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Abstract

How to voice the Unspeakable

A critical exploration of my grandparents' past

Caused by a war diary, photographs and a locket that I received as a gift from my aunt in the summer of 2018, I am using several artistic research strategies to examine how my grandparents Marianne and Franz experienced the Second World War. Franz was 18 years old and had just graduated from high school when he became a member of the NSDAP and volunteered for military service. Marianne was two years older than him, BDM member and used to work with her brother on her parents' farm, which is in the middle of our village next to the church. From here it is not far to the Czech Republic and Bavaria. According to my family's stories, forced labourers also worked on the farm. I was 7 years old when my grandfather died, hence we couldn't talk about his war experiences. I know that he fought in Tunisia and was a prisoner of war in the U.S. My grandmother never said a word about the war. But once when we walked together through our village to work in the field that belonged to her family until it got nationalised by the GDR government, she told me that she used to have acorn soup and made flour from chestnuts. Until her death in 2018, she loved to have lots of cream in her coffee and much butter on her bread too. For my research project, I travel to all the places my grandparents spent time at during the war. I use conceptual photography, historical artefacts and experimental writing to clarify and understand from the perspective of the later-born to what extent my grandparents have possibly incurred guilt and if they also became perpetrators, like most Germans did during the time of the Nazi regime.

Keywords: exploration of wartime experiences, critical artistic research, family studies, question of guilt, conceptual photography & experimental writing