Could you briefly introduce yourself? Your name, your occupation, where you grew up?

My name is Hoelpes Albertine and I was born on 16/10/1940. After primary school I went to boarding school in Ettelbruck and then to the *Fieldgen* private school where I lived alone in Luxembourg City, after the 9th school year. In Paris I completed my training as a nurse and social worker and then I wanted to study psychology. But when I saw who was studying psychology back in the early 60s, I stopped. I didn't want to waste my time with those people. They were all studying psychology in order to solve their own problems. I went back to Luxembourg and first worked briefly in the hospital in Ettelbruck, but everyone wanted me to work in the social welfare office. So I worked in Ettelbruck and Diekirch and then when I got married - my husband worked in Differdange - a job became available there and I applied. We built a house in Bascharage and moved there. From then on I worked in the erea of Rodange, Petange, Bascharage.

You spent your childhood here in Kalborn?

Yes. The first time I was in Luxembourg City was when I made my first communion. I went to the Octave with my mother. We also sometimes went to my mother's family in Dahl. We never went any further than that.

Can you briefly introduce your parents? Their names and occupations?

My father's name was Hoelpes Nicolas. He was born in 1898 and was a farmer. They had a big farm and they all worked there. My mother was born in 1902 and was a teacher here in Kalborn. They got married in 1928. She was the first teacher in the country to get married and still continue teaching.

How has this been perceived?
Not well. But since it wasn't laid down in any law, and my mother was quite an authoritarian person and knew quite a lot about everything, she wasn't bothered by this. Later they held her in high esteem. But of course, it was a scandal because all the female teachers were unmarried. That's why they were called "Miss". When they got married, they stopped teaching.

Did you also have brothers and sisters?

Yes, I had three brothers. I was the youngest. One was born in 1929, Jos. He went to secondary school in Diekirch and then worked at the airport. He died in 2008. Gust was born in 1931. He was at the technical secondary school. He worked at the Paul Wurth company and was often transferred. He was in Canada, etc. He went to many countries because of his job. He and his wife didn't have children either, so they could travel a lot. Then there was Erny. He worked at Goodyear and lived here in our parents' house in Kalborn. Erny died in September 2002. Jos died in September 2008, so I'm always glad when September is over. All our men died in September. That's why I don't like that month. My other brother, Gust, is still alive. So we were Joseph, Gustave, Ernest and Albertine. And apparently, since I was born in 1940, my father had to go to the town hall three times to register me because they wouldn't accept any name. He received a list from which they could choose a name. They chose a name that sounded the most French to them, Albertine. I think the Germans pronounced it with an E at the end. The others too were renamed: Josef, Gustaf – with an F. They never kept to it, of course. But Gust was written to by the government a few years ago asking if he wanted to

change his name back to the form with “ve” at the end. Because it was still registered with an “f”.

You told us that you were born in 1940. What is your first memory of the occupation?

I can hardly remember since I was born in October. I only remember that my father always sat with his ear to the radio and listened to the Grand Duchess. Then the postman, who was the son of the local group leader, came and he went where the people were, that is, to the kitchen. He caught my father listening to the Grand Duchess. My father then went to his bunker in the forest for a few days because he was afraid they would take him away. And I remember that when there was an air raid alert, he would take me piggyback, and we would quickly run downstairs to his family because they had the big farm with big, vaulted cellars. Half the village used to sit in those cellars. On the briquettes, the potatoes and the turnips. There was a bale of straw there on which we slept. We weren’t allowed to talk and certainly not to turn on any lights, not even here at home. Everything had to be closed so that it was dark. So that no one saw light from outside. And then the rosary was said. There was no television. We had a radio, though. I remember that we were always told that we would have to escape at some point. I always had to take a midday nap because I was still small. I was always afraid then that they would run away and leave me in bed. Or that they would be far away by the time I would have tied my shoes. I imagined it like a child imagines “running away”. I never asked any questions either. I never thought in the least that they would take me with them. I was only ever afraid of not being able to follow.

What did the German occupation change for your family in everyday life?

We weren’t allowed to turn on any lights or talk loudly. Our local group leader was ... His son was a postman, his daughter was in charge of the Hitler Youth, the other son was a field warden. So you were always in danger of being watched by someone. You always had to be on the lookout. We spent a lot of time down in the village with the aunts, because my mother was teaching. My father worked a lot because they had the big farm. I didn’t go to school yet, so I went there too. But it was the same there. All the doors were locked. As a child, you wondered why you couldn’t get in. But because they hid men - quite a lot of them - no one ever talked about it. It was all so secret. Many things were not said in front of us children. Everywhere you wanted to go was locked. You wondered why.

