

# Tour Through Nation Changes Viewpoint

By Ginny Dumond

From the sidewalk flower shops and towering cathedrals to the chilling halls of the Dachau prison camp, Germany is a country rich in beauty struggling to overcome demons of the past.

All my life I've seen the pictures and heard the stories of a time and place when human life was nearly worthless and a man named Adolf Hitler held the world at his mercy. I can remember my first feelings of patriotism beginning during a discussion about the United States involvement in bringing that man and his regime to an end.

The word Germany has always brought to mind the swastika and everything it stands for. I realize how horrible that sounds, but it's the truth.

Not until I had the chance to see first hand and really explore the causes, continuation, and costs of the war did I begin to shed my subconscious stereotyping of the German people and their country.

There were so many things that spoke to me about this trip, and so many ways that I was changed, but the transformation I may remember most is learning the difference between a German and a Nazi. It's the kind of lesson that helps me see the ignorance behind the madness, the beautiful countryside behind the mystique, and how a people with a harsh history searching for redemption could put their faith in a madman.

While in Nuremberg I was right in the middle of William Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. Just looking out my hotel window onto the stone road, I could almost smell the smoke and imagine the confusion - it was amazing. It made me realize how far away the actualities of war are from my generation. What a tremendous blessing it is to live in America today in a nice little sub-division of Joplin, Mo. I almost always sleep through the night, and almost never awaken to a sound other than a roll of thunder or train whistle.

Meeting the Germans and the men and women of the Second Schweinfurt Memorial Association drove this point home even more. They were all younger than I am now when they were called to fight one another. They have scars, inside and out, but were able to put the past behind them and tend their wounds together.

More than 80 percent of Schweinfurt was destroyed in the battle, and many Luftwaffe shot down an American plane, but both groups came to know that forgiveness is the

salve that heals deep-seeded hurts. What an amazing example these men present to a generation virtually untouched by war and the hardship it brings.

I will never forget the eloquent and well-respected Georg Schafer saying to me with emotion in his voice, "They told us to man those guns or our town would be destroyed. I tell you, we didn't know about the camps or anything until after the war, and even then we nearly didn't believe it...we just didn't know."