

**The National Museum of the Pacific War  
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)**

**Center for Pacific War Studies  
Fredericksburg, Texas**

**Interview with  
Ann Jonushaitis**

**Interviewed by**

**John B. Tombaugh and Peggy Van Meter  
October 8, 2005**

My name is John Tombaugh and Peg Van Meter and I are interviewing Ann Jonushaitis.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What was your parents names?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

Martin Austinas and Emma Odavaiti Austinas. My father was a cabinet maker and worked in the steel mills in Germany. He came down with TB and died. They were both born in Lithuania.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

I have sisters; Ruth; Martha; myself; Erica; Zelma.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

When is your birthday?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

November 26, 1934.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Where did you go to school?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

I started school in Germany. I went to Kristrina and then to different schools and sometimes there was no school to go to at all. We were always on the run.

The Russians were filtrating into Lithuania and my father did not want to be under their rule so we left.

We had a house and we left everything and only took what we could carry. We boarded a train and the cars were packed with people that were escaping to Germany. We traveled mostly in cattle trains because there were not enough trains for all the people that were leaving.

A lot of time we were so close to death. You never knew when the planes were attacking. I think the Lord was protecting us so many times. Always so close yet not close enough to get us. We always stayed together and my mother was a little women but she was a fighter and a good mom.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What did your food consist of?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

Mostly bread and little butter. We didn't have any meat at all, the people in Germany relied on potatoes and bread. When we had food we always showed off that we had food to eat. Mom would put a little jam on the bread and we would go outside and show off to the other people that we had food to eat. We would wash floors just for

a slice of bread.

Mom used to go beg for food and to do this she at times would go away for two days. We lived in a small town and everybody was hungry. She might be gone for a day or so and come back with a small sack of flour. You had to wait in the longest lines to get anything.

During the war there was nothing. You could have money but you couldn't buy anything.

We didn't even have toilet paper or know what it was until we came into the United States.

In this country you eat sweet corn; in Germany they don't eat corn. There was field corn but no sweet corn. They used the corn meal in their bread. We didn't know what corn was until we came into this country. We only knew that farmers used corn to feed the pigs. There was no sweet corn or popcorn at that time available in Germany.

A typical meal for the Lithuanian people would be potato and meat and maybe a little vegetables. It would have to be a cooked vegetable, not eaten raw. There was no salads like you have in this country.

One time we did have a garden after the war and mom had lettuce and beets and tobacco. Since our dad was dead and we needed wood to cut for cooking and heat they would bring us wood and my mother would give them tobacco leaves in exchange for the wood and they would also split the wood for us.

If you hung the laundry out on your own line you had to stay until it was dry because the people would steal it.

We had a dress and wore those heavy socks and they would have holes in them so you kept pushing them down and your shoes. If you got a hole in the shoe you would put a piece of cardboard in the bottom. We always walked barefoot in the summer. The shoes you bought were heavy leather and you would get blisters. When they would get softer it was because the shoes were wore out.

We were DP (displaced people).

We lived in a burned out barracks. One of the worse barracks was a big long barracks and beds made out of wood and mattresses were straw and already like flour because so many people had already laid on them thus there was no softness at all. That was the worse I remember. The barracks was really cold in the wintertime.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

During that time was there problems with lice and the such?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

Yes, the lice and bed bugs were all over. Mom tried to comb them out of our hair but you couldn't help it. Everybody had it too.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Did you stay all winter in that barracks?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

Yes, there was one stove in the center for that barracks. We had

a roof and sides on that building and we did have windows and one door. It was for both the men and women and you had no privacy at all. The barracks was of wood construction and no insulation and so it was very cold. Everything was in the open. We used to always gather together around that stove as it was generating a little heat to stay warm as ten feet away there was no heat and that's where the beds were located in the cold area.

In Germany they fed us fish and potatoes which sometimes wasn't quite fully cooked.

The Germans didn't have it bad as they had farms and their own animals. In Germany the barns were on the first floor and the people lived on the second and third floors of the same building. Who was there to see if there was a litter of pigs?