You said that your mother was a teacher. Had something changed for her too?

Yes, of course. French was no longer allowed to be taught at school. We were a small village, so the school inspector didn’t come as often. But then she would have had to say “Heil Hitler” and so on. Of course, she didn’t. She would look out of the window and when the Germans weren’t in the erea, they sang the national anthem, “D’Heemecht”, in the school. Of course, this was not allowed to be public, so that no one would know.

How was it with the food supply?

Of course, we were a bit spoiled here in a farming village. People had chickens, animals, milk. They made their own flour to bake. Bread and so on. The people from Luxembourg City then came foraging because they didn’t have all that. No garden to grow vegetables, no meadows with apple trees. We didn’t suffer from hunger. In fact, we got these food stamps to go shopping but we didn’t need them very often.

People were not allowed to slaughter animals, it was forbidden. My family - by that I mean the whole family, because we were at my grandmother's a lot - had men hiding with them and was a big family itself, so they slaughtered clandestinely. They were denounced and sent to prison, in Diekirch. Their neighbour had betrayed them, he was a German. A real Nazi. They were poor as church mice and he always worked as a day labourer for my family. But his wife and children were loyal to the Luxembourgers. He ran across the border to Germany one day when the Americans came and he realised things were getting dicey. But his family didn't go. And they used to sit here in the cellar because they didn't have one themselves. When they were in prison, the German was summoned as a witness. They had a lawyer. My uncle said, "You dirty Nazi, you slaughtered animals clandestinely yourself. Of course, you didn't have any tools, you took them from us." Then the lawyer said, "You shouldn't have said that, now I can't help you." But the judge let them go home. They were not all bad. There were inspections from time to time. The men whom they had hidden were in the hayloft in the barn. They sometimes came outside and helped with the threshing. Once someone came for inspection and the one who was helping with the threshing ran away. "There's one run away!" "Then you'll have to run after him." But they did not, because they were afraid of the consequences it might have for themselves. They always put the food down on the wall for those who were hidden in the bunker in Heinerscheid. It was all kept secret. I remember well that once, when the men were in prison, I got a hiding from my grandmother because I refused to eat. I had never been beaten like that before. That left its mark on me. Our neighbours were relocated in 1942. The sons ran away to avoid being relocated too. They first ran to a house where they were not taken in, and then to my grandmother, who hid them. Then Tyroleans came to the house. We got on well with them, they also attended my mother's lessons. I was with them very often as a child because I didn't go to school yet. I walked through the village.

How did you feel about the mood during the German occupation? Did you notice anything changing over the 5 years?

The mistrust was there, of course. Especially towards the Germans. They didn't do anything to us, it was only the postman who came to the house. But you had to be careful if you thought he was coming. People always looked out of the window. Because he was the son of the local group leader. But apart from that, people stuck together somehow. But they didn't spend much time together. Everyone stayed at home.

So you would say that it was different after the war? That people met more again?

During the war, you never knew what might happen all of a sudden. If there was an air raid alarm, you had to go to the cellar. People had work at home. In the village they were all farmers, they had to do their own work, all day long. It wasn't like today, where there are machines for everything. Many men had already been called up, so in many families only the women were left at home. And they had to work all day. That's how it was for many. In the morning, the cattle had to be fed and the cows milked. It wasn't like today, where it's automatic. The only ones who didn't have a farm were the Tyroleans in the neighbours' house. They had a little more time. But nobody bothered with them either. The children only went to school and I was with them a lot.

How did you experience the liberation in September 1944? Do you remember it?

We didn't have a liberation here in the north. They came across the border in the south at Petange, but there was nothing here yet. We were no longer at home, we were in Dahl. Almost

all the people were no longer in the village, there were only those who looked after the cattle and fed them. They were in the two cellars, everyone else had gone. In fact, there was no one in the village for six months. We were in Dahl, my father had stayed here.

But those who stayed were certainly happy about the first liberation and celebrated?

Yes, it was celebrated all the same. The flags were hoisted, etc. And then there was shooting from the other side, because we were very close to the German border. The Americans ordered the flags to be taken down again. That was the first time there was a real bang here. That was during the liberation.

Shortly afterwards, there was this terrible incident here in Kalborn. Can you tell us what happened?

Just before that happened, we went to Dahl with my mother. The people who were looking after the cattle were still in the cellars. My father had packed things for us. He had another box on the back of the bicycle to bring us clothes if he was to join us. But he never came.

Who else was here in the cellars?

