Friday, January 30, 2026

(As corrected by GM in March 2026.)

[0:30] My older sister, who we lost quite some time ago, was named Elizabeth; it's a family name. She was roughly 8-years-old when we were dropped off (with my maternal grandparents) in Germany (in 1939). My older brother Karl, also a family name, was about 4. The "troublemaker" was about 0.

[1:18] My paternal grandparents had already died by then.

[1:34] A secondary reason we were dropped off was that my father wanted to show my mother the 1939 World's Fair in Flushing Meadow. It would have been a great vacation to have had an 8-year-old, a 4-year-old, and an infant tag along.

[2:03] We ended up living in what would become the American Zone, basically southwestern Germany. The largest, nearby city is Stuttgart. The little town we lived in, Schorndorf, really had no claim to fame. The archaeology indicated that the Romans were there, although the vineyards there probably existed well before the Romans came.

[2:50] In terms of industry, they used to make those nice, reddish-orange roof tiles until they ran out of clay. They used to make wire bed frames until somebody else took over.

[3:13] The community basically was a farming community.

[3:20] Its only other claim to fame was that the church in Schorndorf was then the third largest Protestant cathedral in Germany. There were other nearby churches, including the Lutheran church. This was simply a German Protestant church. One other claim to fame was that the church still bore pock marks from French canon during the Thirty Years War in the 1600s. They even put a plaque there.

[4:28] I have a decent recollection of that church. Remember that in Germany you were assigned a pew. You sat in your pew pretty well all the time. So my grandfather's pew was up in the balcony. They did not have Sunday School, *per se.* Kids came with their parents to the Sunday services.

[5:02] The church has been changed quite dramatically over the years. The people who designed it knew absolutely nothing about acoustics. So you have two large rectangles with a rectangle coming off the so-called church choir.

[5:27] When I was a child, they had done away with the church choir section. They had pretty well screened it off with the organ pipes. Whenever the choir sang, you couldn't really hear it in the rest of the church; there were too many dead spaces. The pulpit was actually directly across from the balcony.

[6:02] That all got changed. The church actually acquired another organ which was put into the wall of the choir and one of the church towers. The only way that they could communicate between the two organs was by a series of mirrors. Both organs were played simultaneously quite often. That actually came later.

[7:7:51] During the War, needless to say, you had Easter and Christmas services. You had, generally speaking, *Totus Sontag* which is "Death Sunday" Service. You celebrated Ascension Day. There certainly were a number of church Holy Days that the church was used for.

[8:16] It is now a church that serves actually a number of religions.

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[11:07] Needless to say, during the Second World War, there were very many bombing raids. Schorndorf was not a target. But if you think about WWII bombers dropping time-bombs – there

was no place to set the timers on the time-bombs once they were loaded on the airplanes. The timers you set beforehand, And if the flight was delayed, you better have had the opportunity to drop your payload. Otherwise, you'd blow yourself out of the sky.

[11:46] Consequently, Schorndorf was literally ringed with craters. They weren't considered dangerous, although they created problems for the farmers. The things that were considered dangerous were the small holes in the ground which meant something hadn't yet exploded.

[12:16] Two bombs actually hit the town. One went through the roof of the church – the roof of the baptistery, the floor of the baptistery, and entered the basement. I believe it was probably a time-bomb. It was diffused and removed. The second bomb hit the railroad station – the waiting room, actually. It was a time-bomb. They diffused it. Because they didn't have immediate transportation for that one, they put it under guard outside the railroad station. The guard was a really nice guy. He let any kid who wanted to come and sit on the bomb. There's a picture of me, a little kid sitting on something way bigger than he was.

[13:38] Schorndorf had a very small railroad junction, if you will. They did a lot of strafing in order to kill steam engines. They used rocket fire in order to try to destroy rail cars. There wasn't much rocket fire, but there was a lot of strafing. I recall one house on the other side of the railroad station, three stories where not a window pane, not a roofing tile, everything was pock marked with bullet holes.

I14:30] It provided an opportunity for kids. We used to go out to look for the jettisoned machine gun links and cartridges. They became a belt. If you were really lucky, you managed to find three misfires, which you used for your buckle. Every time I came home with a cartridge or a couple of links or a couple of empty

cartridges, hoping to put together a belt buckle like the other little kids, they kept disappearing. I have a feeling that my grandfather didn't like that idea.

