

First, would you give me your biographical data. Your name, your age, where you grew up.

I am Marianne Peiffer and come from Erpeldange near Wiltz. I am almost 89 years old.

Could you also briefly introduce your parents? What did they do for a living and what was the family situation like? Did you also have siblings?

We were three children, I had two brothers. But they are both dead now. My father, Theo Peiffer, worked in the leather factory in Wiltz. My mother was a housewife. Her maiden name was Hermes.

When the Germans invaded in 1940, I was 7 years old.

What do you remember from that time?

The German army came along the main road with horse-drawn carts. All the carts they had with them were drawn by horses. They didn't have many vehicles. My father suddenly said he had no more tobacco. I said nothing, but he sent me to the shop to buy tobacco. I didn't know how to go about it. The shop was on the road to Weidingen, so I had to walk up to the "Knupp" and then across the main road. There was a square next to the school, it was full of soldiers with their helmets and rifles. I was terribly scared to walk past there. But I made it to the shop and the woman there asked me how my father could just send me off. I told her not to touch me because I was shaking with fear. I got the tobacco even though I didn't have any money. At that time we had it put on the slate. And then I had to go home again. Those guns scared me so much that I came home crying. But the main thing was that my father had his tobacco. That was the beginning. Then all at once they said that the Germans had confiscated a horse from every farmer. Imagine farmers working only with one horse in the fields at that time. So, they had to restrain and harness the oxen.

What changed in your everyday life after that day?

We were taught by a German. The school mistress was ill. When the German came to the class, we had to stand up and do the Hitler salute. At that time, the children attended primary school until the 8th class. The 7th and 8th class pupils did not always do everything he told them. He would then get red in the face with anger, but he couldn't hit us. Although it was still allowed to discipline the pupils in school at that time. We would sit in front and laugh. That's how the time passed, but it was a hard time for the little ones. The older ones didn't learn much.

What was the situation with food? There were these food stamps.

My father had three children and was a factory worker. It must have been in 1942, when the men were shot in Wiltz, everyone in the factory had to join the "movement". Those who didn't sign were dismissed. My father was one of the first. And now what? How was he supposed to feed his family? We had 1 cow, 1 goat and 2 pigs. He said we had to build an extension behind the house to accommodate 2 more cows. And that's how it was. Our mother made milk and butter, and I took 250 g packages of butter to the houses of the richer families every week. My brother, who had already completed his 8 years of school, was at home and said to my father that they could harness the ox. They trained the ox with a cow so that they could harness it to do work. We did not own much land at that time. My parents went out to

loosen the soil with a hoe where the hedges had been cleared and planted buckwheat. In autumn they harvested it and threshed it at a farmer's. My father would put a sack on his bicycle and ride to Enscherange to a farmer who would do it for him. And so my mother always had enough flour. We didn't have to go hungry at that time. Before school we always got buckwheat dumplings, "Stäerzelen". My mother also baked the bread herself. Once, however, there was a small problem with baking bread. There was a big rock behind our house. In that period, the young men were conscripted. This was at the time when my father was dismissed. About 150 metres from our house, some had hidden in small bunkers. One of our cousins was also there with his family. When he found out we had bread, he came and asked if they could have a loaf. So every week my mother would bake a loaf of bread for them and my father would hand it to him out of the window at night. Once, when we were at school, a group of Nazis came and did their exercises. Then my mother fainted because she thought they were coming to take us away because my father had done that. That was the end of the bread. My father didn't want to do that to my mother anymore. We were given clothes that were too small for the others. We children wanted for nothing. But when I think about everything my father did, I have great respect for him. He didn't have a wage anymore. It was still war.

You talked about your cousin who was also in hiding. Did you have any other family members who had to go into hiding or who were conscripted and also joined up? Were you or your family affected by forced conscription?

I remember at least four of my cousins who were conscripted. The man who later became my husband was also called up. He was a few years older than me. He was wounded in battle and was given leave. After that he didn't go back and hid with small families. There were four of them in the barn. One of them was always smoking, and the neighbours began to talk. To the outside world they kept quiet, so they didn't report it to the Germans. But they told the family to be careful. My husband went down to the barn every day to milk the cows. They weren't too afraid, they had a roof over their heads.

When he was in hiding, but also before that, when he was wounded and at the front, did you talk about it a lot later?

He never wanted to talk about it. When something about the subject came on TV, he would start to cry and turn the TV off. He still had pieces of shrapnel in his back and arm that could not be removed because they lay on a vein. He was blind on one eye. He was quite disabled by the war.

