



Martin's Story, Chapter 2

Did you go to a kindergarten?

No I didn't. Attendance at the kindergarten was voluntary, as it is in this country, or at least it was, I'm not sure if it is now. I didn't go to one and in any case by the time I was old enough the Nazis were in power, it might have been difficult to gain acceptance for one and it would have been extremely difficult to find one where the teachers were not Nazis so that was an additional reason for not going to one. So I simply went to school, just before I was six years old.

It was simply the local school, there was nothing special about it, and it was normal in Germany for schools to take both boys and girls but not in mixed classes. The classes were separate although the school took boys and girls and I think that was the normal arrangement in Germany. Now the academic side of teaching in Germany was quite high. Educational standards were high except of course that for young children the teaching obviously was at a very elementary level but it was good teaching except for the fact that by that time the Nazis were already in power, they came to power when I was about 2 ½ years old and so of course mixed in with the normal academic teaching there was a lot of propaganda, children were being told what wonderful work Hitler and the Nazis were doing for Germany and so on, it was that kind of propaganda. And certainly at the beginning of each term and usually a few times during the term one had what was called Fahnenziehung, that means "honouring the flag" which meant that the whole school was assembled in what here would be called the school playground, I will say more about that in a moment, and a dais was arranged at one end and the headmaster stood there with the big swastika flag behind him and he made a speech which was full of Nazi propaganda and then the children were expected to raise their arms in the Nazi salute and sing the two songs, the German national anthem Deutschland Deutschland Über Alles and the so-called Horst Wessel Song, a Nazi propaganda song which was written by a man called Horst Wessel and which was used as a sort of second national anthem all over Germany. This sort of thing as I say happened normally at the beginning of each term and usually two or three times during a term. But also during the lessons there was a good deal of Nazi propaganda mixed in with normal education.

The teacher I had, because at that elementary level one just had one teacher for all subjects, the teaching I had was carried out by a man who was already getting on in years, he must have been fairly close to retirement and I will be quite fair that although he taught a lot of Nazi propaganda he was never deliberately unkind to me. And in thinking of it now I think that probably he was not a convinced Nazi but of course he had to teach the Nazi propaganda or lose his job, he had what in those days of large scale unemployment was a secure and comfortable and I suppose by the standards of those days well paid job which in a few years he would expect to exchange for a reasonably good pension and of course he would have sacrificed all that if he had refused to teach Nazi propaganda. So he in fact taught this sort of thing but whether he genuinely believed it I don't know, except to say that he was never deliberately unkind to me. Some of the boys were but I must again be fair. For one thing they were very young boys who were being indoctrinated with propaganda, they weren't encouraged to think for themselves about these things and boys of that age don't anyway, and perhaps there was another reason why they were unkind to me, I was rather small and puny, not the sort of boy whom other boys particularly respected.