

PURE RELIGION

Cracked Wheat and Canned Peaches

Some things you never forget.

For one man, it's the shriek of air raid sirens, the whistle of bombs descending from the air, the explosions, the fires, the rubble.

Berlin, during the closing months of World War II, was anything but safe, particularly for four-year-old Detlef Lehnardt. But that did not stop his mother and father, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, from leaving the relative security of their suburban home and taking their family into the city every Sunday to attend meetings. Detlef remembers walking through rubble and the sirens sounding during the sacrament.

He also remembers the day the Russian Army marched through Berlin. They occupied Detlef's home and threatened to shoot his mother when she tried to take fruit from her trees. Having lost their home, the family moved to the electrical plant where their father worked and began yet another struggle to survive.

Food was scarce, and the children spent their playtime outside looking for edible plants. The stinging nettle, dandelion leaves, and wild berries they gathered helped them to survive. Detlef's father sold his bike and had a dentist remove a gold crown to get money to buy food. But the money did not purchase much, and the Lehnardt family often went hungry.

Then, in 1946, Elder Ezra Taft Benson arrived from Salt Lake City and with him hope. From welfare resources and the generous offerings of the Saints in America came much needed relief. Food from their Church farms,

clothing from Deseret Industries, cans of fruit from their bishops' storehouses.

"We survived on it," Detlef says. "We ate cracked wheat for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It sustained us. When we opened a can of peaches or pears, we felt like we were in paradise. Oh how we treasured every bite."



During that period, many Berlin children were malnourished. Every so often, public health officials would inspect the children. They took those who looked sickly and moved them out into rural areas six weeks at a time where they could receive better food and could regain their health.

"Thanks to the food we received from the Church," Detlef says, "none of us had to be separated from our family."

More than a half century has passed since those days where the Lehnardt family survived on cracked wheat and canned peaches. Today, President Detlef Lehnardt presides over the Liberty Missouri Stake of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When he speaks of compassion and caring for others, he speaks of things he cannot forget. He speaks of the kindness of strangers, the blessings of giving, and the blessed hands so far away that planted, harvested, canned, and shipped precious, life-sustaining food to strangers half a world away.

In the end, the kindness and compassion shown to his family by fellow members of the Church were the memories that Detlef treasured the most.

"When someone reaches out and blesses your life," he says, "those are the things you never forget."