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Getting Back in Touch with My Culture

Growing up, I didn't consider myself Hispanic, although we spoke Spanish around the household, it wasn't until I was in the 2nd grade that I realized I didn't look like everyone else. My brother and I grew up in a predominately white neighborhood with one other Hispanic family. We had traditional Mexican meals, enchiladas, tamales, pozole, tacos al pastor, elote, tostadas, etc., but never participated in the traditions, i.e. Quinceañera, Día de los Muertos, La Posada. As my brother and I got older, we started to learn more about our culture and traditions. Some people would say to us, "y'all are white-washed" which means "a person who does not necessarily abandon their culture, but rather embrace others besides their own". We embraced the American culture and traditions, but realized we had been missing out on our own.

Over the years, my mom and I have begun to participate in numerous Mexican traditions. One of our favorites is, Día de los Muertos, where family members would put up an "ofrenda" which is an altar with a collection of objects placed on a ritual display. It can be quite large and elaborate. Although it's taken some time, I don't regret my upbringing at all. My parents had moved us from New York where my brother and I were born, and where all of our family is located to a little community in Midlothian. Moving to a new place and not knowing anyone is hard enough and not having family to share your culture and traditions with makes it harder. We have since shared a community with friends who we consider family now. It's taken some time, but I don't regret it at all. I get the best of both worlds.

"Actions Speak Louder Than Words"

Culture Breaks

Beginning in June of 2021, the DEI Committee created "Culture Breaks" for employees both at The Health Care Communities and Independent Living. The purpose of these breaks is to bring together staff from different departments and different backgrounds to discuss each others culture. These quarterly breaks allow for staff to get to know each other better and gives insight into different cultures they may not have been exposed to previously.

SAGE Training



Sage is the nations largest organization dedicated to improving the lives of LGBT older adults. One way they achieve this is through trainings sponsored by SageCare. Brandermill Woods became SageCare certified in 2019, and their latest certification in 2021 reached Platinum status (80% of all staff participated). The training topic was on Preventing and Responding to Bullying.



IL Resident Ernst Keller - Growing Up in Nazi Germany

I was born in 1932 in a small town in southwestern Germany by the name of Aalen. I was the last of 4 children. My father was a high school teacher, my mother taught piano and voice, both were quite active in the cultural and political happenings at the time. Aalen, an industrial town of about 18,000 people, split approx.



50/50 between protestant and Catholic, located near 2 fairly important railroad crossings on the western foothills of the so called Swaebian Alps. The area was fairly prosperous and had a healthy mix between industry and farming.

Needless to say, I was way too young to notice the changes that took place in Germany before and after the Nazis came to power in 1933. However, when my 9 year old sister and my brother of 7 were compelled to join the BDM (League of German Girls) and the Jungvolk, the boy's equivalent, and had to attend weekly meetings, marches, outings, and reported back to the indoctrination they were exposed to, often conducted by fanatical youngsters, who were trained by seasoned Nazis, for whom Hitler and the growing personality cult was Germany's salvation, I began to sense apprehension and caution on the part of my parents as they questioned my siblings about what they were exposed to.

My father, who had fought in France and Palestine in WWI was an admirer of Bismarck and more a monarchist than a democrat. Disappointed in the lack of accomplishments of the Weimar republic, he looked at the Nazi movement with grave concern and never joined the party, something teachers were expected to. He actually became politically quite active, joined the "Alldeutscher Verband", a group of like-minded, right leaning Germans, spoke at town meetings to caution folks about the questionable teachings of the Nazis, the communist threat, the emerging Hitler cult and the Arian "Superiority". The local party leaders became quite upset with him, even more so when he refused to take his children out of traditional religious classes in school. Both protestant and Catholic churches taught religion in our schools, much to the chagrin of the party. Only the Nazi sanctioned "Deutsche Christianity" was tolerated. We had a neighbor, a trade school teacher and artist, whose wife, also an artist, was a good friend of my mother. He was a passionate Nazi who missed no chance to tell my siblings and later me of the greatness of Hitler and all the wonderful things he and his party were doing in Germany. He was of course a party member at a fairly high level and had gotten wind of the fact that my father was being closely observed and in serious jeopardy because of his outspoken opposition. He told his wife, who one sunny afternoon came over to us, talked to my mother in the front yard, where I had been helping with some yard work. I was 7 years old at the time. As the 2 women talked, my mother all of a sudden fainted and fell to the ground. When she came to, I helped her back into the house. As I later learned, she was told by her friend that my father was under the watchful eye of the Gestapo, the secret police and should immediately refrain from political activities to avoid arrest and possible incarceration. Our house was actually searched twice by the Gestapo. In anticipation of this, we did our best to hide any incriminating documents or books in whatever nook and cranny there was in our house. Being the smallest of us 4 children, it was my job to not only find suitable hiding places but to also do the hiding. Twice the Gestapo left empty handed.

What saved my father is that WWII had begun and the Wehrmacht needed and drafted officers who had served in WWI. He returned to the Airforce and taught radio communication to young recruits, a skill he had acquired in WWI. The Luftwaffe and Wehrmacht in general maintained a fair degree of independence from Nazi party and Gestapo influence and meddling. My father was no longer bothered and would soon be deployed to the French and Russian fronts. Our neighbor and his 5 children continued to bother us with Nazi propaganda. The original friendship between the 2 families deteriorated. My mother remained strong and refused to take us kids out of religion classes. Needless to say, this meddlesome neighbor thanks to his party connections did not get drafted until the very end of the war.

The following story is from my father's memoirs: because he refused to join the party and still sometimes voiced his opposition to Hitler in public. The Aalen County supervisor, a very loyal Nazi, summoned him to his office for a private discussion in the hope that he could persuade my father to not only join the party but also have his