Now, after the war it was even worse as everything was being sold. The barracks were always on the outside of town and was a cement block and wood construction. There was that one stove and mom had to cook on that as well as trying to keep warm. We had to get our own wood and everything as nobody provided anything for us.

As for the wood, we could not cut a tree down. The only things we could get had to do with dead limbs or possibly in trees that had been blown down by demolitions as in bombs. Other than that we could not cut down a tree under threat of the Gestapo and later after the war the police.

From 1940 until 1950 we struggled all this time.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What were you doing during the later portion of that time in Germany?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

My aunt lived in America and she came to this country a long time ago when she was a young girl. She found us through Red Cross and mom didn't know her that well in Lithuania. My aunt then started gathering the needed papers to get us into this country. When we came to America the government didn't help you, you were on your own. America did help bring us to this country. I think you had to pay forty dollars.

We come to this country in a big Navy ship. They were bringing three ships a week to America from Europe and they were not luxury liners.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Where did you sleep aboard ship?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

They put us way down on the lower deck and we were seasick. The first day the food was so good, we never had it so good. Everybody was having a good time. By the third day nobody wanted to eat anymore. Everybody was sick and they made us go on deck to get fresh air. It took us nine days to cross. November was a bad time to travel.

American's paid our way to come here and my aunt had to provide

us with a place to live and find jobs. It was hard for us being in a new country but the Americans were very nice and helpful to us and I want to thank them for that.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What was your first job in America?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

My sisters and myself went to work in one place because we didn't know the English language. We worked in a glass company where they make windows for cars. After two years we decided to split up working together because we only spoke Lithuanian and had to learn the English language.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

While working in the factory were you still all living together?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

Yes, until we all got married.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Where were you living?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

I believe the name of the street was Maplewood in Chicago. We moved around also, each time that we found a little better place we could afford we would move again. Two years later I got married.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

I should think that it was a hard adjustment for your mother coming to this country?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

Yes, I think more of an adjustment for mom than for us girls. She went to work downtown in Chicago as a cleaning lady. It was hard for her. We didn't have a car but in Chicago there is transportation in the city. They still had those streetcars and they were cold to.

I remember the first time we came to this country. There was a neighborhood store and we didn't know English at all and we were so embarrassed. You had to go inside and ask for everything and we were so shy when we went into the store and so we would wait until everybody left and then we went in and we would point to what we wanted.

White bread in this country it is so soft, you could eat the whole loaf yourself. The bread was coarser in Europe. We were not used to eating so much white bread. You can still buy Lithuanian bread in Chicago now and when we go up there we always get the bread. The white bread is like cake in this country. One thing about American bread, it doesn't have that good taste like German or Lithuanian bread.

After the war the Allied army was out there and all the tanks and

things. We kids would go out and try to make friends with them. They were good, they gave us chocolate, gum and stuff like that and soap. There was a garbage dump and they knew we came looking in the garbage for food and they would leave some in the open on a piece of paper for us including the bread so we could find it. We used to go through the garbage all the time. We found all kinds of stuff like silverware and other things.

The barracks were always built on the outside of town as the Germans did not want anything to do with us. As we were going home we used to pass some fields that would have peas and carrots growing and we would sneak into the field and lie down and start eating them. If they caught us they would really get after us. We used to eat poppy seeds and we never got high or anything like that. On the way back from school we spotted an apple tree and we would make a hole in our pockets and get apples in the lining of our coats. We came home with a coat full of apples. You do anything when you are hungry all the time.

We drank water. A lot of time when you live out of town they had their own wells. I don't ever remember not having water. Now the toilets were always public toilets and we go on certain days to have a bath.

In Germany there were no refrigerators and mom would go buy bread and butter and put the butter in cold water to keep it from melting. When she could find some get potatoes she would put them in the ground like a root cellar.

**Peg Van Meter**

How about eggs?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

Now there were no screen doors in Germany on the farms. We only had to walk so far and there was a farmer and he told us, "If you can kill a hundred flies I will give you something."

