

My name is Helga Schwededsr. I was born in Hamburg, Germany. Yes, Hamburg. I was born January 15, 1923. I'm 78 years old now.

I'm a Lutheran. I belong to the Lutheran Church. No, I was born deaf. No, I don't know the cause. The cause was never determined. I was just born deaf.

No, my parents were hearing. I'm the oldest. I have two brothers and two sisters. My youngest brother is deaf. And he was born deaf the same as I was, with no determined cause.

We went to the school for the deaf. There was a school for the deaf in Hamburg, and I went to that school. And I learned by lip reading. And I learned to read lips when I went into the school.

And the rules were that the children in class had to learn by lip reading. We signed outside of the classroom, but in the classroom, we had to lip read. Outside of the class, it was permitted for us to sign.

My father worked as an import/export-- he worked in the import/export business. My father's name was Edward Schwededsr. Anthony Gambain was his maiden name.

I was first born. Second born was my sister, Ursula, and then my deaf brother, Raymond-- or then a brother Raymond. Then a hearing sister. My last was a hearing sister, Elsbeth.

We learned grammar, English, we learned writing, reading and writing. We learned to read lips. We practiced reading lips in school. There were eight of us in the classroom, four boys and four girls, and we sat in a semicircle around the teacher. The four boys sat on one side of the semicircle, and the girls sat on the other side, and the teacher stood in the middle.

Oh, we were taught the alphabet, our ABCs, the beginnings of the learning process that all children learn, writing, reading. Oh, yes, we did socialize. Outside of class, we had our recess and we had our playtime outside of the class.

I went to that school until I was 14 with the same group of students. We didn't-- I didn't mix with other students. We went through all seven years of school together in that group.

Oh, yes. I did socialize with many hearing adults, deaf adults also, older people. They were very smart. Actually smarter than my classmates, of course, because they were adults. I learned a lot from them. We talked about history and politics.

I went into school in 1937-- no, 1937 is when I was 14 years old and I was out of school at that point. Yes, then after that, I became a house daughter. It's called a house daughter. I learned from my mother to do household chores, cooking, sewing, cleaning, everything like that. I was intended to go to another household, another hearing family, but I was deaf, and I was fortunate that my mother, if you will, hired me into our own home to work as a house daughter.

When President Hindenburg passed away, Hitler assumed power. Hindenburg was the president of Germany at that time, and he had been for many, many years. He was elderly and then he passed away and Hitler took power.

The country was very shocked at that time because we didn't know who Hitler was. He sort of came out of nowhere. He took power so quickly.

It wasn't like here in America. The process was very different. Here, in America, you have a competition for the vote of the American people. In Germany at that time, we were not given any free choice. It was simply Hitler assumed power.

I saw many people in the streets crying over that decision. My father was very mum, was very quiet at that time. But I saw-- saw my father's face at that point. My mother's face was filled-- my mother was-- face was filled with tears.

We didn't know much as children because we were so young, of course. We really didn't know what was going on. I

was 15 or 16 when my mother got a letter that said that I was going to be taken to the hospital and be sterilized. And she didn't tell me, of course, until the date loomed so closely that she felt forced to tell me.

I was in the kitchen cooking and I was going about my business, and I was-- it was just a regular day. My mother came in with this very odd look on her face, and I asked her, mother-- I asked her what was wrong, and finally she was able to tell me that she was going to need to take me to the hospital for sterilization. I was very calm. My mom was confused. I thought she would-- she thought that I would scream or run away.

It was just that I was so calm. My mom was confused and asked me why I was so calm. I told her that the rest of my classmates had already been sterilized and I was the only one that wasn't sterilized and I thought it was fair for me to be sterilized the same as my classmates.

My mother went very calm and quiet. It wasn't until I was older that I became depressed and realized when I saw my sister's baby what had been done to me. I realized that I could never have a baby. I mean, I was touched, and I went to the bathroom very quickly to hide my tears.

I came back from the bathroom. My sister asked me what was the matter, asked me why I was crying, and I told her that I was just so happy to see such a beautiful baby. I hid my feelings underneath my pride.

My father hid his tears when I went to the hospital. My mother took me to the hospital to the neonatal section. We didn't go to the main hospital. We went to a much smaller hospital. It was very charming, very beautiful.

The people were so nice there. The doctor was an older man. Made me feel very comfortable. When I was 15 or 16 years old, I had the surgery, and I woke up feeling the pain from the surgery, but I had a sandbag on my abdomen.

