

I am Marie Jacoby-Esch and I was born in Erpeldange near Wiltz, which was actually the Weidingen section at that time.

When?

In February 1933.

What did your family do?

We were farmers with 8 children and we all helped out at home. When we were all a bit older, we were able to earn some extra money in other households. I got married in 1955. To Rudy Jacoby from Eschweiler. There we set up our own household, but also helped out back at home when it was possible.

What do you remember from the time when the war started?

There was a lot we could not imagine at the beginning. Our chaplain came every week to teach us. When the weather was good, we went for a walk with him in the woods. One day in May, we were also walking in the woods, he said that this would be a good place when the Germans came. I wondered what he meant by that. A few days later we knew. Because then they came. He meant that nothing could happen in the bushes where we were. At first it wasn't so bad. I can still remember how they arrived. They came on foot with old horses that almost couldn't walk any more. We thought it was really terrible. We didn't know anything about these people. They were so tired because they had already walked very far. They didn't like us as much as the Americans did when they came later. That was very different. We were older then, too. The Germans came shuffling along with their weak horses, shoulders slumped. Later they came with vehicles. Some of the soldiers didn't even want to be in the war. And it got worse and worse. Suddenly we were told to darken the windows and not to show a light at night.

I went to school in Wiltz. We were given ration cards with our name and date of birth on them, which you could use to buy food. You then had to hand in the stamps from these cards to the ration office. At that time I went to the Hauptschule, which was the school for children who had good marks at school. We had lessons until 1 p.m. That was back in 1940/1941. My mother always sent me to pick up the ration cards at the ration office. I had to know the given names of all my brothers and sisters. I always heard from the queue behind me that people wondered how I could remember all that. I even remember it today. We could then go shopping with these cards.

Little by little it became stricter. My uncle was already dead at that time, he was in Dachau. My oldest brother should have had to join the Hitler Youth. But he didn't. We were not that kind of family. Especially since our uncle was in Dachau. They were after us to make us join the Hitler Youth. But we didn't.

Didn't that have any consequences?

Yes, a little bit at school. But we kept quiet and went to church. We lived our lives. Our parents were very strict.

It all happened so quickly. Back then, you started with French in the second grade. But that was over very quickly for us. We didn't learn French. Then the refugees from the south of the country were coming to the north. That was terrible at school. Everyone from the south sat at the front of the classroom. There were also poor children among them. In the end, the school

was full of lice. We didn't know what lice were before. It was bad for those children. They were with us for several months. Some were good students, others not so good. There were adults too, but they were drafted soon after. That was in 1942. We had one at home who slept on the sofa. He had been ordered to work with us because there were so many children. But he didn't work. My father and grandmother were cross with him. He didn't know what to do when he was in the field. He had never seen anything like it. So we also had trouble with these strange people. But they were only there for 2-3 months.

Was that at the beginning of the war?

Yes, right at the beginning of the war. We provided for ourselves back then. With our milk, our cream, our butter, which we made ourselves. There was hoarding too. People came to us to buy butter and milk. My mother also baked our bread herself. She did that all her life. Seven loaves every four days. After all, we were a large household. As I said, we provided for ourselves. We had to give away what was left over. Potatoes, etc. Some came to hoard secretly. If they were caught, they were punished. So did we, but we were careful. We had 5-6 cows and didn't need all the milk for ourselves. Some also came to buy milk from us secretly. A little later, around 1942-1943, people from Weidingen came with milk cans on their carts to get milk from the farmers, which they then sold on the way. Thus we got rid of our milk, for which they paid us a small price, and they lived off the rest. My father always said that these people also had to live. We had two horses which pulled our carts in the field. One day a car came from Wiltz and they told us we had to deliver the horses the following day. We did so and from then on we had to see how to pull our carts and machines. During the Rundstedt offensive we were only away for 5 days, but when we came back they had chased our cows out of the barn. One pregnant cow had remained nearby because these animals knew nothing else. They had slaughtered it. There was a field kitchen in the village where they slaughtered them. But we didn't get any of it. We hadn't been gone long, we had only made it as far as Heiderscheidergrund. 1943 was also a very bad year. And the strike in 1942 was horrendous.

In 1942, when we were already on holiday, several of our teachers were sent to Hinzert or even executed. We didn't learn much anymore. We learned a little English during the war. And then in September the Americans came. When our teachers were shot, we found out the very next day. There were these posters everywhere, which you see in the history books today, that named those who were shot. We didn't have school for a while. After the holidays, classes started again, but they were no longer real classes. Things got more and more dicey.

Did you know these teachers personally?

Yes, one of them was my teacher, Mr Lommel. He was shot. That came about through this strike, because the Luxembourgers didn't want their men to have to go to war. It had started in Wiltz and in Schifflange. That was terrible. I can still see the posters before my eyes today. It was terrible for us children. We understood some of it. It had already been a few years of war at that time. We were never allowed to say anything against the Germans. Otherwise they would have been there immediately. The *Gielemännercher*, i.e. collaborators. And then there was the black out. And don't you dare forget to cover even a crack of the windows. Then the German woman who lived next to the church came to tick us off.

