

IA Perspectives

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In this issue we share an excerpt from Toni Fuss Kirkwood-Tucker's remarks upon receiving the International Assembly's Distinguished Global Scholar Award, 2010. Dr. Kirkwood-Tucker is Associate Professor Emerita, Florida Atlantic University, and Visiting Associate Professor, Florida State University. She has decades of experience in global education, including work with her late husband Jan L. Tucker. Her recent book, *Visions in Global Education*, was reviewed in our first issue of the *International Journal of Social Studies*.

Dr. Kirkwood-Tucker spoke about several critical life experiences and how they influenced her development, particularly her world view, values, and commitment to global education. These experiences were growing up during the Nazi era, engaging in international study and travel, and crossing the border (emigrating to the United States from Germany at the age of 22). Our excerpt addresses her most poignant remarks about growing up in Nazi Germany.

Critical Life Experiences that Mold a Person into a Global Scholar

My childhood years during the Nazi era were filled with stark images of a population *scarred* by war and yearning for peace. Too many death notices from two fronts had decimated the male population in my farming village of 1500 residents in the foothills of the Alps. Husbands, sons, brothers, uncles, and cousins were missing in action, either detained as prisoners-of-war or killed. To this day I still see my mother fainting when the death notice arrived of her oldest brother, a scout in Siberia.

I remember hundreds of refugees, from the Sudetenland and as near as Munich 100 kilometers away, seeking shelter in our village; the first group migrating from Polish lands conquered by the Nazis; and the city-dwellers hungry and homeless from the bombing.

When the death notice came that my father's youngest brother had fallen in

France at the age of 17, I still hear my grandmother's primeval scream that caused me nightmares for years. I feared that we would be bombed to death. I could feel this blanket of despair hovering over my village nestled along the Ammer River, liberated in April 1945 by United States tanks.

Mind you, this is Catholic Bavaria. The mayor, priest, and teachers were the prominent individuals in the village. I clearly remember the scene when our village priest entered our classroom one morning, climbed on a chair, removed the hand-carved crucifix from the wall behind the teacher's desk and replaced it with a framed picture of Hitler he pulled out from under his black frock. He stepped down from the chair and told the class, "From now on, when your teacher comes into the room, you will no longer pray. Instead, you stand up, salute Hitler,

and shout ‘Sieg Heil’ three times. Only then are you allowed to sit down.

Second, when you greet people in the street you no longer greet them with ‘Gruess Gott, Frau such and such’ but you raise your arm and say, ‘Sieg Heil, Frau such and such.’ As a first-grader I thought Jesus coming down from the wall was cool. I always felt sorry for him having to hang from a cross.

When I informed my Father of this exciting event, he grabbed me by the arms and spoke in no uncertain terms: “I forbid you to salute Hitler in the classroom or in the streets, do you understand? Do not let me catch you.” From the next day on, I had to remain one hour longer in school every day cleaning blackboards, floors, and windows. From then on, Herr Pfarrer disliked my family.

In another vivid memory, I still hear to this day the daily clicking of a young woman’s passing footsteps—heading daily for the train station expecting her fiancé to arrive home from the war on the 10:30 night train. It must have been a year before the feet stopped clicking by. He never arrived; he had died in one of history’s bloodiest battles in Stalingrad at the age of 23.

When my little brother was born in our house in 1944, I questioned my

mother as to why Dr. Kohlmeier did not deliver him like he did me and my sister. She responded that he was not around any more. My father, just arriving from Munich where he worked in the Messerschmitt factory after being injured in the war, screamed at my mother, “Tell her the truth. Dr. Kohlmeier is a Jew, and he was taken away. Who knows in which concentration camp he and his family were killed.” Mama started moaning, and I begged my father to tell me about the camps. He ranted for hours as he spoke to his seven-year old first-born of the horrors happening at Dachau.

The memories of war and genocide of my early childhood (and there are more) have shaped me into a questioning individual distrusting governments and authority, and hating war. For most of my life I felt shame to be German, wondering how so much darkness could emanate from a hard-working, cultured, and gifted people, trying to make sense of the nightmare. The shame eventually turned into pain and, for nearly all of my life, I carried it silently as I did not have the courage to discuss the horror in my high school or university classes in South Florida, an area with a large Jewish population.

Toni’s international travels revealed more devastation and victims of corruption, colonialism, and greed. But many of the victims still worked selflessly to improve conditions in the world. In the South (United States) in the 60s, she witnessed “cities burning, demonstrators beaten and killed by the police, and unnerving race riots.” And in Miami, during integration and bussing, she taught students who were living in poverty. Toni experienced disappointment, frustration, pain, and horror as well as the achievement of hopes and dreams, and encounters that would profoundly affect her life.