The doctor came to visit me very often and check on me. He gave me books to read and he visited me often in the hospital. My mother would come and comfort me.

I did ask about my father. My mother told me that he was embarrassed and didn't want to be seen crying in public. That's why he wouldn't come to visit me.

My sister came and visited me. My second sister opened the door very quietly and peeked in the room. I saw her face, and she was so sad. I just-- she was scared, and I just responded by laughing.

I told her that the expression was so funny that she was so puzzled. When I laughed at her, she thought-- she thought that I would cry, but I was laughing and that's why she was so puzzled. Then, next, my classmates came and visited me in the hospital. They all cried when they saw me. And I wondered why they were so upset, because now, I felt that we were all in the same boat.

They told me that they had hoped that I would be the one to have the baby so that they could all be godmothers to my child. Yes, my uncle, my brother's-- my mother's brother was a judge in Hamburg, and he tried to protect me from that trip to the hospital for sterilization. But the Nazis were so powerful at the time that my uncle really had no recourse. So they took me in for the operation.

So as time went along, I got married. My husband, like me, did have the surgery as well. But his surgery was awful.

He had to go to the hospital, but his family resisted the going to the hospital and they ignored the letters, so the police came to his door and forced his family to take him to the hospital. They tied him down on the bed, on the operating table. And so that was very painful for him. They didn't give him any drugs for the pain.

When he and I found out that we were both sterilized, he thought that we'd make a perfect match, so he asked me to marry him. He refused to marry a woman who could bear children. My husband's name is Joach Impeters. I met him in a swimming tournament in Leipzig and fell immediately in love with him.

He used to live in East Germany and I lived in West Germany. At that time, the border was up because of the war and he escaped East Germany to come to West Germany to ask me to marry him. He asked me to marry him and moved to East Germany to live with him. So I did, and we lived together in East Germany for about 2 and 1/2 years, and then we escaped to West Germany. And my husband was a carpenter.

The reason we moved to West Germany was because we were fed up with the communism. West Germany was freedom, meant freedom for us. East Germany was just oppressive with the communism. I have a lot of stories about how we escaped into West Germany.

My husband and I went to visit my parents. My husband's relatives lived near the border, and they helped us escape East Germany into West Germany. We asked them to guide us into West Germany and they were happy to do so.

So my husband's relatives told a Russian soldier that we wanted just to visit West Germany. The Russian soldier asked us if we would be back and we responded, of course we'll be back. So the soldier let us visit. My parents were so happy to see us. They asked if we could stay for good.

I had so many things in East Germany, for example, my papers, my language books, and everything else. My parents said we could try. So my mother and I went to see the police about interviewing from East Germany to West Germany. The police said that my husband and I could move within six weeks if there was no report for a missing persons. If there was a report of such missing persons, then the police would have to send us back.

So the police would hold my papers until my husband and I moved into West Germany. So we left the police station. My husband and I went back to East Germany, told only a few of my friends. My friends told us that we were very smart to stay in West Germany, that the East German country-- East Germany was in such poor shape that we'd be better off in the West.

I had to be careful who I told about our intent to move. We didn't want any rumors floating around, anyone to find out what our plans were. That means we had to be very secretive and we had to be very careful when we packed. Our suitcases were so heavy.

We had sold all of our furniture. We had put the furniture in a wagon in the dark to drop off at different furniture stores around East Germany. And we did it in the evening, in the dark because if we sold our furniture in the daytime, people would start to become curious and an investigation may pursue.

And we didn't want the police to put us in jail. We were very afraid because we knew that such an infraction could mean a long jail sentence. So thank god my husband had an accident with his knife. He was trying to cut some wood, and the wood was so hard the knife ended up cutting his thumb.

So he wrapped his thumb in a towel and went to see a doctor, friend of his at work. The doctor told him that he could not work for two to three months. So he was at that point, then, unemployed. However, the accident was really a godsend and helped us to escape.

The reason being is that my husband's boss would never know that he was absent from the job for other reasons then. Just simply he had cut his finger and he couldn't work. If we had not had that accident, then trying to disappear from the house would be very difficult.

It was a perfect chance to disappear. We had friends to help us carry the suitcases for many miles. We had a branch of a birch tree, a branch of a tree between the suitcases and we each carried the suitcases because they were so heavy, and we each had a suitcase on our back.

