

Interview with my grandfather

How old are you?

I am 72 years old.

Where did you spend your childhood?

In Hanover. This is located in the north-west of Germany.

At which age do your childhood memories begin?

At the age of three.

Could you please describe your childhood's daily life?

My childhood was ambivalent. Until the age of three I lived in wealth. But that changed into the opposite after the destruction of Hanover and our evacuation to the little village of Wennigsen. The living conditions were hard because there was a lack of the things that are important for life. My father was a soldier at the eastern front (Russia) and he was not home very often. Since 1944 he was missed and he never came back again. At the age of six I visited the local Volksschule until I got my graduation after year eight. Because of living in the countryside we children were quite free.

What did you do in your spare time?

Besides school we played football in the streets because there was less traffic or we went to the forests to play. Being hungry all the time we got ourselves fruits, vegetables etc. from the neighbors' gardens. Of course we had no TV so we focused on athletics. I did gymnastics, played football and went playing table tennis. In summer we went swimming in the local swimming pool and after that, especially at weekends, we went dancing, went to cinemas or visited pubs. The winters were long and cold so we rode a sleigh or went ice-skating.

How was your daily life at school and could you please name some differences to the present?

I was not a hard worker at school. I often had problems doing my homework so that the cane ruled very often. When you showed bad behavior you had to lie on the desk and got some punches with the cane on your bottom. In those days we had to go to school six days a week. Often we had afternoon lessons because there were no teachers. When the lesson started and the teacher went into the classroom we had to stand up to show him our hands so that he could see if they were clean. After that we sang a song. Besides the normal lessons we also had confirmation lessons after school. After eight years of school and confirmation we searched for an apprenticeship. For one year I could not find an apprenticeship because there weren't enough of them. After this year I finally found an apprenticeship as a clerk.

How were you brought up and do you believe that there is a change to the present time?

In contrast to the present way of bringing up children ours was very strict. You had to be very accurate, which I often did not manage. The cane was always nearby, at home, at school and sometimes at the police. The people attached importance to politeness and moral values such as:

- Greeting with a curtsy for the girls and a bow for the boys
- Older people had to be respected
- Brisk opposition was not allowed
- At nightfall we had to be home.

Did your parents have any expectations of you or did you have any commitments?

I had no commitments. From time to time I had to help my mother in the garden but I was able to slip away very often. But there was always the expectation that you behaved according to the moral values.

Did the social status play any role?

Yes, absolutely. The children from privileged families were not allowed to play with us. But they played with us, anyway, because it was a great adventure for them to go to the forests, too.

Were there any different roles for men and women?

Of course girls were treated differently from boys. In school for example only the girls had a subject called handiwork while the boys played football. The women were responsible for the children and housekeeping. During the war there were less men so the whole responsibility was with the women. Besides the housekeeping and obtaining of fuel, my mother had to go to work because she had to feed my sister, my brother and me. She worked on a farm and later in a cinema. After a few years she opened up her own business, a kiosk.

Interview by: Lukas Witte

Interview with my grandmother

Year of birth: 1946

Place of birth: Cluj-Napoca/ Klausenburg (Romania)

What kind of memories do you have concerning your childhood?

Well, I grew up and my family had no money at that time. We lived in poverty and I remember that as kids me and my brothers and sisters were waiting for Christmas or Easter to come, so we could get little presents. We also used to love spending time together at these Christian festivals.

How was your education like?

It was very strict. We could not afford doing whatever we wanted to do. Our parents had a great authority. As kids we had limited opportunities because our family did not have much money. Even as we grew older our parents had bigger influence on us than parents have on their kids today. At that time if you wanted to get married you had to get the clear permission of your parents first. That was normal because our parents made many decisions, which had influence on our lives.

What about your relationship to your parents?

I had a good relationship to my parents. We were very honest with them. But there were borders that we did not cross as kids. Rules of respect that we had to obey. Due to that we did not argue very often. We did not question the authority of our parents.

What was special about your time as a student?

At my school the pupils had to wear uniforms. That made it possible for everyone to look the same, so there was no big differences whether you were rich or poor. I think that this is important and that schools would do better if they brought back the rules of a coherent clothing standard, because it turns the crowd of pupils into a unity that is not controlled by clothing or fashion labels. Moreover I did not have normal teachers at school. Our teachers were catholic nuns. They were very severe with students and did not hesitate to punish us, or beat us with a cane if we did not behave properly.

What did you mostly do in your spare time?

I helped my mother a lot. I used to help my mother to clean the house or to do other things to run the household. Apart from that I liked knitting very much, so I did that while I was at home. In contrast to nowadays we did not have a television set. The only thing we had was a radio that we could listen to. Besides we also had things like going out to a discotheque, to a ball, to the cinema or even camping. In order to go there with somebody my parents first had to meet my partner or the person that I wanted to go with.

Were people more helpful at that time?

Yes! They were not that envious, materialistic or greedy. Money was not the most important thing because people helped each other in which ever way they could. If something broke down in the house we always had neighbours that helped us to repair it.

Were there strict gender roles?

Yes, there were. Women had to manage the household while men went to work in order to earn money. Even though many women were also working, those with big families and many children like my mother had to stay home. We were 6 children, so I can imagine that my mother did not have an easy time raising us. At our school boys were not separated from girls.

What did your family mean to you?

Family meant everything to us, because it was everything we had. Even after I moved out from home and started working I still kept sending money home to my parents, so they could live a bit better concerning their financial situation.

That's all. Thank you very much for taking some time.