Why did there have to be a blackout?

It was always said because of the planes. We didn't have streetlights back then. Everything had to be dark. I don't know if it was because of the planes, so they wouldn't drop bombs. Otherwise they would have seen that there was a village.

On 10 September 1944, when the Americans came, that was really great. Everyone was talking about it. But we didn't know exactly what the Americans were. All of a sudden they arrived. Our house was a bit higher up and we could see them coming towards us with their tanks and cars. We were still on holiday and ran to meet them. The first thing we got was chocolate and chewing gum. We had never eaten anything like that before. They were handsome young soldiers. We were a bit older and we liked them. It was also nice to be able to talk to them with the few bits of English we had learned. Everyone thought it was over. And those whose sons had been drafted thought they were coming home now. Those who were in hiding came out of hiding again. But those who were in the Wehrmacht did not come back. One dispatch after another came, saying that they had been killed or something. That got worse and worse. I don't remember exactly when the Germans came back, but we fled on 16 December. By then the war was in full swing again. We couldn't stay at home.

Suddenly the Germans were back. Nobody knew where to go. There was heavy shooting. My mother had an uncle in Drauffelt. His son-in-law had been hauled off by the Germans. The cousin had two small children. The uncle had oxen to harness. We no longer had our horses. So they came to us. I often wondered how they got the idea. There was no telephone. On 15 December they came, and my father told him not to unhitch the oxen because we would leave home the next day. There was no prospect of staying. The Germans were so stubborn and dogged. They just came into the houses and made themselves at home. So the next morning we left the village lock, stock and barrel. We drove off without knowing where to. At that time, the bridge in Weidingen had not yet been blown up. So we drove to Buderscheid and Heiderscheidergrund, where we stayed in the hotel of the Bissen family, who were no longer there themselves. There, a Mr Sander took care of the Bissen family's cattle. Around 5 p.m. - it got dark early then in December - we wanted to water the oxen there. Mr Sander invited us to stay there in the cellar. My father thought that was a good idea and they unhitched the oxen to feed them. We all had to go down to the cellar because they were already shooting. Before it got completely dark, an American jeep came from Eschdorf or Goesdorf, carrying a captured German. When there was shooting from the other side, they shot him right in front of our door. By then the war had arrived there too. We had to go back to the cellar, where we stayed until Saturday. We were fed and the men fed the cattle. I don't remember much, because we weren't allowed to leave the cellar. One day after our return journey, the hotel burnt down. So we went home again. We still had our teacher with us. She and my eldest brother had gone ahead to see what it looked like in Erpeldange. That was the day before we were supposed to go home. My father had no peace and wanted to know what was going on. But the next day they were not back yet. My father was worried and decided that we would nevertheless go home now. We would surely meet them on the way. So we set off. We met them again in Buderscheid. They told us that 3 houses had been burnt in Erpeldange and that our staircase in front of the door had been destroyed. And that our house was occupied by the Germans. My father still wanted to go home. The worst thing was that the big water pipe between Weidingen and Erpeldange was destroyed. Because the bridge had been blown up. So we had to take a huge diversion to get home. At home we saw that the steps in front of the door were no longer there and that there was an impact hole in the façade. Inside we saw that the stove was glowing. My brother, who had been there the day before with the teacher and hadn't eaten since, started to cry. The German

asked why he was crying. My mother said he was hungry and they gave him something to eat. We slowly recovered, but in our own house we were only allowed into the living room and the kitchen. The whole house was full of Germans. At night we lay on blankets on the floor, without electricity. My father poured machine oil into the top of a tin with a scrap of rag to have some light. The Germans came in and out of our house, even though the Americans were getting closer and closer. It was already the end of December. Down in the village we had family, a cousin of my father, they heard nothing. Because we were a bit higher up, we could see and hear everything. They told us to come to them. So we did, and my father and my eldest brother went home in the morning and evening to look after the cows. Because if they weren't fed, they screamed so loudly that the Germans just let them go. They had also taken one of our pigs. They didn't give us any of it. And this cow. We stayed with our family until the Germans left. Then we went back home. Some of them had skulls on their collars. They were evil. Once I stood with my grandmother in front of the house on the stones. We used to watch the shooting in Hosingen. It was getting light and you could hear it well. My grandmother said that Hosingen was under heavy fire again. Then one of the men with the skull brooches said, "The Luxembourgers light a blessed candle when they see Germany being attacked." My grandmother replied: "We don't light a blessed candle. My son was already gassed in Dachau in 1942." That's when he apologised. He didn't even know what was going on in Dachau. Or he pretended not to know. After that he never said anything to us again. He wanted to take revenge on us with his words. My grandmother had made it clear to him that we wouldn't light a candle if Germany was shelled. We would be glad when it was over. After that, things went pretty quickly.