We had a couple of friends help us carrying the suitcases. But we figured that people would start to wonder about us. We were so close to the train station. We were lucky because the weather was so beautiful. It tended to rain often during that season and we didn't want the rain to-- we were so happy that it wasn't raining because we didn't want our suitcases to become waterlogged.

So we were about three blocks from the train stations and our friends had to return to their own homes, and it was time for the train to come into the station. So we were left just the two of us with our heavy suitcases. So that was double difficult for us to carry. Oh, before I forget to tell you, yes, I remember we arrived at the house near the border. The person who lived in that house was willing to help us, to lead us to the border to cross over into West Germany.

The house was on a hill with a fence around it. It was a beautiful hill. Then up on the other hill there were a lot of trees. So we stopped at the ask-- we stopped at the house to ask for guidance across the border.

The guide had a police dog and he saw us with so many suitcases. He was not surprised. He was familiar with people trying to cross the border. My husband told-- I told my husband, why not take half of the suitcases across and leave the other half and we'll come back for the other half?

My husband said it was better to carry all the suitcases at once. So we asked the guy to help us, but the guide said no, that he would not help us carry anything. The man said that if he helped carry things he could end up in jail. So he was just there to help us cross the border.

So we decided to go ahead and carry all the suitcases at once. So we put more suitcases on our back and we were ready to go. We had to climb up the hill. I was walking so close to the ground with all that heavy weight on my back. If I walked upright, I would fall backwards and roll down the hill because the suitcases were so heavy.

I kept my body close to the ground so that we would not fall over. So all these suitcases and my husband and I and the guide walked up to the top of the hill where we could see the border. There were two Russian soldiers talking to each other at the border. When one soldier walked away, we were free to walk through the border. It was just a short crossing into West Germany.

This was fall time and the colors were very beautiful in the trees. There was a small stone road going down to the border. There were two men in a Jeep with movie equipment driving down the stone road, and they saw us.

We tried to hide in the bushes and the guy tried to cover our bodies for us, but somehow, the two men in the Jeep saw us. These men told the guide that they were willing to help us cross the border. We were hiding in the bushes with the guide just standing off to the side. We thought that the men in the Jeep wouldn't see us, but somehow, they saw us.

And the guide said that they were willing to help us. So the guy told us to run as fast as we could to get down to the Jeep and put all our suitcases in their Jeep. So we ran as fast as we could all the way down this hill with all of our heavy suitcases while the Russian soldiers had their backs to us. It was so awkward carrying all those suitcases.

So then the men in the Jeep put helped us put all of our suitcases in their car, in their Jeep and we ran as fast as we could on the curve stone road-- on the curved stone road. The men in the Jeep drove down the hill all the way across the border. The first person that I saw when I crossed the border was a German police officer.

I looked down at his uniform. I knew that we were in West Germany. I bent down and I kissed his boot. I felt like I was a free bird now.

Of course, my husband was out of breath. We were hurt and sweating all over. The movie men returned our suitcases. We thanked them profusely for helping us and they went on their way. The German police asked us-- took us aside and asked us if we had any German money.

The police wanted to make sure that we didn't steal from the train station. So my husband unwrapped his bandaged thumb. The police didn't really understand why he was doing that at first, but police waited to see until the thumb was unwrapped, and there was money inside the bandage.

There was a little-- how do you say? My husband had put a condom, if you will, a condom full of money underneath his bandaged thumb. Well, the police were shocked. They were amazed. They thought that we were very intelligent, very

smart for having hidden our money that way.

So the police counted the money and then let us go free. We walked down the hill and took a look at the bus schedule and waited for three hours, which was just perfect for us because we went to a little cafe and had something to eat while we were waiting for the bus. We were very careful with our money. We were trying to save enough money for our train tickets.

So my husband and I went and removed all of our wet clothes and put on fresh clothes and the bus arrived with tourists visiting West Germany. The day was so beautiful and the birds were flying all around. I felt like singing. We were so hungry, we went to the restaurant and ordered a hot dog.

We bought one hot dog, and we ate this hot dog so very slowly. We were so exhausted. We needed so much rest but we couldn't sleep on the road when we were going to the border at the same time. We had to take turns, one keeping watch and one taking rest.

So we both were able to sleep on the bus and the train station. And we bought our tickets for the train, and then we rode the train all night. It was really a very difficult time to sleep because the seats on the train were so difficult, but we were going to Hamburg and it was all right.