There were half a dozen people with the Freichel family, their family. Their sons, who did the work, and another neighbour. At our place, down at my grandmother's, there was one of my aunts whereas she herself had already left, but the men were still in the cellar. So was my other aunt. The Holper family and the husband, wife and son of the Peiffer family were also sitting there. The family from the neighbouring house - I don't remember their names - were also there. Everyone else had gone. My mother had also left with us. We were in Dahl with my mother's family. That's what most people did, they went to relatives they had somewhere.

What exactly happened here in Kalborn on 22 September 1944?

The Americans came down briefly and then went back up again. The Germans came from the Our - it wasn't far - and looted the houses. They took everything that was there. The furniture, everything. They stole everything that was there. Then they noticed that there was still something in my grandmother's cellar. That somehow there were still people there. So they went in and found those who stayed behind. They drove them all out into the yard. That was on 22 September. They were asked whether they had any weapons. They had an old rifle. The women stood by the house and shook their heads. They had separated the men from the women. Everyone said no, but one of them didn't say it so convincingly. So they shouted at him again and he replied that they had an old weapon. They then went and got it. The others said it was no good anymore. But the captain didn't take this up. He then said, "You know what happens now." He asked which of his companions wanted to shoot them. They all refused and so he made a point of doing it himself. He drove them out of the yard to the other side, there was a pond. He put them next to the pond and shot them himself. Suddenly Americans came from uphill. They (the Germans) took them prisoner after shooting the driver. They were taken, along with the women who were still in the cellar across the German border. One of them wasn't quite dead yet, he had dragged himself a bit further. Sometimes a few residents from Heinerscheid came to check on the cattle. One of them found him. Or it was an American who found him and sent word to Heinerscheid, where there were more people in the village, asking that they should go have a look because someone was lying there. They came and found the others too. They had fallen into the pond. They came to Dahl to tell my mother. She went to the funeral alone and only told us that our father was dead

when she came back. Nobody knows much about this funeral, we only have the picture of the coffins. There weren't many people there. Of the others that were taken from the cellar at that time, no one knew where they were either. They went with them to Germany and then had to work for farmers. They came back in 1945. My grandmother died in May 1945. I always wondered whether she lived to see her daughter come back. There is no one left who can answer that for me. I also remember that in the beginning I could never walk past this pond. Later they had a small amount of cattle at my aunt's place. When she brought in the cows, I sometimes accompanied her, but I couldn't go past that pond where our people were shot. If aunt was a little further ahead, I was afraid I would drop dead too if I went past that pond. If she took me by the hand, it was good. But I couldn't walk past it alone. Somehow a certain trauma remained.

On 16 September 1944, the Battle of the Bulge began. At that time, you were in Dahl with your family. What do you remember?

I can still see how we loaded the waggon. My mother's mother was still alive then. She was sitting on top of the wagon. We children and the others - I had a cousin who was still small and lying in the pram - rode behind. Just like you sometimes see in the films today. We drove from one village to another, we stayed overnight on the way somewhere, I don't remember exactly where. Boulaide or thereabouts. I remember that well too. There must have been a lot of people lying there and I had to sleep in a cradle. I didn't sleep all night because I couldn't stretch out. I had to lie huddled there with my legs drawn up. We weren't quite out of the house in the morning when the house was hit and started to burn. I remember that too, that there was a sudden explosion in the house and it was ablaze. We drove on and finally ended up in Perlé near Martelange. Instead of going away from it, we were driving further and further into the Rundstedt Offensive. There we stayed overnight with people who took us in.

How did you experience the moment when you were finally liberated in 1945 and could come back?

It was not nice. There was not a single house left intact in the whole village. The inhabitants were all divided between the few houses that were still standing. Some were here with us and others further down in the village, opposite my grandmother. Over there was the Peiffer family and others. Those whose houses were broken down were housed with others in the village. We no longer had windows, our bedding was frozen in the mornings in winter because it was so cold. The rosary was said constantly. My mother then said that the children should go back to school. She taught the few children who were still there here in the living room. Only one or two children still had both parents. Others' parents had died in the concentration camps, or the fathers had been shot, or- these were the ones from Tentesmillen - the mother had died giving birth to the last child, in an other case the mother had also died, another one's parents had been taken away by the Nazis during the war. He was actually from Pfaffenthal and was placed with a family here. He didn't know whether he had parents or not. I think the people adopted him later. They were all children like that. The people were all busy renovating their houses so they could live in them again. When my mother went back to teach school, the children had to light a fire first thing in the morning. When it was finally warm, it was already noon. And I walked through the village. I also stood by when they dug up the dead American at the neighbour's house. The Americans pushed me back and forth, but I didn't understand them. I guess they thought I didn't belong there and should leave. But I was curious. I had to see everything that was going on in the village. I didn't go to school yet. Then I brushed against the dead man's feet, he was still wearing his boots. There were bones everywhere and I thought they were human. We went to Heinerscheid for high mass and there

