

## *This morning I woke up in Vienna ...*

The sun is shining and the city is buzzing with people going about their business, hurrying to work, taking the children to school. I want so much to hate this place, but find myself alarmingly comfortable and 'at home'. I look out of my window. Across the canal, I can see Taborstrasse. It's exactly as I had imagined from the stories my mother told me of the wonderful childhood she enjoyed in Vienna until it was taken from her.

It's the first time here for us – my sister Laureen, cousin Chantal and me. We are meeting Elisabeth Ben David Hindler to see the *Stolpersteine* of our uncle Eric Weiss's family – parents Adolph and Gisela, sister Lisl and baby brother Egon – in Leopoldsgasse and to arrange for the stones to be set outside our grandparents' home in Heinzelmanngasse. The Weiss's electrical shop in Leopoldsgasse is now an internet café. We take a picture at the spot where his stolen youth is frozen in time on a beautiful black-and-white snap. Perhaps this was his last photograph before he escaped to France at the tender age of 18, the only member of his entire family to survive.



Eric Weiss with girlfriend in Leopoldsgasse c 1938

We arrived last night, on Erev Rosh Hashana, and went to the Stadttempel, which I had imagined would hold a few old men in a dreary synagogue – not the young, flourishing, beautiful congregation I discovered within. The lovingly restored temple, saved from destruction in order to keep archives of births, deaths and marriages intact, is once more a happy, vibrant tribute to the resilience of our people. Ironically, had it been destroyed

on Kristallnacht, the lives of many of the 'assimilated' might have been saved if their Jewish origins couldn't have been traced. After the service, we had a delicious dinner at the Alef Alef kosher restaurant.

This morning, we visit the Zigmann's



(From left) Elisabeth Ben David Hindler, Laureen Hart, Chantal Ghosland, Sue Rutherford

former home in Heinzelmanngasse. We enter the building and my heart is in my mouth. It is undergoing restoration so we are able to view the interior's original splendour as it is stripped back in preparation. We climb the spiral staircase to the second-floor apartment. These are the steps my mother, Hilda Mazin (née Zigmann), described when telling me how she tripped on the stairs and broke her thumb hurrying home as a frightened teenager after going to the cinema to see *Phantom of the Opera*. I imagine my mother running up the winding staircase, opening the large oak doors and falling into the open arms of her 'mama'. She talked of the apartment building so often and with such fondness for her happy early childhood. I feel I have known this place all my life. What would it have been like to know our grandparents – Laura and Isador – and visit them at weekends or after school?

We have lunch in the Wallenstein Restaurant, savouring the Schnitzel, Kartoffelsalat and Gurkensalat before we visit Hilda's college in Staudingergasse. We are so proud that Elisabeth will be giving a power-point presentation to the children using Hilda's dress design sketch books to emphasise the effect on the shattered lives of the Jewish pupils who attended the school many years before

them. From her lecture, they will be able to see a 'real' person's experience and understand how a thriving community was wiped off the face of the earth. We take the tram to Blindengasse, where Hilda worked part-time during her studies for Meyers Store with her friend Finy. It was outside the store that she was made to scrub the street.

Our next stop is Brigittenauer Schule on Karajangasse, where Hilda's brother Hansi went to grammar school. We see the memorial in the basement and later discover the existence of Hansi's school reports, signed in our grandmother's beautiful Gothic script. We learn that school records for Hilda's younger sister Serina have probably been destroyed as they would have attended the junior school. We show them Serina's *Stammbuch*.

It is here that we keep our appointment with Lilly Axter, whom we met through search notices in the *AJR Journal* when we were both seeking people with a similar family name. Our relationship has grown through emails, but this is the first time we are face to face. Although our backgrounds are poles apart – I, the 'second-generation' survivor, she the grandchild of members of the Nazi Party – we have become very close friends. Lilly is still seeking the family who lived in her apartment before it was 'aryanised'. She becomes our guide for the rest of our visit and we see a more light-hearted side of present-day Vienna. She treats us with the utmost respect and our friendship is forged in spite of the madness of the past. We visit the Prater in the afternoon and, again, I remember my mother's stories of happy summer days spent in the park.

The final visit of our trip takes us to Grosse Sperlgasse, where our grandparents were herded together with our great-aunt Regina and her family (husband Willy and children Ernst, Edith and baby Rosie) to await deportation. The building is grey and grim. We can sense the horror and desperation oozing from the very walls. We step outside into the bright sunlight and notice an Orthodox family on their way to synagogue ....

Sue Rutherford

### *'Righteous Gentiles' continued*

found splendid accommodation for us with the Denham family at 34 Highbury Place, near Highbury and Islington Station. We had two rooms with full board. The wife cleaned and did the washing and ironing. Her husband worked at the local baker, bringing home bread and cakes, a welcome bonus as food was strictly rationed. To

make sure we could manage, the Society generously paid the first week's rent for us, £1 10s each!

We had been kept, cared for and educated for two years ten months by the Society and their many wonderful helpers and officials.

Sadly, Uncle died a few years later of cancer. I visited him in hospital and was shocked to see how ill he was.

In conclusion, if anyone who reads the above tribute was also helped by the Society – or maybe their relatives were – could they possibly contact me via the Journal or at the email address below? Perhaps we could arrange some suitable commemoration to ensure these wonderful people are remembered.

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