I looked at the schedule, and there were 5-- there was 5 to 10 minutes to wait between trains to Hamburg, and that mean we had to run-- that meant we had to run to catch another train in 5 to 10 minutes. I didn't think that we could catch another train in that short a time. There was another choice, but we had to wait for many hours to catch the train.

We rode a train with one man. It was so interesting, he asked us where we were from. We told him that we were from East Germany.

He was so interested in us. He asked us how we escaped from East Germany. He had lived-- he lived in the West. We told him that we asked for help. We had to get a guide. We said that alone, we couldn't have made it.

The man listen to our story and said thank you. He thought that we were very brave. We went to another train station and put our suitcases in storage. Now, with lighter packs on our back, we could walk to the train and walk to my mother's house.

My parents were so happy to see us. And we stayed in West Germany for good. It was so wonderful. My parents didn't know what a hard time we'd had escaping from East Germany. She just knew that we were very tired and needed to sleep before we could report our adventures to her.

And she was very shocked about our stories. Yes, we settled in the West. We stayed there. My parents gave us permission to stay at their home.

The reason is we looked so tired and we couldn't look for an apartment on our own right away. It was quite a challenge to find our own apartment, so we stayed with my parents until my mother's close friend passed away. My friend's room was available for us, so we got permission to stay at my friend's home. We stayed in Hamburg for about two years until we moved to the United States, where my husband worked as a carpenter and I worked as a weaver.

Well, we were looking for freedom. We had agreed a long time ago that what we wanted to do was live in the United States. The reason my husband's aunt and uncle lived in-- the reason was that my husband's aunt and uncle lived in Detroit, Michigan.

My husband's aunt told us that we needed to move to West Germany first before we could move to the United States. And if we lived in East Germany, it was going to be impossible for us to emigrate to the United States because of communism. So we moved to West Germany. And then my husband's uncle was willing to help us move to America.

He went to the consulate to ask for the papers to help us move to America. He was told by the consulate that members

of the family that are deaf are not allowed to emigrate. The consulate rejected the paperwork because at that time the United States refused to accept deaf immigrants. They also refused the mentally retarded and the homosexual.

So we were very upset, dejected at this rejection. So we stayed in West Germany with a man from Boston, Massachusetts. And he was visiting Europe at the time. He traveled to Hamburg, and we visited him.

He liked us so much we all became very close friends. His name was Tom Rule. Later, we told Tom about the United States and the paperwork and that we were rejected, and we asked Tom if he would help us. He wanted to know why we wanted to go to America. We told him that we wanted our freedom.

We relayed our story that my husband's uncle tried to help us, and Tom Rule said that he would help us get to America. He said that he would go to the American consulate and ask for the paperwork. Well, we were rejected again when the embassy found out we were deaf.

That happened in 1954-- no, 1951. That was in 1951 that we rejected. Yes, it was 1951, about that we were rejected again by the embassy. They found out we were deaf.

But Tom said not to worry about it, that he would wait until his vacation was over. When he returned to America, he would get the paperwork for both of us. So Tom went to the government in Washington DC, Congress, I guess, to the Office of Congress, I suppose, and he asked if two deaf friends of his could come to America from Germany. He explained that we so desperately wanted to come to America.

Well, the woman agreed at the House of Congress. They were wonderful people. And she gave us the stamp of the United States. She sent the paper to us.

My father was so impressed when we got the paperwork because Tom had followed through on his promise. He was just so wonderful. We were on a waiting list for less than two years.

Then the United States embassy called us to go be sworn in. So we went and promised that we would obey all the laws of America, and we had to take a physical exam as well. They tested our feet. They had to check us all over physically, make sure that we were in good shape.

We needed to stand up right and put our arms out and bend over, and then the inspector taught us that we could go to the United States because we were both in such good shape. When we arrived, we got to New York. Tom Rule picked us up and we stayed with him for several weeks. Then he drove us to Detroit, Michigan to meet my husband's aunt and uncle.

At first, we were-- our plan was to stay with Tom in Boston. My mother told us that we would have better lives with relatives in Michigan. And she didn't really feel comfortable with us staying with Tom. She would prefer us to stay with my husband's family. So we did that for my mom's sake.