[15:37] He also didn't approve of something else that happened near the end of the war. Most of the German soldiers did not wish to surrender to Russians. Keep in mind that the Russians implemented a scorched-earth policy. It didn't matter, if you had a farm, who burned it. It was the German's fault because they invaded. The Russian population was going to be pretty tough on the Germans. I'll give you one example.

[16:24] My father had a brother-in-law who served on the Russian Front. He was captured by the Russians. He was basically sent to Siberia and then was returned to Germany in the late 1950s. He was a totally broken man who died a few years later. In any event, I suspect that a whole bunch of Germans, knowing what had happened, between the execution of partisans and the scorched-earth policy, weren't happy to surrender to the Russians. The Americans were their first choice.

[17:25] Even before the war ended, there were enough people who knew that the war was lost – in spite of what Hitler said – and they simply deserted. That meant that they had to get rid of their uniforms, their arms, whatever they might be carrying. Near my grandparents' home, there was a building that was used as some sort of a garage where a number of deserters had literally left their clothing – SS daggers, cavalry swords, belts with the Nazi belt buckles, you name it, medals. My friend – we lived in the same house; he was my father's brother's grandson; we were about the same age -- we discovered one of those caches. We took the stuff. This was really neat stuff for a kid! A day or two later we were taken by the ears, marched back out, and told,

“This is theft, put it back to where you got it.” We lost a really unique opportunity.

[19:30] With the Russian advance there was a growing awareness that the war had been lost. The German armies were basically stopped just outside of Moscow. They took St. Petersburg; they took a whole bunch of Russian cities. But they came to a dead stop outside of Moscow. When the Russians counter-attacked, Germany was pretty well lost.

[20:03] Germany also did some stupid things in terms of what they did with their equipment. The United States had the Willys Jeep; no matter who manufactured it, it was manufactured, by various companies, all to the same specifications. If you blew an engine, you found a Jeep that still had a good engine but maybe a broken axle, and you had a new vehicle. The tank that was most feared during the war was the Tiger; it was a German tank. The Germans under-engineered the engines. What happened was, on the Russian Front, if a tank blew an engine, it had to be picked up, put on to a flatbed vehicle, brought to the railroad siding, picked up and put on to a railroad flatbed, taken back to Germany to have a new engine installed, if one was available. It then was put back on to the flatbed and taken back to the front. Somehow that didn’t make sense.

[21:45] Virtually every (German) military vehicle was made by a different company to a different design. The parts were not interchangeable. If something broke, the vehicle was lost.

[22:32] (Disinformation) was used by Goebbels to keep the morale of the population high. In those days, you didn’t get a newspaper. The newspaper was posted on roughly a three-foot diameter pylon with a slightly overhanging roof. It was simply glued there whenever they managed to print an edition. Needless to say, the thing that most people were interested in was one

article that was of the most concern to them – that was entitled *Gefalen,* meaning "Died." Goebbels was really quite smart with that. What he did was limit the names to a very small geographical area. So the number of names was quite small. It didn't look like you were being clobbered. And, of course, whatever other propaganda he wished to have made known to the German population was also in the news.

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[24:32] You have to admit that, by controlling the press, he could literally tell the Germans a pack of lies. He could tell farmers a pack of lies. The foreign press was kept tightly constrained. They were given whatever news he wanted to give them.

[25:17] Bombing raids were really quite common. You have to understand that most of the bombing raids went against two targets: munitions and energy factories and – in order to affect the German population – they went after cities. You've heard of the fire bombings. It wasn't the bombs that killed you; it was the fires that sucked all the oxygen out. There were, obviously, some exceptions. Some cities were spared, for whatever reason I don't know. Some of the university cities were not touched.

[26:27] In any event, you knew – almost from the beginning – that the war was going to go badly. Initially it was going to go very well.

[26:42] When my parents approached the State Department here to ask w25hat to do with the kids – do we bring them back to England, do we leave them in Germany, do we try to bring them back to the United States -- the answer was that submarine activity against passenger ships had already been restarted. It would not be safe for an Atlantic crossing.