Can you remember September 1944, the first liberation of Luxembourg, when the Americans came for the first time?

We were in Erpeldange by the shop, half the village was there. When they came, we waved like mad. They threw chewing gum and chocolate out of the window and us children were overjoyed. A jeep with four Americans which had made its way to Eschweiler was shot up in the forest there. Naturally the village was shocked when the news came. They had to be more careful. When the Germans left, some of them hid in the woods. But many Luxembourg Nazis also moved to Germany with their belongings. We could see them on the road from our house. Once many tanks came. We hadn't experienced anything like that. More and more came. They drove up to Dirbach. After the shop there was a bend they had to take. Behind the houses were

meadows. We children ran to the road because we wanted chocolate. Then when classes started, we weren't in school. After half an hour, we set off and got a decent imposition from the teacher. But there was no beating. We resolved not to do that anymore. This is how this time finally passed.

You told us what it was like when the Americans came in September. Three months later, the Battle of the Bulge began. Can you remember how it began? How did you find out that the Germans were coming back?

From our house we could see the road. The Americans dug themselves in there. That became a base. When the offensive came closer and closer, my father said we couldn't stay at home because we lived directly opposite this base. So my father packed a ham and a loaf of bread and we drove with the cart to Winseler. There we spent the night in a barn. There were also many people from Wiltz there, and at night every hour someone else kept watch outside. The last watchman saw heads and rifles in the wood, and my father said we were going back home. That was before the offensive reached Wiltz. So we got to Wiltz, where the Americans sent us behind a wall to protect us from the shooting. Then a Luxembourger came and told us we couldn't go to Erpeldange under these circumstances. We should try to find shelter in a cellar. So we went to the cellar of the Clarens family. This was a rich family who had a food store. I had often brought butter there in the past. But we were not alone in the cellar. There were at least two other families there. At night we didn't sleep a wink. Everyone talked to each other. One morning at about 10 o'clock the cellar hatch was opened and the dean from Wiltz came down, Mr Colling. He told us that the Germans were back and food stamps were being distributed again. My father asked whether we could go home. He answered in the affirmative and said that everything was quiet. The Germans were back and the Americans were in captivity or gone. So we packed our things and were ready to go home. When we got outside, there were still Americans on the other side, on the Follmühle. They must have thought we were Germans and shot at us. The bullets hit the wall right next to us. So we went back down into the cellar. After about an hour, everything was quiet again and we made our way home. It was not far to Erpeldange. Down in Weidingen there was a shortcut to our house. But my father wanted to stay on the main road because he thought it was safer. The Germans were everywhere with their machine guns. One of them pointed his weapon at us as we came. A German was walking next to us with a cart. My brother immediately rushed to help him. The one with the cart indicated to the one with the machine gun to put the gun down. We were terribly afraid. There was no further incident on the rest of the way home, but when we got home we saw that a shell had hit right next to our house. The house was badly damaged. So we had to make the best of it. At home we had to go to the cellar because the Germans had occupied our house. The Red Cross was also stationed in our house. Next to our house, shells were hitting everywhere. So we went to a neighbour's cellar, where we were not alone either. My mother had fetched bedding from home and we slept on the turnips. We did that for four weeks. But we were only there at night. During the day we could go home to the kitchen. The Germans had taken over the bedrooms and the living room. In the living room they had put candle stubs on top of a sideboard. My youngest brother stole one without anyone noticing. Then he took another one. And suddenly a German came and scolded him. He said that if he took another one, he would be shot. He almost peed his pants. My mother gave them a packet of butter to calm them down. Then everything was all right again. They even gave us their hazelnut spread. Us children were very happy about that. At night in the vaulted cellar, we didn't notice much of the shelling. It went on like that for a month. Our

mother washed the laundry in the stream. In winter, mind you! That's how courageous women were in those days. There was no room in the house and of course no electricity or running water. Everyone had a well. You were happy if you could draw water from it for cooking, because it was clean water. It was not an easy time.

What was Erpeldange like when the Battle of the Bulge was over? How do you remember the village? After all, much of it was destroyed.

After the war, I wondered what would happen if I had to go out with the cows. There were limbs, heads, guns, ammunition everywhere. It was terrible. You should have seen it. That was just dreadful. To have to see something like that as a child, that was terrible. I can still see the images today. You felt so sorry to see that. The real farmers were no longer there. The Germans had slaughtered the cattle. When the farmers came back, they had nothing left. A friend of mine told me they returned to an empty house. And that was a big farmhouse. They had taken everything from them. The army had to live, too. One could understand them somehow. After all, they had nothing.