My husband and I stayed at his aunt's home in Detroit. My husband got a job as a model carpenter, and he went through college at the same time to learn all about English and math and the like. I became a housewife, and we stayed in Detroit for 19 years.

Then we moved to San Diego, California. That was in 1972. So we moved to San Diego. And yes, we were very happy there.

My husband got a job at the Naval-- the Naval Air Station, same as before, as a carpenter. And he worked there until he retired. And then, sadly, two years after retirement, he passed away from cancer.

I was a widow for 13 years, and then I met my second husband. My second husband's name is Bernard Gross. And we've been married for 2 and 1/2 years.

Oh, well, my father-- my father was dead against the Nazis, but he wouldn't tell anyone about his opinion. He didn't

want the Nazis to put him in jail for his political beliefs. So he had to be very careful.

We learned much about politics in school. In Germany, people are required to have the German flag up on the flag pole all the time and everyone must learn the German songs, the national songs. We were very scared for a very long time. It was a reign of fear.

My teacher forced me to join the NSDAP and pledge allegiance to the German flag. And the reason that I had to do that was because I was a Girl Scout and I was involved in scouting. I know how to talk with hearing and deaf students. So I was scared about having to leave my papers because I was a member of the NSDAP, and that was a Nazi group.

When I got my job as a weaver, I was an apprentice under a higher weaver and my weaving teachers. I had to go work. That was six hours away from home. My job was in an island just north of East Germany.

My teacher had two jobs. One job was in Hamburg and the other was on the island called Westland. So I told my school teacher that I wanted to go work up north. My teacher told me to bring my papers with me when I traveled to the Westland island.

I was so uncomfortable about this and I thought that I could get away without taking the paper, but I was totally wrong. The paper said that I was a member of the Nazi party and I didn't want to go to Westland with my papers. I mean, my mind, and my body, my spirit, wouldn't let me take that paper with me.

But I had to take the paper with me. When I lived in Hamburg, there was a Nazi guard between my home and my job. I was so scared because the Nazi guard had a brown uniform and a gun, and every time I would see him, I would ask myself, should I pass by the guard or should I walk around the guard? I had to keep my papers with me at all times.

Then the bomb destroyed Hamburg and I felt so lucky that I had the paper with me. And it just happened. I just was lucky that way. My school teacher died in the bomb blast.

And I wasn't sure then if I should throw the paper away or not. I was very scared around that piece of paper. I didn't know what to do with it. At the same time, my parents lost their home in the bomb and they escaped to the south. So I asked my weaving teacher to let me go visit my parents.

The weaver teacher refused to let me go visit my parents, and I begged her again. I wanted to see my parents. They were living in the south, in Bavaria now.

Then the Allies came, America came, and we were liberated, and I was so happy that I could tear that piece of paper up and throw it in the fire can. I just said goodbye to the Nazis. I don't know if-- I didn't know at that time that the president had died in the bomb or not, but I felt so light without all that fear.

In my classroom in school, it was my duty twice a week, because I was a Girl Scout, to teach political songs and about the Third Reich to my fellow students. My teacher believed that I was so wonderful in my teaching capacity. So I was teaching students the same age as myself.

And when the teacher would leave the room, I would change my role. I would stop teaching political ideology to the other students and I would share stories about movies that we saw. And the other students would tell stories about movies that they saw. And then when the teacher came back into the room, we would change back into our regular roles about talking politics and history again.

Years later, some of my classmates told me that they never forgot that time and how I taught them and we talked about movies. It was a wonderful time. Is he sleeping? I think he's sleeping.

It's difficult. My husband, Joachim, is a very soft spoken man. He's very quiet. He's very private. He doesn't like to talk about the war and his pain.

I try to make him talk to me about it. My experience with him is that it's very hard to get his stories from him and his experience with sterilization. Whenever people talk to us about children, ask us if we have children, my husband always said that no, we don't have any children because we were sterilized.

People ask him how they did it to him, and my husband is very hurt. It was a very painful-- it's a very painful time for him, that whole sterilization problem. The nurses tied him down and didn't comfort him. The doctor didn't give him a pain shot, any medication. It was very difficult for many reasons.

My brother was deaf and my mother got a letter to send my brother for sterilization. So he went to the hospital, and somehow, the hospital was full. There were many wounded soldiers there and there was no vacancy for my brother so the doctor told him to come back when they had a bed for him.

