

What were the children taught about WWII, as it was happening in Germany?



By Sarah Meisels_(studied at the University of Paris)

I have a friend who grew up in Germany during the war. Her kindergarten class took a field trip to see Hitler give a speech in 1939. She expected to see a wonderful, heroic person, because everyone around her acted like they were in love with him. Instead, she saw someone who to her seemed like a rabid dog. She cried in confusion and fear. Her teachers thought it was adorable that the Führer could make a little girl cry tears of joy.

I'll ask my friend if she wants to answer this question.

Here I am at Trudy's apartment. Her full name is Trudy McVicker, née Gertrud Siepmann. I will try to write what she

told me last week. She is reading over my shoulder and telling me stuff and verifying.

As far as what kids were taught in school, she said:
“Propaganda! All propaganda! People were brainwashed!”

“What kind of propaganda?” I asked.

“They rewrote history.”

“How?”

“Oh, about Hitler’s life growing up.”

In school, they were taught that Hitler had a storybook childhood. He was so talented, and was going to be a painter, (they said), until he became aware of how the Jews were threatening Germany. (They said.) So he decided to dedicate his life to saving Germany from the Jews. (They said.)

She says that everything about Hitler, and Nazism, and being a soldier was shown as fun and games. Bright, colourful, proud. The soldiers play tug of war, and kids are running around having a great time.





The main theme about the war that they taught kids, says Trudy, was that Hitler was saving Germany.

In their schoolbooks and in posters on the walls, (says Trudy) Hitler was a benign, saintly man whose greatest interest was to make Germany great again. He was devoted to making Germany beautiful and prosperous again. He would take back what had been taken away.

The school had posters on the walls of beautiful paintings of Hitler. He was 6 and a half feet tall, strong, beaming. *“He looked like a god,”* she said.

It shows Hitler in the middle: tall, muscular, staring into the distance. His hair is reddish. (His actual hair was almost black.)

An eagle with wings outspread glides over his head. He’s flanked by a glowing blond Hitler youth waving a huge Nazi flag. They’re overlooking an expanse of countryside, with mountains, meadows, and forests in the distance. Women in traditional clothes are gazing at him rapturously and crying. Soldiers are marching next to tanks. Men with rippling muscles are digging and building.

Here's the painting.



[The Adolf Hitler Collection](#)

Trudy says that Hitler's birthday was a huge deal. All the kids wrote him birthday cards. Everybody got a letter back that they really thought came from Hitler.

They often sang a song in school when she was six. They also sang it in the girl group counterpart to Hitler Youth. They all *"bellowed it at the top of their lungs"*, Trudy says. *"It was fun to sing about taking over the world."*

Heute gehört uns Deutschland und morgen die Ganze Welt

"Today Germany is ours, tomorrow we'll own the whole world."

She says it's very difficult to translate this accurately because it loses the rhythm.

She says that mothers tried to have as many children as possible, because Hitler would be the godfather of the seventh child. That was an enormous honour.

Trudy has a memory she's told me several times. When she was four or five, in the city of Wilhelmshaven, the family's next-door

neighbour was an old man (at least he seemed old to Trudy.) He had white hair, a little cap on his head, a long black coat, and curls hanging down around his ears. (That was how Trudy perceived him.)

He had a beautiful flower garden. One day, Trudy picked some of his flowers. The man came outside and asked her not to pick his flowers, but said that he would cut some for her and asked her to point out the ones she wanted. After that, when Trudy saw him in his yard, she would squeeze between a gap in the fence to go visit him. She thought he was a magician because he was so different than everyone else. He had a long white beard and his demeanor was different from anyone else she knew. She remembers his smile, his kindness, his gentle way of speaking.

Then one day he was gone. Trudy finally asked a neighbour if she knew where he was. The neighbour suddenly had an expression on her face full of hate. She said, *"They sent him somewhere where he can't hurt the German people anymore."*

Trudy was stunned. She remembers to this day exactly how she felt. He was the kindest person she knew (next to her father.) This man would never hurt a fly, much less people. How could anyone think this man would hurt anyone?

She never saw him again, but she never forgot him.

Trudy told me that kids — and adults — were encouraged to report anyone who said anything bad about Hitler or Germany. They were told to report friends and family members. And they did. She remembers the Gestapo (the secret police) running up the stairs of her apartment building in the middle of the night to arrest the woman next door and her two teenaged children. It was just after one of the attempts on Hitler's life. Her neighbour had said that it was too bad they hadn't killed him. The next morning, there were bloody handprints on the wall of the stairway...