I felt excited. Forgotten was grandmother and her grief. I wanted to start packing. "Don't be in a hurry, we are not leaving yet," mother said, "Maybe tomorrow." I was disappointed. Most of my school friends and their families had left our village days ago by train, some by horse and some even by cow drawn wagons. "We have work to do, the cows have to be milked." My brother and I loved playing in the hayloft while my parents tended the stock. While we were playing I heard a familiar sound, airplanes. Instead of running to the basement I ran across the yard into the pasture. I wanted to see those planes. One plane left the formation and came right at me. It flew so low I could see the man looking down at me. Never realizing the danger, I stopped and waved. I saw the man waving back at me. Then the plane lifted and just left. I did not understand why my mother, who stood in

*pre-war + wartime residence  
Gräditz ( )  
and then by Poles  
moved to CS  
b/c of bombings  
DP in  
Passau*

the doorway watching, uh clutched her hand to her chest. She seemed awful quite the rest day.

Finally, we were ready to go on our trip. Disappointed again, no toys, no games, just clothes and food and a feather bed. I did manage to sneak, sneak my favorite book, *The Good Brothers Grim* in my book sack. What a train ride, so many things to see. We passed many places where so many houses were destroyed by the planes, by the bombs. I thought about the man in the plane and wondered had he done that? It started to get dark and I got awful sleepy. "Too much excitement," my mother said. I was so glad mother had brought the feather bed. I awoken because the train stopped. "Mother, can't you turn the light on? I don't like the dark." "Keep still and go back to sleep." How could I go back to sleep with all the commotion going on? I heard some people silently crying, some praying and there, there was a familiar, there was an unfamiliar distant noise. It was February 13th and the city of Dresden was under air attack. On the way to the bathroom I managed to look out a window but the train was incomplete darkness. In the not so far distance it looked the sky was on fire. I live it, I believe it was the first time in my life I felt more than afraid, horrified. I prayed to God, "God, don't let those bombs hit our train." This terrible night passed and morning came and so did those awful planes with their deadly cargo. As the city was burning from one end to the other the bombs kept raining from the sky.

They give medals to war heroes. What does it mean to be a war hero? How many people must you kill or how must it's destruction must occur in order to qualify

for a medal? And what about the victims or the innocent? Can there be innocent people even among the enemies? At least some? Any?

Our train was rerouted in the in rapid Czechoslovakia. Mother told us kids there at least we were safe from the bombs. After spending a few days in a temporary refugee shelter we were given a room at a farm place. For a short time, life seemed to get back to normal. Uhhh, okay...my sister Elsie got sick and had to be hospitalized with Scarlet Fever in a city nearby. One day my older sister, Inga and I, intended to visit Elsie in the hospital. As our train pulled in to the station, the air siren went off. People were screaming and running for cover. What, what chaos! Nothing made sense to me. I couldn't understand what the shouting was all about. The war was supposed to be over. I remember asking my sister, "Did we win?" Now at least we can all go home. It didn't take long before all hell broke lose. All the bottled up emotions and hatred for the occupier seemed to explode. People were rounded up and brutalized in the worst way. Not everybody participate in that frenzy but the criminal elements did so without any intervention or regard of guilt. When I saw the L.A. riot, it reminded me of that time except it was 100 times worse.

We were prevented from returning to my, to our mother, Some how we got away and managed to join other refugees on their way back to ~~Silasia~~ <sup>Silesia</sup> ~~(? sp.)~~. The next day, Czech partisans rounded us up in an, an open field. Women, children and a few old men had to line up hands above the head while the Czech soldiers pointed their machine guns at us. That was the second time that I was very frightened. I, we couldn't understand what the shouting was all about. I remember some soldiers ripping earrings out of

women and of course the watches. Too scared to cry I just prayed. It seemed like forever but finally we were allowed to sit down on the ground. Some women fainted and we were kept...some women fainted. We were kept all day and all night without food and water. I uh, was I hungry. I could eat a horse. The next day after dark my sister and I escaped. I had to get something to eat. My hungry was stronger than my fear. I walked up to a farm house and asked for a piece of bread. Thank God I got it. For almost three weeks we were on the road towards <sup>Silesia</sup> ~~Silasia~~. Sleeping at night in the woods, sleeping at night in the woods. Sometimes we were lucky and stayed at an abandoned house. Their owners were driven out.

One day we made it. We were at home in our village, credits (?). My father couldn't believe his eyes. We had no idea what happened to our mother and our little brother and our sister in the hospital. Uh...my father's good intention by feeding us all we could eat after our long ordeal created havoc. We, we got so sick and weak I thought I was going to die. God willing, we made it. Our village was under Russian occupation...our village was under Russian occupation. I was not afraid of the soldiers, they seemed to like us kids. I just couldn't understand why the women were so afraid and kept hiding from them, from them. One night we were sound asleep and some soldiers pounding on our door. My father got up and opened. In came five soldiers. Two kept my father out in the hallway while the rest entered the bedroom looking for women. My sister, Inga, then 14 years-old, clung to me. One soldier tried to lift me out of the bed while I screamed, "Nyet, nyet! Yap will ya mop (? sp.)" That means, "No, no, you son of a bitch." That was the first Russian words I picked up from the

soldiers. The soldiers let me go. The soldier let me go. They talked among themselves and then left. After a while those things didn't frightened me anymore because it happened so often. As a matter of fact, after a while, I started to tease the soldiers about women. When I asked them, when I asked the soldiers for food, I told them I know of a house where there are lots of women. Of course, I pointed to an abandon house. Day after day, Russian trucks would pull up and confiscate everything from live stock to machinery and even house hold items. From house to house they took the...from our house they took the curtains and a big picture from the wall. The officer that ordered our house to be raided perhaps did so because of our last name. Our last name happened to be Grutsner (? sp.) and Paul Grutsner was supposed to be uh, a famous painter.