Early one morning, it must have been at the beginning of January, because my brother-in-law had stepped on a mine on 2 January, everything was suddenly cleared. But they had mined everything. Many people died then, from the mines or the grenades that were lying around. The young people picked them up because they didn't know what they were. And another story: that was a few days before the Americans came back. We had no water since the bridge was blown up, and we didn't have a well either. Down by the church there was a well belonging to the municipality where we could fetch water. They had repaired the path so you could walk down there. My mother had sent my brother and me with buckets to fetch water. Suddenly we heard the planes coming from Wiltz. They were still shooting there. They flew very low over the hollow where the rubbish dump used to be. I can still see them today. They were firing incessantly. Shells and bombs. And they flew towards our village. We sat by the well and were afraid to walk home. We were afraid of being hit by a shell. Things like that happened almost every day towards the end of the war. We hid behind a hedge and splinters and shells hit all around us. Fortunately, nothing happened to us. When things quietened down, we ran home. My mother was probably already looking for us since we hadn't returned home from fetching water. When we got to the top of the road, we saw two dead bodies. There was a house whose occupants had taken in the family across the street with their 4-year-old child because their house had burned down. They were sitting in the kitchen cutting wood when a shell hit across the street and a German soldier, running away from a flying splinter, came running into the house and didn't close the door behind him, so the splinter flew into the kitchen and killed the men of the two families. That was terrible. We then told my mother when we got home. She was so happy that we were home safe and sound. We could have been dead. I was so scared at that time. My brother and I prayed that nothing would happen to us. That was at the end of the Rundstedt offensive. 1-2 days later it was all over. But there was still heavy shelling, no one

was allowed outside. Many were still killed. Afterwards there were dead horses everywhere. That was terrible. Everything that stood in the way was shot at. And there were also the grenades and splinters.

We had survived it. But we had no lessons until the autumn. Our teacher was then transferred to Feulen. We still had no lessons in the spring, it was a complete mess. The worst thing was the loss of the sons and the relocations. Even during the war, you could see the boarded-up front doors of the relocated families. You were not allowed to say anything or you would be shot or relocated. Or when the young men did not want to go to war.

They didn't all come back either, did they?

Some came back, but many did not. My brother-in-law from Eschweiler had stepped on a mine. He was 18 years old. I didn't know him then, but my mother-in-law later told me that he had already been drafted. He would have had to join the Wehrmacht in December. But because the Americans were coming, he could stay at home. And then he stepped on a mine! That's when they lost him. That was so sad. I always felt so sorry for his mum. When we had children later, things got better for her. She could look after our children and so on. But I often felt sorry for her. Later, when there was a detonation somewhere - in the 1950s explosive noises could be heard in the woods when ammunition was found - I always had a bad feeling. My husband was in the forestry administration, but they took good care of their workers. I always hoped that nothing would happen to him in the forest. There was still so much ammunition lying around. Many lost fingers picking up shells at that time. They didn't know what they were.

From 1947 we had normal lessons again. In fact, already in 1946. We had the teacher who had fled with us. There was a bit of catching up, but we didn't learn much. We started with French, because until then we had learned almost none. I was actually better at English than French. Then came the war damage. Those whose houses were destroyed got money from the State. Things were slowly getting better. But there was misery everywhere. It was not much either. Only a small sum with which you had to make do. We had lost many other things, but that was just the way it was. We were glad that we still had all our limbs and could work. But those people who were absent at home, that was rough...

Our Uncle Batty was a clergyman. He was a chaplain at the cathedral and director at the *Luxemburger Wort*. He was also a writer and journalist. He wrote "Mein Kriegstagebuch" (My War Diary). From 1933 there was war in Germany. The Germans read all his articles. That's why he was on the list, and when they came to Luxembourg, they arrested him immediately. We received a dispatch that he was in prison. When his father, my grandfather, died two days later, we reported it and the day before the funeral, a Jeep drove up to our house with my uncle in it. They had brought him for the blessing. My grandmother asked whether he was coming to the funeral too, but he said no because he didn't want to walk behind his father's body with a German next to him. That was the last time I heard him talk and the last time he was with us. That hit us hard. We never saw him again. He was taken to Hinzert and then back to the Grund prison. A certain Mr Loesch, who was with the Grand Duchess at the time, wanted to take him away. My uncle said he was no coward. He knew what would happen to him. In August he was sent back to Hinzert and then to Dachau. In 1942, he was at the end of his tether because of the beatings and malnutrition. He was allowed to write every two weeks and so were we. Anything that didn't suit them was cut out of the letters. In September 1942 we received an urn with his

ashes. His ashes are in the dean's grave in Wiltz. That was devastating for the whole family. And for the country. He was an important, learned man.