

07/09/19 Frau Leipold Interview Transcript

Betty Leipold was born in Hungary, but her family was forced to flee to Bavaria when she was only three months old. When she was 12, she and her family came to America, first to Virginia and then to Akron, Ohio. She joined the German Family Society of Akron soon after and remains an active member.

Ilyana: Could you talk to me about the Donauschwaben, who they are, etc?

Leipold: Okay, well the Donauschwaben, those are the people that in the 1700s, they emigrated from Germany and went down the Danube and settled the different countries like Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia. Now mine settled in Hungary, so this is where I'm from. And that's who the Donauschwaben are because they went down the Danube. And my forefathers settled then in Hungary and these people went there because they were promised land from Maria Theresia, queen [Empress] of Austria, because she was in charge of the, or she was, she had the Austro-Hungarian Empire [she was the sovereign leader of these countries]. That's about it for the Donauschwaben.

Ilyana: The Kirchweih was a tradition over there and then they brought it here, right?

Leipold: The Kirchweih, I don't know much about it. I know it was tradition in the old countries but in Germany not so much because everybody settled in different places. And the only time then, when we came over here, the club started it again. So that's how I know it through the club.

Ilyana: How old were you when you had to leave?

Leipold: I was three months old when my folks had to flee.

Ilyana: And your family was able to escape before...?

Leipold: A few days before, because they knew some - well the German army was in there, in Hungary already, and they told the people - and it was a small town - they told the people that the Russians were coming. Basically we were fleeing from the Russians. And they said they would be there in a matter of days, and that's when my mom and family [grandmother and great-grandfather] left, my grandfather he died in the war, he was missing in action [dad and grandfather were in the Hungarian army, grandfather never returned from the war], so we never knew what happened there. And they fled then with just a few belongings. And then they got separated, family members got separated on the way, but then they reunited. And they settled in Bavaria then, on a farm. A farmer took us in.

Ilyana: After that how did you end up in America?

Leipold: Well, my mom and dad worked on the farm. And there really was no future there. I mean, we made a living, and that was it. We could have never had our own house or anything. My aunt had relatives over here. So my aunt and uncle and their family, they emigrated to over here. And then five years later we emigrated. We couldn't do it earlier because my grandma, who was a little bit older and they didn't [she was being held back] - but then eventually they let her come too. We weren't going to leave her behind, so we came over and settled here. We actually had a sponsor in Virginia and - but that didn't work out because he said he had a working farm, and he didn't. He didn't have anything really. And so my aunt and uncle came and got us and brought us to Akron.

Ilyana: What was your experience coming to America?

Leipold: Uh, coming to America, it was hard. I was 12, didn't know a word of English, and when they tried to enroll me in school, elementary didn't want me. Junior high didn't want me, because they didn't want to deal with somebody that didn't speak English. And so they finally, I started in junior high, but they just kept on passing me through, not knowing the language or anything, you know. So it was very hard. I wouldn't want to do it again. It's no fun being a teenager and not knowing how to speak the language and all that, no.

Ilyana: Do you think people know enough about the Donauschwaben story?

Leipold: Probably not. Because until I joined the club I really didn't know much about it, you know. And it's not taught anywhere, I don't think. So, unless you're involved with it, you really, I don't think people do know. So I guess it's just up to us, you know, when we talk to people, to get the word out.

Ilyana: What is one thing about your story or the Donauschwaben that you wish more people knew?

Leipold: The Donauschwaben, they're very, very hardworking people. They're honest people and I joined the youth group when I came over when I was about 14 or 15. And my kids grew up in the club, and it couldn't have been a better place to bring up your kids. It's, because it's very family-oriented and stuff. So that's, I think they are great people. Honest, hard-working.

Ilyana: So when you joined the club was the club still in Akron?

Leipold: Yes, I joined the youth group at that time.

Ilyana: So did you experience moving out here, then? Was that positive?

Leipold: Yes, yes, yeah. Because at the German-American club, we had the upstairs which we rented from the club itself because they had a downstairs with the bar and everything. And they really, the kids were not welcome downstairs or anything, even as teenagers or whatever. And we had a lot of people. And not having your own place, and we had that opportunity to get our own place. So yeah, this was very positive for us.

Ilyana: Is there anything else that you want to add or talk about?

Leipold: Oh, well, I loved growing up in the youth group. I loved being in there. And I enjoyed having my kids in there, and going to the functions every year. Labor Day weekend, meeting all the other people. I think it's a great experience for anybody.

Ilyana: Do you think that the Donauschwaben culture is fading or do you think the club is doing a good job keeping it alive?

Leipold: The clubs that have young people involved, they're doing good. But there were so many clubs that didn't involve the young people or concentrate on the young people. Because in order to survive, you gotta have your younger generation in there and, which is always what we counted on, you know, having kids in between youth group which some of the other clubs didn't do and so a lot of them have folded. But I think if you concentrate on your younger people, I think you can survive.