[27:12] The State Department was of the opinion that England would be heavily bombed and invaded. So it was not a good idea to bring us to industrial England, particularly energy-producing England. My parents actually had a home in Wales near the city of Cardiff. The advice was that the war was going to be over in no time. Hitler does not have the ability to fight a long-term war because Germany does not have the fuel necessary. It was just like in World War I, when Germany was going to run out of nitrates to make explosives. The Germans figured out how to make synthetic nitrates (and fuel for vehicles.)

[28:18] In World War II, one of the first sections that the Germans took – the Germans actually pumped oil along the Rhine River. They took what now is a section of Ukraine which had a large number of oil wells and refineries owned by people like Rockefeller. One of the reasons that Ukraine was an appropriate target for them was that Ukraine was totally underpopulated. Catherine the Great of Russia had invited German peasants in to populate that section of Russia. So there was a German background within the population there. They figured that there would be less partisan activity or whatever.

[29:35] And then it comes back to chemistry. Germany had adequate hydro-electric power and adequate coal supplies. Electricity, coal, and limestone make calcium carbide. That's what's used in a miner's lamp. Calcium carbide and water make acetylene. Again, the reaction used in a miner's lamp. You burn the acetylene for light. Acetylene under the right catalyst and high pressure makes benzyne, which is an ideal roughly 100-octane fuel, so you can use it literally as airplane fuel.

[30:29] The hydro-electric operations and coal-generated electricity also enabled them to make hydrogen. And the V1 rocket, for example – a rather slow, inaccurate rocket that could

actually be shot down by fighter planes -- used hydrogen as a fuel. The V2 also used hydrogen, literally tons of it. The V2, when it went into space and came back down – there was no way of stopping it or shooting it down.

[31:26] There was no way they could achieve their goal. And their goal was roughly a hundred V2 rockets a week. They couldn't produce the hydrogen for it. Producing hydrogen is one dangerous proposition. Little things like a hydrogen leak you can't see. You can't see a hydrogen flame. If you walk into a hydrogen flame, you get badly burned and never see it. As a matter of fact, my son, who used to work for Merck, was in an operation involving hydrogen. And if you walked through a section with high-pressure hydrogen, you walked with a broomstick with a piece of paper at the end. You moved that broomstick, that paper, up and down because, if you had a flame, you would see it because the paper would ignite.

[32:45] Fuel in Germany was extremely rationed. On a Sunday afternoon, you went for a walk after church, you went for a walk in the woods – near Schorndorf there were pine forests -- you could not cut a pine tree or break a branch because that was state property. You'd get arrested. The beech forests, the same thing. But at the right time of year, the kids, in particular, went out to pick beech nuts because beech nuts had a medicinal purpose. If you were badly burned, you were coated with beech nut oil.

[33:58] Sufficient energy was something difficult to come by. You really had a choice of coal, wood, or pretty well nothing. So you searched for wood, wherever possible, knowing that you couldn't break wood or take wood out of state land. Everybody who took a walk brought back whatever branches, small or large, that they could find to help cook with.

[34:38] Schorndorf, being a minor railroad junction, generally had coal cars parked on one of the sidings. Now in those days – think back to the railroads – there were not welded rails like there are nowadays. In the winter, they separated. You had a fairly large space between rails. In the summer, they came back together. The clackety-clack of the wheels hitting those joints created not only a noise but also a vibration in the cars. Because transportation was extremely limited, the cars were usually overloaded. This means that they lost coal along the way. So the kids were sent out, with a bucket. And we walked the railroad tracks. Whenever we saw a hunk of coal, it got thrown into the bucket.

[35:50] My first time out was very traumatic. The kids I was with disappeared. Not knowing why, I just kind of stood there and continued to look until somebody grabbed me by the back of the coat, picked me up, turned me around, and looked at me and said, as he looked into my bucket, that I had just stolen state property. Three lousy pieces of coal. And I got a lecture. Number One -- If I ever stole state property again, I would be arrested and jailed. That's pretty tough for a five-year old. But then he did something that was totally unexpected. He sat me back down, walked over to a hopper car, pulled a lever, and dumped a pile of coal basically the width of the railroad tracks and about a foot-and-a-half or so high, and walked away. I'm sure there wasn't anything left the next day. I figured that if those kids can steal this stuff, so can I. So my grandmother had coal to cook with.