Let's see, we were about five years apart in age. So now, we would be-- I don't know. But we were about five years apart in age. Jewish people, I mean-- I'm trying to remember if I saw-- I didn't see Jews very often.

They seemed to disappear so quickly. I mean, the only time I remember seeing them is when I was very young when I went to the-- there was a park near our home and I would go play there and I would see the Jewish kids there. There was a girl who was actually taller than I am, taller than I was, and we played together quite often. Until a few years later, then the Jewish people all started to disappear.

Really, I didn't know where they went. I did see the Star of David on their coat, but I really at that time didn't have any idea. It wasn't until years later when America came and entered the war and liberated us that I started to discover some of the news that I hadn't known when I was a child. In Bavaria, I heard there was a Jewish concentration camp where many of them ended up.

And I learned about the uniforms that they had to wear, the black and white stripes, and I saw pictures of them being very weak and thin and emaciated in front of the concentration camps. And the Nazis standing in those pictures were very big, large, well-fed, and they were wearing warm coats. All those Nazis went to jail.

And when my mother found out about this, she started to scream and she felt like that she wanted to do something to help these Jewish people. But we really didn't have any food at all, and we were all surprised that we didn't know about this news until much later. They disappeared through all those years, and we didn't go back to Hamburg.

And when the American troops entered Germany, we found out a lot of things that the Nazis did that we were unaware of before. They couldn't go back to Hamburg because the train was out of order and the city of Hamburg was totally destroyed anyway. I needed to go back to work because I could not depend on my family to support me.

There was a bus service for troops, so I kept my eyes open and asked the troops where they were going, and the troops told me they were going up north. I asked them if I could join them and they said, of course, I was welcome to join them. It took me some time to get packed and get ready to take the trip up north, but I waited until the troops were on the bus and I joined them.

My brother who is deaf lives in Hamburg. And so the bus stopped at a few places along the way. I was so hungry one time a farmer stopped and gave me some apples and let us get off the bus and take a rest. So there were a few stops on the way to the north where people would get on the bus or get off the bus.

There was a couple who joined us on the bus. They were so thin. They were such a beautiful couple. It really just touched my heart.

I looked so strong and healthy, and they were so thin. My mother had given me bread and I had rationed that bread, ate a little bit each day to make sure that I had enough. But at that time I wasn't hungry, and I had kept the bread for so many days, and I thought, I better give that bread to the young couple.

And their first response was they just kissed me, they were so grateful. They were very careful eating the bread. And I



said to myself, you know, bless them. I felt so good. I didn't even care if I would get hungry. It was better to see this young couple eat.

Then I got to my stop, got off the bus, and the first thing I did was to visit my aunt at a senior citizens home. My aunt was so happy to see me. That was wonderful.

I went to work as a Weaver. My boss was so happy to see me. I still worked for the weaving industry. Until I found out about the concentration camps.

And my husband's father helped some Jews escape. He was so anti-Nazi and anti the Third Reich that he helped some Nazis-- some Jews escape. My father was hoping to hear that the Jewish people arrived in a safe place. However, after the Jewish people were gone, there wasn't any news of them.

Jewish people would disappear, and then I met some Jewish people in America. Hamburg was not a Jewish town. Most of the people in town were Lutheran. So there were a lot of-- there was a lot of voice in that town against Nazism.

Like I said, they were hard to find. There weren't many Jewish people in my town or around that I could see until I got to America. I met more Jewish people in America. There was lots of anti-Nazi sentiment in our town in Hamburg.

Oh, the sterilization. Yes, we-- about the sterilization, my husband told me that he went to Scandinavia. He went from Hamburg to Scandinavia for a swimming tournament.

He wanted to know why we were sterilized. Well, when the situation about the Nazi government was explained to him and why he was sterilized, he just thought it was so awful he just fainted. I guess I've gotten a little tougher. I'm used to the idea-- I was used to the idea of sterilization before it happened to me because I had seen so many of my friends be sterilized.

Many of the people from Detroit and San Diego and Tom Rule even asked me about children. I explained to them that I cannot have children. They ask if I want children, I have children, and I explain why I can't have children. It makes people very sad and they often cry because it was such an awful time. I see their expressions, and that's difficult.

Well, when I was young where I went to school-- let's see, I was I was 10 or 11 years old. There was another teacher in our classroom, not our regular teacher, a substitute teacher, and his face was so sad when he came to the classroom. He looked, he peered into the window and we were all just waiting for him. We said nothing.