Interview

by:

Haider

Abdul-Wahab

Interview with H. R. (69 years old, from Poland)

Is the life in society better or worse than a few years ago?

It's worse. That's because of the role which the money plays in society. The society is split into different groups, which are separated because of the money. So it's harder for the poor people to live than for the richer ones. Another aspect is respect. Years ago the gap between rich and poor wasn't so big as today. People had more respect and they had to help each other because all in all there was poverty. Today people live for themselves. So the life in society is much worse.

Are the people influenced by the media in a positive or negative way?

The people are definitely influenced in a negative way, because the media aren't that serious. They are just focused on their profit with making sensations. But these sensations are topics which are very hilarious and not serious. For example the media could concentrate more on politics and being objective.

What can you say about child raising? How important is authority in this topic?

Authority has lost the importance in raising kids. This is a bad development. It is caused by the media especially the internet. But the parents don't have the authority because they have to work and have less time for their kids. It's in 90% of the society like this, I think. The rest is doing it right.

How would you compare the activities in the free time now and in the free time years ago?

In the past people had to meet each other in real life, not in the internet to chat. There were also activities like playing cards and not playing the Playstation. And because of this, the young and old spent their time together. Another activity which isn't popular now, was reading books. Now less people are reading books, because it's 'boring'.

What can you say about education today and in the past?

Today education goes in many directions. In the past you hadn't that many ways and opportunities to teach. But the teachers were also different. They had to wear 'good' clothes and they had respect of the students and the students had respect of them. Today the respect isn't part of education. But it's a bad development now that the rich can have a better education than the poor. In the past there were no fees for universities or school, like nowadays.

How were you raised up and what impressions do you have of the life in the city and country of the past and now?

The contrast between the life in the city and the country was very big. The people wore different clothes and had almost no contact with the 'city-people', because of the bad infrastructure. But everything has changed. The big grey and boring cities became colorful and nice cities with a good infrastructure. So the people in the country can go to cities without problems like in the past. And because of this development there's less difference between country-people and city-people today.

What does religion have to do with the value change?

Nothing. Religion is less important to the people today.

Interview by: Kevin Kreja

Interview with I. F., born in 1924 in Lower Saxony, Germany

What kind of hobbies existed and on what did they depend?

I spent much time outdoors, walking in the forests, for example with friends to my aunt's little pub to drink a limo. Furthermore I spent a lot of time playing with my dolls or reading. Not like today when you drive around to many places. We did not have a car so we could not go far. And of course I went to the "Bund deutscher Mädel" when I was 10 as it was obligatory. But me and my friends enjoyed it because we did many exciting things together.

Was there a difference between towns and the countryside?

Yes, a lot. I grew up in a village and as I said we could not travel a lot. Just sometimes we made a trip into the nearest town. But it definitely had advantages as we had not much contact with the war and could live quite normally.

Did you have a lot of spare time?

Yes, we had a lot of spare time. Our mother mostly managed the household on her own.

Did gender-specific activities exist?

Girls played with dolls or did crafts. Boys played sports, for example football.

Were the activities separated between girls and boys?

Yes, my friends were all girls. The "Hitlerjugend" was also separated into boy and girls. It was not usual to play with boys, especially as I only had sisters.

What was considered a virtue?

Education was very important, the right behaviour was natural. For example we had to be at home always quite early.

What was considered a vice?

There were many vices, like being impolite or not respectful to older people. Arguing with parents was also not wanted. But none of these happened very often.

Did the values from the past change?

Maybe not the values. But the education is definitely not that strict anymore and people do not care that much.

What was expected from men and women?

Well, we lived in traditional families, so the man had to work to earn the money for their families and women had to stay at home to care about the children and the household.

But only women with children, it was normal to work until you became a mother, so did I.

How did typical manners look like?

Always very polite. I was taught to make a curtsy when I met friends of my parents in the street.

How were minorities treated in society?

They were treated like me and you. I was still a child when the war began and the Jews were deported. Suddenly they were not there anymore, we children knew nothing. Maybe our parents did, I do not know.

Did the education of children change a lot? In which way and how does it appear to you?

As I said, the education is not that strict anymore. Everything is now much more open, children have more opportunities. And I guess in some cases there is a more lovely relationship to the parents, especially to the fathers.

Was school different?

Yes, school was not that much about learning all these complicated methods but about learning how to behave. The teachers cared about different things than today and were much stricter. And we had to pay for the secondary schools in that time.

Did themes exist no one talked about?

Not in my day-to-day life. But of course we did not talk about the political mistakes of Hitler, at least not to the children. And we never talked about communism.

Were material things very important?

No. We did not have so many electronic things like today, but I did not miss anything.

How did the size of the family influence each person?

My family consisted of 5 people, so there was not a big difference to today. But of course, more persons means more work to do.

Did traditions exist?

They existed in the way that we had all meals together and prayed in the evening. And of course Christmas was very important and we celebrated it every year in the same way.

Were there typical tasks in the family?

Our mother did the household. She learned everything in a manor, so she was very good. And my father worked as a carpenter to earn the money. He was the "boss" of our family and we did not question him.

Did typical problems in the family exist?

No.

Could you enjoy your childhood?

Yes. Before the war I was a typical child with a nice childhood.

Was it normal to have pets?

No, not like today. Many people had some chicken, pigs, rabbits etc. as livestock, but not like today were there are so many cats, guinea-pigs... . Some farmers had dogs, but they had to protect the farm.

Which significance did the family have?

Well, it was normal to have a family and to do lots together. We did more together than today, but I always felt this was something good.

Interview by: Christina Freise