

Gawenda Writes War Memoir

By Francisco Garza
Staff Writer

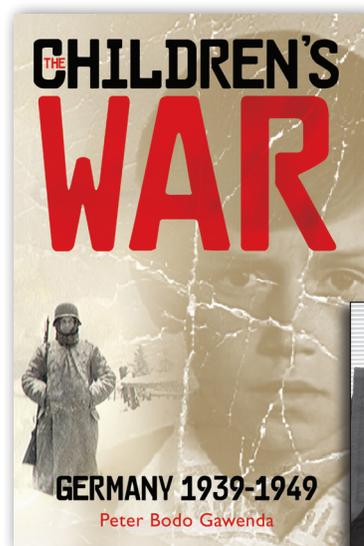
If you have the chance to pick up a copy of “The Children’s War: Germany 1939-1946” by Peter Gawenda, dean of the College of Applied Technology and General Studies, do it. It tells you the true story of a family growing up in Nazi Germany, all through the eyes of a child.

“It’s a recount of the experiences I had as a child age 3 to age 12, during and right after the second World War,” Gawenda said. “I was born and partially grew up in Upper Silesia, now Poland, which is a German eastern province. I was one of four children. My dad was in the war. Then he ended up in a Russian prison, which we did not know for a while because my mom had gotten notified that he had gotten killed.”

The book “fills a niche largely overlooked by other accounts of that dark period,” according to the book’s publisher, Brown Books.

“The book describes what we, the children, experienced as children,” Gawenda said. “It’s based on many notes I have made and notes my brothers had made ... back in the late 1940s and the ’50s and that I’ve have used in school. They kind of were forgotten and in a visit to my mother, she brought some of the notes and we started comparing notes and experiences, and so she said, ‘Why don’t you write a report?’ But she was very clear she did not want me to write anything down or publish anything until about two generations had passed because she always felt it could be misunderstood as revenge or anger. We didn’t feel or see all the dangers the grown-ups saw. Although, we saw the bombing, we saw the artillery fire and we saw the dead, but for us children it was more of an adventure that we somehow had to get through.”

An excerpt from Chapter 3 reads: “Because of the frequent air raids, Opa Müller began to teach us and let us



practice how to stand still suddenly and not move when we heard the sound of an airplane, not to do anything when under cover, and to sit down or drop on the ground and remain in one place when in the open. We would try to do that for maybe 10 to 15 minutes. ‘You must dissolve into air and become part of nature,’ he always said. Being able to not move or to disappear came in very handy whenever an airplane attacked. We were able to remain immobile for several minutes and if necessary to crawl very slowly into a ditch or drainage pipe, or the shadow of a bush or a fence. Opa taught us to observe continuously and scan our surroundings to recognize the best opportunities when we needed to hide.”

The dean said the first version of the book was finished before his wife, Irma, died about four years ago. His children persuaded him to publish it.

Gawenda already has another book ready to be published about his late wife.

“I felt she was a very out of [the] ordinary individual that any Hispanic female could be,” he said.

Gawenda said that book will come out sometime in the middle of next year.

“The Children’s War: Germany 1939-1946” (Brown Books Publishing Group, \$18.96) is available on Amazon.com.