were also dead bodies on the way. That was not pleasant. As I said, I walked through the village. My father was no longer there and there was no one in the house, so I couldn't go there either. I climbed into a tank once and found sweets there, which I ate all at once. Then I came back and my aunt was here. I told her that I had filled my belly with sweets. Where did I find them? In the tank. She then boiled some milk for me. In the old days, they used to boil milk when someone was sick or had eaten something they shouldn't have, also during the war, when something was spoiled, so that you would throw up and wouldn't poison yourself. The milk didn't come back up and neither did the sweets. They all stayed in. She was so upset because she thought they were poisoned. But they weren't. They were some of the first sweets we had. Although, when I was still in Dahl, there were also Americans who lived in a room at my aunt's. I was always sent there in the morning to bring them apples and to see if anyone else would be there as well. My cousins were older and liked to smoke. If there was no American, they would go into the room to see if they could find any cigarettes. Then I would shout from inside, "There's still one!" So they wouldn't come in. They taught me to count in English. Sometimes they gave me chewing gum or a sweet. That was the immediate post-war period that I experienced in Dahl. Not everything there was as destroyed as it was here.

How would you describe your home here in Kalborn after the war?

It wasn't nice. Not at all. There was only sadness. Every Sunday the cemetery was blessed, every Sunday we went to vespers. That was just the way it was. There was practically no house where no one had died. Some were killed in Russia, others were blown up in the bunker, others were shot. The Swiss came, the Americans helped, and the people from the area, trades people and so on, to renovate the houses that were still somehow habitable to the point where you could move back in. We got furniture from the so-called Sequesteramt. That was the name of the office that confiscated furniture of the Jews. The office was in Luxembourg City and the furniture was still there. We got some of it so that we could live in our house again. Also china, or rather a few knives, plates and pots. There was nothing left. The Americans gave us American blankets, these patchwork blankets. They didn't help at all; it was too cold. People unravelled them and knitted jumpers with the wool so that we had something to wear.

That means the houses here in Kalborn were all destroyed?

They were not completely destroyed. Some were still partially standing. Like the one where the Tyroleans resided. And *A Backes*, as we called it, that was still standing too. Aunt Lis' house too. And the customs houses. There were still a few where people lived. Some people also lived in the school at the beginning.

How would you describe the solidarity between people during the reconstruction?

Solidarity was not so present in my eyes. Everyone was looking after themselves. Everyone was busy enough with themselves. No one could help anyone else because they had enough to do with their own things. People had so much work to do on their own that they couldn't. But everything was rebuilt relatively quickly due to the government. It was known what had happened here. The solidarity of the government was therefore very great and many workers and businesses were sent here to rebuild.

That means that the solidarity came more from outside, from other people and from the Swiss?

Yes, because they were not involved in the war, they came. They had to be housed, etc.

What do you know about the blasting of the bunker in Heinerscheid?

There were men hidden who were to be drafted. And they were hidden there in a bunker. They were like everyone else, of course, they were young men who didn't stay inside all the time. They picked up their food in Kalborn. They had an uncle, Paul Meyer. He gave them food. And they would sometimes warm it up. It was cold in that bunker and sometimes they would make a fire. Then the mayor saw that smoke was rising and sent the Nazis there. Of course, they went to have a look and the men still tried to fight back, but they blew up the bunker. They were all dead. Five or six men were hidden there. Most people had a bunker in the woods, my father too. He went there when someone noticed that he was listening to the English radio.

What thoughts come to you when you think back to the war from today's perspective?

I have to say one thing: that time has brought me a lot. You get completely different values in life. Solidarity was important, even if it wasn't from the people here from the village. We were refugees in our own country. The people who gave us a roof over our heads, fed us. We didn't care who had the latest car and the fanciest clothes, like today. You learned to assert yourself, to stand on your own two feet, to take responsibility. When I graduated from secondary school, I went to Paris. There, the Algerian war took place. That is the war was in Algeria, not Paris, but Paris was heavily involved. I worked in the Val-de-Grâce military hospital, a very prestigious hospital where all the presidents used to go to die. When I worked there, they brought in a whole plane of soldiers. Soldiers who were paralysed, in a coma, no longer had arms or legs. And there I first experienced what war is. Yes, over here we had also dead people. But I didn't see anyone here who had been maimed by the war. But there I did. That's when I realized what war meant. I understood it then because I was older. The whole thing gave me a different view of life. I think it did that for all of us.