And that day, he didn't teach us anything. So we all just started to talk. He returned to his desk and he said he was short of breath and his tongue was tied when he gave us the news that we all had to go to the hospital for sterilization.

We were very puzzled. I mean, we didn't really understand what he meant. So he explained the sterilization process to all of us and that we would not be able to have children. We still didn't understand about the children part, so he explained that as we grew up, we would get married, and most people would then go ahead and have children, and so we start to understand the process of how a baby develops.

And he told us that we couldn't have babies because of the sterilization. We asked him why. He said that the Nazis forced him to tell us. They wanted to have a smaller deaf population so they were choosing sterilization as a method to do that.

So the Nazis had forced us to be sterilized. And that's what he explained to us. We were also shocked when we looked at each other. I mean, I was thinking-- I wasn't used to seeing a teacher who was-- his face was so sad.

He was very much against Nazism, and he was a big supporter of freedom. When the Nazis found out about his political beliefs, the soldiers came and put him in jail. Somehow, my teacher evaded the police by hanging himself. Which I really didn't understand until years later when I found out that he was so anti-Nazi and that he had hanged himself. And I just felt so sad. And he felt so bad for us because we were deaf and we were going to be sterilized.

When school finished for the day, I went home and asked my mother about the topic of sterilization. And my mom was so shocked, her tongue was tied. My classmates, who were about 10 years old-- and she-- my mother was shocked that they would explain to us children that we were going to be sterilized and to take us to the hospital for sterilization.

My mother didn't know how to explain this to such a young person. There was no news. There was no prior Warning to any of this. They just came and got us. They came-- we were told that it was our turn, our number was up, and we were going to the hospital.

And I hadn't heard anything. Lots of my classmates had had suffered this fate, and I hadn't heard anything. Lots of my classmates has already gotten a letter for sterilization. I was the last person. They all, as I said, wanted to be the godmother of my baby.

Then, when I was 15 years old, I got my letter, and my mother's brother, the judge, tried to intervene, but their hands were tied because the Nazis were so powerful. So I did end up going into the hospital for sterilization. There was one boy from Guatemala, he was older than myself and he really liked me. His parents sent him to Hamburg to live with his uncle and learn the German language.

His uncle was a policeman, a bounty hunter, I guess you would call him, to catch people who had escaped from jail. His uncle told him and then he told me about the Nazi plan to kill people in Germany. I was so surprised, I really-- I didn't tell any of my classmates.

He told me that when the Nazis were finished killing the Jewish people, the mentally retarded, and the blind, the last people that they wanted to kill were the deaf. So I was so scared. I went to see my aunt, who was my father's sister, and she was also anti-Nazi. I had another aunt who supported the Nazis. There were quite a lot of disagreements among my aunts there.

Anyway, I told one of my aunts who was against the Nazi about the boy who told me of the Nazis plan to kill deaf people. My aunt told me that I was right. That was the reason that she had kept a radio to keep updated on the war and the goings on. And she could hear the radio station from England. We were all very interested about what was going on in the war.

If the Nazis found out about my aunt and the radio, she could end up in jail. There was a lot of interesting information and dissenting views on the war that we heard over Der Achtung, the fight against the French. She would hear all that information on the radio station.

So she would hear all of that. And if the Nazis found out that she had that radio and was listening to those English broadcasts, then she would be put in jail. So we had to be very careful about what we were speaking of.

I took another train trip to visit an aunt who lived in German-- who lived in Munich. This aunt also was against the Nazis. She happened to be good friends of Picasso. Picasso, the painter.

Well, she was in France, in Paris for a couple of years, and she was staying there and Picasso wanted her to stay in France. He wanted her to leave Germany and come live in France. But she couldn't. They were told that she was from Germany and they had to move back.

So my aunt returned to Munich. She was so angry with the Germans because she wanted to live in France. When I told her what that boy had told me about the Nazi plan to kill all the Jews and the deaf people, she thought that was so terrible.

She was the one who taught me not to sign any papers and not to join any Nazi youth groups or any of that. So I followed my aunt's advice. She said I could get brainwashed if I joined the Nazis and I would never have a chance to move to America.

So that's the reason that when the embassy asked me in America if I was a part a member of any Nazi youth group or any Nazi group, I answered loud and clear, absolutely not. And so that's helped me escape and come to the United States. And I have much thanks for my aunt and that boy from school.