Our house happened to be the only private home being raided. While all this confiscation was going on my father with some men from the village tried to hide some horses because they tried to keep them for spring planting. At the same time a curfew was in effect, no villagers were allowed on the street after dark. One evening we all went to bed as usual. We slept in one room. As I woke up I noticed my father's bed empty. I didn't hear him get up. I got up and started to get ready for school when some kid stopped by and told us about a man being shot not far from our house. My sister ran out to see. I heard a scream. My sister screamed. Right then I knew it was our father. He had broken curfew. He was buried the same day in a very simple, wooden box. Now we had to fend for ourselves. Food was getting harder and harder to get. We had one grocery store and one bakery in our village but you had to have Polish money to buy any and nobody had gave us any money. For our daily bread, we had to rely on begging

or stealing. While the confiscating of livestock was still going on the cows were, all the cows from the village were brought to a big meadow where the women from the village had to milk them twice a day. The next day they were loaded on trucks and shipped, and shipped out. A couple of us kids and I had an idea to steal back a cow. It would mean milk, butter and perhaps meat. So we waited 'til dark by...so we waited 'til dark. By then the soldiers usually sat around the fire drinking and singing. One of the kids managed to get a rope around the cow's neck and we started to lead her away. I was praying but this time it didn't work. A Russian patrol caught up with us and after much cussing and a kick in the butt we were let go, minus the cow of course, which, by the way, turned out to be a steer - what we couldn't see in the dark.

After while, most Russian soldiers left and the village was taken over by Polish people. Winter came and so did hard times. Thank God for our feather beds. I think I would...we would have frozen to death without them. We had no wood or coal left for heating. A fire in the stove was only made when we had some potatoes to cook and the wood for that I had to steal first. After that first winter I believe there were no picket fences left in our village. Most Polish farmers would give us some potatoes and a piece of bread but never more than a day's supply because we were not the only ones hungry.

First Christmas came alone with our parents. On the morning of Christmas Eve I decided that I had to have a Christmas tree. I asked my sister that she should get the potatoes and I would get us a Christmas tree. I took an axe and started for the woods. I don't remember if the axe was too dull or, or I too weak. The darn tree wouldn't fall. All of a sudden I heard a noise behind me. There were three Russian...uh soldiers out

on patrol. One of them pointed a gun, his gun right at me. I didn't raise my hands, I was more angry than afraid, and I shouted at him, pointing at the tree, "It's Christmas and I want that tree." Uh...the soldier took the axe out of my hand and in two whacks the tree was down. If I would have known the Russian word for "thank you" I would have said so. I got my beautiful Christmas tree and started home. The snow was about a foot deep and it was slow going. A gunshot rang very close to me. I stopped cold in my tracks and dropped the tree. A big black bird fell out of the sky. The Russian soldiers like shooting the black birds. As I picked up the, the black bird, I thought it's a miracle and moot...and meat to boot. What, what a, what a feast. It's going to be a good Christmas.

Summer 1946, Polish police informed us that we had to leave our house and all of our possessions for relocation. We were to assemble at the train station the next day and that we were allowed only enough clothes and a blanket and what we were able to carry in our hands. As the, at the train station were hundreds and thousands people assembled from all surrounding villages. About three million were relocated from <sup>Silesia</sup> Silasia. Before we were put on the train, which by the way was a cattle train, everybody was searched again and every single value was taken away. No food, no water, no bathroom facilities. There were so many people in our wagon that I was not able to stretch my legs. When the train finally moved many people wept and we all sang "Noon A Day Du Mima Pamatlan" (? sp.). That means, well, uh "Farewell My Homeland." The next day our train arrived in <sup>Leipzig</sup> Lipsee, Saxony. Russian army trucks took us to a big cacellny (?). First time we had received a piece of bread and water. Women and men



were separated and I, while we were left in two shower rooms our clothes were being defumigated. Doctors and Red Crosses checked us for head lice and minor diseases. A few days later my sister and I were separated and put in four of the homes in the same village. Every Sunday for two hours after school I walked...no, after noon I was allowed to visit my sister. The rest of the time it was work, it was work except for school hours.

In the meantime, my mother and little brother made it from Czechoslovakia and to Bavaria and with the help of the international...international Red Cross established connection with authorities in <sup>Leipzig.</sup> ~~Lipsee.~~ My sister and I received special permission to leave East Germany to be reunited with our mother in West Germany. On the outside bumper of our freedom train we rode all night on a chilly April night. The train was so overcrowded when it arrived at the station there was no room inside for anybody. Two years later after the war my sister and I were reunited with our mother in <sup>Passau,</sup> ~~Pashao (? sp.)~~, Bavaria. We lived with at least a thousand people in a refugee camp that used to be a monastery. Four families in one room. After two years the rooms were divided in half...in half and each family received one room. I would like to point out that during those ten years living in poverty and close togetherness with so many people from all sorts of life not once did we have a murder or a rape or any, any formation of gangs.

In March 1958 my sister and I emigrated to the United States of America.

Q: Excellent.

A: Yeah, that's the way, \_\_\_\_\_ need only one minutes, that's....

Q: Now uh, I would like you to say your name and the town that you're from.

A: Okay, I'm Maggie Neumann and I'm from Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Q: Okay, I just need you to say, "Maggie Neumann, Sioux Falls, South Dakota."

A: Maggie Neumann, Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Q: Great, thank you so much. We really appreciate....