[37:35] His motivation was that you needed coal to cook food with -- Number 1. And in the wintertime, you wanted to keep warm. Why did he do it? Because he undoubtedly knew that there was a supreme energy crisis amongst the population. He wasn't about to arrest a little kid, but he had to do his job. And his job

was to keep people from stealing coal. And he only caught one that day, and that was me. He was a watchman.

[38:39] Electricity was pretty constantly available. My grandparents had one or two electric heaters. One was in the kitchen. Whoever designed it should have gone to jail because it had a plug that was removable from the heater. Both ends of that extension cord had male plugs. My sister Elizabeth made the mistake of plugging one end into the wall while holding the other. And 230 volts will give you quite a jolt. She probably had a slight burn.

[39:48] Coal provided some heat, if you could get it.

[39:57] My grandfather was a vintner. He had orchards, he kept goats and chickens. At one point, each of us was given a rabbit. We were told we had to feed the rabbit and make sure it had water – literally take care of our rabbit. And one Sunday we had a really nice Sunday dinner. I went out to play with my rabbit, and the rabbit wasn't. My brother's and sister's rabbits were eaten subsequently.

[40:47] I don't know whether you've ever had goats. Goats kind of turned me off, particularly Billy goats. Their meat has an odor which I do not like. The milk from a Nanny goat also smells, particularly if you had Billy goats and Nanny goats in the same stable, which my grandfather had. His brother had dairy cows, so he had a source of income which was probably adequate.

[41:31] Besides an apple orchard, my grandfather's hobby was to *espalier* trees. At the end of the farmhouse, he had planted between windows which were above each other – he planted three pear trees which were designed to grow tall and straight, but not very far out. You could go to any window and pick pears. He had two more which were used for special occasions. Basically,

these two were next to the front door. It was actually the side of the house. The branches were flat against the side of the house, perpendicular to the stem, and the ends were 90 degrees up. Next branch, same thing, shorter. And he permitted one pear to grow on each of those two trees. That resulted in one very large pear. I don't know who he gave it to. I don't remember eating it.

[43:18] The war generally wasn't discussed. It certainly wasn't discussed in the presence of children. There was a system where, if you heard something that was anti-government or seditious, you were to report that to the authorities. And so kids were cut out of conversations such as that. It was quite often that even an innocent remark could get you arrested. We kind of liked our grandparents, so not only weren't we going to say anything, we were never given anything to say.

[44:16] Besides growing fruit, we had plenty of grapes which were turned into wine. He had rented a field nearby which, every other year or so, grew wheat. He rented another field where he grew potatoes, and things like carrots and brussel sprouts. Lettuce was grown in the vegetable garden behind the house. We didn't have refrigerators. So we kept eggs in a water glass – sodium silicate -- which prevents oxygen from coming in to the egg and spoiling it. Your cabbage got converted into, not coleslaw, but certainly into a state that kept it edible for months. Potatoes and carrots were stored in the wine cellar in separate sections, usually in a bed of sand. He grew enough to feed the family for pretty close to a year with both potatoes and carrots.

[46:12] (I was a British citizen by birth, yet here I was in Germany.) [46:34] I knew there was a war. I probably knew that there were French, British, and Americans fighting against you. And the Russians.

[46:56] (My parents were in the United States.) [47:12] I was of an age where I never really knew my parents. I knew my grandparents. I can't speak for my brother and sister who knew that some place they had real parents and that the people we were staying with were grandparents.

[47:36]Kids don't miss what they don't know. I didn't miss my parents. That's abstract to a kid. My grandparents were "Grandmother" and "Grandfather." I didn't know I was supposed to have a mother and father.

[48:15] Prayers at night were pretty mandatory. It wasn't a good idea to pray for (German) victory. Anything political was pretty well avoided. You prayed for a good crop. You prayed for the health of your friends, your grandparents. You prayed that the next bomb that fell didn't fall on your house. The person down the road probably would be okay.

[49:27] Part of the difficulty in a farming community was that people of a certain age were drafted. The labor supply was virtually nothing but very young kids and old people. Near the end of the war twelve- to fourteen-year-olds were taken. Again, near the end of the war, older people were taken, people in their sixties, for example. They would have been given a job as a watchman or as a guard.