We didn't know what it was but heck, we would do anything for food. So my sister and I both killed a hundred flies and the farmer counted them out and he went out to the barn and got and gave us each an egg.

I did not know what an egg was, I was only eight years old. This was the first egg I had ever seen. I brought it home and then I hid the egg because I didn't know what it was. My mom asked, "What did they pay you?" She knew I had gone all day to get those flies. Now my mother knew what an egg as she had grown up on a farm.

I showed her and she said, "No you can't hide it, I will boil it for you." She boiled it and I ate the egg and it was funny tasting at first because I never had an egg before. That's how I learned about the egg. We had never had chicken meat either. We didn't have any chickens so you never tasted the meat. People in Germany would eat horse meat quite a bit.

Mom would boil most everything. We used to go to the butcher in town and get the water that they would boil the sausages in and bring it home and mom would make a vegetable soup with it. If she got hold of some meat she would save that bone for a couple of

times and boil it down for a little flavor. Meat was hard to get.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What languages do you speak?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

I can speak Lithuania, German and English.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Your husband name?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

Ewald J. Jonushitis, we were married on November 29, 1952 in Chicago and he passed away in 1985.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Was your husband in the service?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

Yes, he was in the Army for four years.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Do you have any children?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

Allen passed away in 1996; Martin and Karen.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Do you have any other stories you would like to tell us?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

It was a big experience living on a farm here in Indiana. I had never lived on a farm as we had always lived in town. When I got married and we lived for twelve years in Chicago. My husband was born in Chicago but he had grown up on a farm and he kind of liked farming and he finally talked me into moving on the farm.

We moved down here as my two sisters were close by. He wants to come and live on the farm and I didn't want to go but he finally talked me into it and our children were still little. We all came here and he put us on the farm and then he left us here because he had to work for two more weeks in Chicago. We were so scared, we all slept in one bedroom. We did have neighbors across the road and that made it nice as we were not completely alone. I think the first night I even heard the grass growing, it was so quite after Chicago. It was awful, I could hear everything and in the city you never hear these things.

The first time I planted my garden nothing was coming up because I had planted to deep. In my garden I had nothing but dirt. Second year my neighbor was smarty-pants, he said, "Remember how to plant corn, you have to make sure every kernel is up and if it's not it will grow underground."

At first I took him seriously and that was a lesson I learned

rather quickly. Everything was new to me. I hated the farm and I hated to leave my husband but I stayed. It took four years before I started to begin to like it. Then I liked it a lot.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What would you tell the young people today of your experience?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

That's kind of hard to say because they know no other way of life and they should appreciate what they have instead of complaining. You don't really know until you go through what I went through. My children are not wasteful either. I don't take things for granted.

My life was full of adventures and hardships but we made it through these times.

When you see the Statue of Liberty it is really something. When we came here from Germany we had to go through a lot of doctors because they didn't want anybody sick to come into this country. We went through a lot before we came to this country then we again had to be checked out. Everybody stayed in one spot and they would tell you where to go because you don't know where to go. My Auntie picked us up at the Chicago train station.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

How long were you at Ellis Island?

**Mrs. Jonushaitis**

We came in the morning and by the time we got through it was already dark. We went on a bus in the water (a ferry) and couldn't understand this and we were very nervous. They took us to the train station and put us on the train and the tag on us told where we were to get off.

The first time I ever had a sandwich on a train we had to buy our own food. It had mayonnaise on it and we never had that in Germany and I didn't like it. In Germany they eat just a little butter on their bread. That was my first taste of mayonnaise and it took me quite a long time to like it.

I respect the Army for helping people, if it wasn't for the Americans they fought the Russians following WW II and I don't know where we would be if they hadn't. There was a lot of times that we went on a train and didn't know which direction we were going.

When the Americans took over a town they were met with flowers. We always thought the Americans were good people. Nobody like the Russians.

War was hell for us and we grew up in a rough time.

You have to live through the hard times to appreciate it.

-END-

6.5 hours

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