

## Interview with Alfred Opp (Part 4) – Teen-age Years near Stuttgart, Germany

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*I'd like to focus a little bit on your youth, on your teenage years.*

OK, well, we'll jump a little bit over. The first date I had, I was 18 - maybe 17 - years old. Because of the war - the seriousness of the war, and the recovery time after. When you're a refugee, you know, we didn't have any money to take a girl out on a date. So what are you going to do? There's not much you can do! Actually, you go hand in hand and you go for a walk, because everything else was verboten. We were also told you cannot do what nature pushes you on to do. That's not the way to behave. But like I said, I had no money. I couldn't go and buy a soft drink, or candy, or anything. We just didn't have any money. And actually we couldn't buy anything - after the war everything was on ration. So when I was about 17 we went for walks. We walked down to the valley a ways to spend time there. I was also more into sports, and so were the girls with us, at the time.

*What kind of sports?*

Well, I was in track and field - I was running; and I played hand-ball - it was played like soccer, but we played it by hand; and the girls did their things with rings and ball gymnastics, and so on. We had an athletic club, and that was very, very nice - very sociable. Everybody had a lot of fun! Sometimes we went to the movies - that didn't cost very much, but we had to walk to get there. Not only could we not afford the bus, there was no bus running to take us! The other fun thing we did was to take dance lessons. And I took dance lessons with a girl who didn't like me - not one bit! But I needed a partner, so I went to ask her and she said, Well, she wanted to dance but she didn't have a partner either. So she had the attitude, Well, you will do, if nobody else is available. But what she made me do was talk to her dad first. Holy cow! - - That was something! So anyway, I shaved, and did the best I could to look good, and you know I had my white shirt collar out, with a black sweater on, so I thought I looked pretty good. So I went and saw Mr. Hirsch and said, "May I have permission to take dance lessons with your daughter?" Now don't forget, I was a refugee kid. I had nothing - a poor kid. So he listened to what I said, then he said, "So, that's what you want to do! You want to take my daughter to dance lessons! Let me think about it." So he scratched his head a little bit, and thought about it. Then I remember he shook his finger at me. "I want to tell you one thing. You can take her for a dance. But listen good to me, son! Every time the dance is over, you bring her home. And forget about everything else you have in your head! Just dancing! You hear me?" I said, "Yes, sir! Y..Y..Y..Yes sir! Yes! Yes!" "OK" So I took Ruth - her name was Ruth Hirsch - I took her for dance lessons. She was a pretty girl, I have to admit. She was a good dancer. And did she ever float around.

But the problem was, it was right after the war and I had no comfortable shoes. So I danced in my boots - literally boots that I got from two different people. The reason I got the boots from two different people was because shoes were on ration. But all war veterans and industrial workers could get boots - and so I got one

boot from a war veteran who lost his right leg, and I got the other boot from a war veteran who lost his left leg. I talked to the guy who gave me the right boot who knew somebody - a buddy of his - who lost his left leg. Now at that time they had no artificial legs. They only had crutches to use. So the one war veteran gave me his right boot, and I went and talked to the other guy. The other guy said, "Sure, sure, here - you can have it." So I took the two boots - they were natural tan in color - I took them to an old shoe maker and he was very sympathetic to a refugee kid. And I asked him if he could darken them and make them black so they looked good. So those boots were my dance shoes. And I went to my confirmation in 1946 in those boots. Oh, they had to last me for quite a long time. And I was so proud of them. I proudly showed everybody that I got boots - new boots. You know, when I came out of Poland in 1945, I just came out only with the clothes on my back and they were practically rags. So anything that was new was so good. Boy, those boots! I still remember those boots! I think I would wear them today!

*What was the general attitude of people toward refugee families?*

Well, I tell you, the attitude was not good right in the beginning. You have to understand the locals. All the refugees came in a mass. And there was not enough room, so literally a house - a one-family house was made into a multi-family unit by law. They had to take in a refugee family. So we had to share the kitchen and the bathroom in shifts. So we came to an old inn - it had nine rooms and two toilets - and we were assigned to two rooms with one door. And on the other side of us was a family of six and we were a family of three. So any time they had to go to the bathroom they had to walk through our room and back the same way. No knock on the door, no Hello, or Excuse me. So if you were in your underpants, it was too bad. So you had to time yourself and listen - Are they coming? - or not? OK! Put my pants down, and change quick into my other pants! That's literally the way it was. We lived that way for 2 1/2 years until my mom went to the Mayor and said, "Please, I have a son who is 17 years old, and there is a girl walking through, and we've been through the war and suffered so much. I lost my husband and two children." And the Mayor said, "Well lady, I'm sorry, but there's no way I can help you. I have no where else for you to go."

But anyway, some way along the line, a week or so later he came and told us there was one room that he located that we could move into. And we stayed there until I left Germany 8 years later. The room belonged to Mrs. Bühler and her son - a very nice family. So she gave us another room where my aunt and my grandmother could live with us. That was the beginning, really, of a better life for us. We had our own room! But we still shared a toilet with the rest, which wasn't bad.