[50:32] Being an American citizen seemed to help. The powers-that-be within the town knew that there were two Americans and a Brit staying with their grandparents. I still have a copy of my birth certificate – a photographic copy – which identifies me as basically a British citizen. On the reverse side would be a German seal – eagles, the swastika. Written in German was "this document, along with a copy of the original, serves as identification."

[51:59] It wasn't to anybody's advantage (that we were living there) for a very simple reason. Nobody on the Allied side knew where we were, my parents included. They tried to find out whether we were alive or dead via the American Embassy (which had no contact with the Germans), the Swiss Embassy (which did, but failed to discover whether we were alive or dead). Our status only became known thanks to a roughly three-day period of time when Germany was declared open and (Allied) soldiers took things that could be used for espionage or as weapons.

[53:06] Two American soldiers came to my grandmother's house. They spoke only English; my grandmother spoke only German. She relied on my older sister to do her best to translate. Part of the translation was that there were two Americans and a Brit whose parents were still in the United States, probably on Staten Island, New York. One of those soldiers wrote his sister; the sister managed to track down my parents and wrote them. To give them credit, the soldiers did not come into the house. They simply left.

[54:17] The real problem started afterwards and that was the two Americans could be repatriated immediately; I had to come in under an immigration quota. And my parents decided to keep the three of us together. They had a choice: they could wait for the British immigration quota. Now all of those GIs falling in love with British girls created a problem. Their immigration quotas were miles long. People in Germany – anybody who had a head on his shoulders – wanted to leave anyway, America being the land of opportunity. And certainly any survivors of the concentration camps sure didn't want to stay in Germany. So the choice of becoming a German citizen was really not a choice I had open to me. The adults, speaking for me, (decided I) could become a German, having lived in Germany for a long enough period of time as a minor. So I could be declared a German

citizen. Again, that wouldn't have solved the problem. The problem was ultimately solved. I came to the United States as a person without a country in late 1947.

[56:30] I had German relatives. One of them was an architect who won a first prize for a design. The first prize was a trip to the United States. And he took advantage of that trip – you wouldn't believe. He got the addresses for every possible relative and sort of bummed off of them in America. This way he didn't have hotel expenses and he could extend his stay.

[57:12] Sorry to say, I got a call in graduate school and I said to Judy, "Who the heck is this?" He spoke German. And she said, "He's your cousin." And he stayed. He wanted to see Niagara Falls. And I said, "You know, Niagara Falls is really better from the Canadian side. So I drove to Niagara Falls, stopping on the American side to make sure that he had a multiple-entry visa. I never thought about me, mostly because our research group used to go to Canada maybe once a month, have a few beers, and then come back. Nobody ever stopped me, until that day.

[58:12] And the conversation went, "Let me see your papers." Well, my cousin and my car could return to Buffalo, but I couldn't. It was, "Out of the car." I was taken to a little house on the side where out of my wallet I pulled a rather worn card. And I said, "This is what I have that shows I'm in the United States legally. And he looked at it and said, "That's no longer valid." I said, "Well, here's my UB identification. You can call my wife." After a bit of hemming and hawing, they said, "Okay, but don't come back unless you have proper papers."

[59:16] That created a problem because my parents had become citizens. They had two sets of marriage papers: one, civil marriage; one, church. They submitted the paperwork from the

civil marriage with their application for citizenship; it was required. The powers-that-be lost the file.

[59:51] I went to my father and said, “Look, I need the other marriage certificate.” And he said, “No.” And I said, “Well, if you don’t give it to me, I can’t become an American citizen.” He said, “That really isn’t true.” I said, “Well, it is because I’ve already checked.”

[60:15] He gave his lawyer a call and his lawyer was handed their church wedding certificate. The lawyer and I went to the courthouse in Hackensack. When it came to proof that my parents were married, he opened the wedding certificate and said, “Your honor, I’ve been told not to let this out of my hands because you guys lost the civil certificate and that’s all we have left.” The judge kind of laughed and said, “Okay, put it away.” It didn’t do him any good anyway; he didn’t read German.

[61:02] He asked me whether I had gone to school here. I said, “Yes, ever since eighth grade or so.” “How far did you get?” “I’m working toward a Ph.D.” “You’ve had history?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Okay, congratulations, you’re a citizen. Get out of here!”

[61:41] I think he sort of got a kick out of the whole thing. Here’s a guy coming with a lawyer who won’t let marriage papers out of his hands.

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