

A former student of mine told me I should get in touch with Gertrud Schneabele Price Peters Goetz, indicating that she would make an interesting story for the newspaper.

When I made that call, there was just something in Gertrud's voice that told me I was in for a real treat, that this was a lady worth knowing.

And thus began what I consider finding a friend in one of the most interesting people in Wheatland.

I had learned before going to her house that first day that she was an outstanding artist, but little did I know what a story she had to tell.

In the midst of that first interview I knew one little story was not going to be nearly enough to even begin to expose this lady's life experiences and that art was only a minor part of what made Gertrud who she was.

Over the next couple of months, I spent wonderful hours hearing her story and getting into the nuances of Gertrud Goetz.

I learned that she—

- spent her growing-up years down the street from Hitler's headquarters;
- at 12 years old, along with her 11-year-old brother, she painted light bulbs blue so they couldn't be seen by allied bombers;
- lived in a 4th floor apartment with no elevator;
- had no refrigeration;
- would not completely undress at night since the sirens would probably go off and it would be a mad dash to the subway during bombing raids;
- all her food was rationed monthly and everything purchased required hours of standing in line
- maybe she'd get meat once a week and no more than about the size of a hamburger patty

—was 18 years old before it was all over

—had a father who spoke Italian, French and English as well as his native German and was drafted as an interpreter to a POW camp outside of Berlin. After being sent to a camp in Italy, he was able to send things home like rice. Gertrud's French mom got the water hot, put in the rice and the gas went off so she wrapped the hot kettle in a blanket and put the whole thing in bed. In an hour there was perfect rice and she'd made the first slow cooker!

Another time he sent a case of champagne which was shared with others in the shelter. Quoting Gertrud, "We sat around and drank it and didn't care how many bombs fell!"

Four years into the war one day her 15-year-old brother didn't come home from school. He, along with all the boys in his class, had been put in uniform and sent to anti-aircraft gun training stationed at Berlin Airport. He never spoke of his experiences under Hitler's regime.

At not quite 18, Gertrud took several tests that admitted her into the Berlin School of Graphic Arts where she took her turn sitting in one of the four towers at each corner of the school watching for planes coming in to bomb.

She was conscripted from art school to go to a military base outside of Berlin to make teaching sketches of the planes for the Hitler's men training to be jet pilots and making maps for aerial photos.

She learned to forge stamps required to purchase food or other items necessary for day-to-day survival.

As she recalled the screaming sound of mostly British planes coming in, her eyes welled up and her voice and hands quivered.

When the Russians with their canons were approaching the base, she left money in place of the bike she stole to escape with her friend Edith in the night.

As Gertrud and Edith neared and witnessed the destruction in Berlin, the two said goodbye and headed each to her own home, hoping it was still standing. They never saw each other again.

She and her mother along with as many people as could be crammed in it, lived in the stairwell of a bunker for some time. Toilets backed up with people trying to flush their papers that had the eagle and swastika on them which would have made them targets of the Russians.

Gertrud, her mother and a few others escaped the bunker only to be seen by the Russian soldiers resulting in them hiding in a subway tunnel.