

Would you please introduce yourself briefly? Your name?

My name is Lilly Wilmes. I come from the Éislek, from Wiltz.

When were you born?

1923.

Can you tell us your exact date of birth?

20 March.

Where did you grow up?

In my parents' house in Scheergasse in Wiltz. My father had a tailor's shop there.

Can you tell us the names of your parents?

My father was called Bernard Wilmes-Schanck, my mother Catherine Goedert. They worked together. It wasn't a real workshop. It was a family that got together to tailor. My father did the rough work and my mother did the buttonholes, lapels and so on. And then I joined in, but I was just in the way. Therefore, I let them work so that the customers were happy.

Did you have any brothers or sisters?

No, I was an only child.

Who played an important role in your everyday life during your childhood?

Actually, I remember the years in kindergarten and the time in primary school well. I went to boarding school in Wiltz. There were nuns there.

When the Germans were here and the war had already begun, how did you perceive the mood in Luxembourg? How did the population feel?

The people were afraid. They didn't know what would happen to them. Later I went to boarding school with the nuns of Nancy. There I learnt to adapt and accept everything or to make suggestions. So it went by well. Until the Germans said that was the end of it. Then we had to join the Hitler Youth. We were forced into it.

Were you in the Hitler Youth yourself?

No.

On 30 August 1942, Gauleiter Gustav Simon called for forced recruitment in Luxembourg. As a result, the next day a strike occurred here in Wiltz. Can you tell us something about this strike?

We had closed the shop so that no one could get in. As a means of striking. We couldn't shoot or anything. By locking the door and leaving the lights off, we said we weren't going to go along with that. I was working in an office at the time and was also on strike. I did not go to work; I remember that very well. We were taken down to the Ideal Leather factory and we all stood there together in a circle, those who did not work that day.

When the strike was on, the teachers were also on strike.

Yes, I remember that well. Mr Lommel, Mr Meiers, Mr Brück. The Lommel family had children of our age. Their father was a teacher.

And what did the teachers do?

On the day of the strike, they stayed away from class. They were picked up like every day by the girls who always accompanied them on the way from Oberwiltz to school, but on that day there was no escort.

Do you know what happened to the teachers afterwards?

A short time later we learnt that they had been arrested. At first we thought it was just to question them about their profession. Unfortunately, it had a different background. They were arrested on the same day and we never saw them again. What I find so terrible and still regret today is that they were standing in a crowd in front of the boys' school and didn't know whether they should or not. They didn't know what to do. They were helpless. They consulted among themselves also because they did not know how it would turn out and what would happen to them. Whether they would be shot or imprisoned. How could they know? They were arrested and thought it would perhaps only be for a month or a week and then they would be released. But nothing of the sort.

In the winter of 1944, the last big offensive took place, the Battle of the Bulge. Where were you then?

We packed the bare necessities on a handcart, because you can't load a handcart like a car. And then we set off. We first had to decide what to do and how to behave. And when we saw that it was burning on top of the hill, we told ourselves that it looked like war.

And where did you go with the handcart?

We were supposed to go to Nothum, but there was no bed available there. So the next day we set off again towards Belgium.

And you found something in Belgium?

In Belgium we were near Attert. The grandmother there said we could stay because her husband was in hospital and she still had free beds. She invited us in and offered us a cup of coffee. She saw that we were half frozen. Fortunately, we hadn't been shot.

When did you go back to Luxembourg?

We spent six weeks in Belgium with these people.

Can you describe your way home? You came home via the "Schumann", didn't you?

Oh dear. On the way home we saw what the war had done. That made us very sad. We were desperate to get home to see what was going on there. Then we saw that our house had been riddled with bullets. We couldn't go back into our house.

Can you describe what your house and Wiltz looked like when you came back?

On the way back to Wiltz we saw dead bodies lying everywhere. It was indescribable. Dead bodies everywhere, it was not nice.

And when you arrived here in Wiltz, a lot had been destroyed?

When we arrived in Wiltz, we immediately went to Scheergasse. My father wanted to see what had happened to the house and whether we could do anything to live in it again. But nothing could be done. From the outside you couldn't see how bad it was. When we went in the front door, we saw that a shell had hit the gable. And it exploded inside. That's why it didn't look so bad from the

outside. We saw the hole and that a lot of damage had been done, but we still hoped that with a few repairs we could make it habitable again. But up close, all you could see were stones. There was nowhere to step. I immediately went to see if the piano was still standing. It was very difficult for me. It was broken and the keys were lying on the floor. You couldn't play it anymore. A little music might have helped at that time, but it was no longer possible.

What thoughts do you have when you think back on the war from today's perspective?

For me, the whole thing was unnecessary. Why did they go to war? For us Luxembourgers, it was unimaginable that you could lose all your belongings without a reason.