A Coat, a Name, and an Unexpected Journey Through Time
By Danielle King

Last month, I stood before an audience in Vienna to tell a story I never imagined I would be able to tell. This story begins more than a century ago with my great-great grandmother, a coat, and an almost impossible coincidence.


Leopold and Pauline Jedlinsky with their granddaughter Lisl in Vienna, 1921

For most of my life, my knowledge of my great-great grandparents, Leopold and Pauline Jedlinsky, was fragmentary.

I knew that Leopold had been an officer in the First World War and later owned an elegant menswear shop on Vienna's Mariahilferstraße—a store that, remarkably, still exists today, albeit under another name. In photographs, Leopold appears serious and dignified, always well-dressed and with a fabulous moustache.

Pauline, on the other hand, was more of a mystery. I had always imagined her as a cheerful woman, because every surviving picture captures her smiling, often outdoors, enjoying picnics in the Wienerwald with sisters and cousins. Beyond these snapshots, though, I knew almost nothing about her life, her work, or her voice.

What I did know was how her life ended. In 1942, Leopold and Pauline were deported from Vienna to the Theresienstadt Concentration Camp. They were murdered the following year.

In September 2024, a commemorative stone was laid for them in Vienna's 7th district. After the ceremony, their names were added to the Steine der Erinnerung (Stones of Remembrance) website, giving a piece of their story a digital presence in the world.

Shortly after the memorial stones were placed, a woman from Portugal took a short trip to Paris. Wandering through a vintage shop, she spotted a coat. It wasn't the fabric or the style that stopped her—it was the label sewn inside. The name on it was her own: Pauline. Intrigued, she bought the coat and, back home, decided to look up the full name written there: *Pauline Jedlinsky*.

Her search produced only two results: a Holocaust victims' database entry and the Steine der Erinnerung page added mere weeks earlier. Suddenly, the coat in her hands was not simply a garment. It was a relic. It had a history, a tragedy, and a family attached to it.


Pauline Sabatini with the coat she found in Paris.

She felt compelled to return the coat to someone who belonged to that history. Through a chain of messages and introductions, she found me. The idea that I might someday hold something that had belonged to my great-great grandmother was overwhelming.

It took months and more logistical challenges than I ever expected, but by April 2025, Pauline's coat was finally in my hands.

When the coat arrived, I examined the label more closely. The front bore Pauline's name, which was exciting enough. But the real revelation was on the back: *Robes Modes II, Glockengasse 18, Wien*

A bit of research revealed that Leopold and Pauline lived on Glockengasse in the early 1900s. Through further research conducted by Roswitha Hammer, a researcher with the Steine der Erinnerung group, I learned something astonishing: Pauline ran her own dressmaking shop from her home for many years.

Pauline Jedlinsky, 1914.

This coat wasn't merely *worn* by my great-great grandmother. It was *made* by her!

For the first time, Pauline emerged not only as a smiling face in old photographs, but as a businesswoman and skilled garment maker. Photographs of her suddenly took on new meaning—now I could see her not just as someone's wife or mother, but as a creator of clothing that lasted long after she was gone.

The coat itself is exquisitely constructed: sturdy seams, elegant details, still in very good condition despite being around 120 years old. Every stitch seems to insist that its maker was not just competent, but remarkable.

The coat made by Pauline Jedlinsky.

Collar detail

Hand-stitched shoulder pads

There are still so many mysteries about this coat. Who was its first owner? How many people wore it? How did it leave Vienna, survive a world war, and end up in a vintage shop in Paris more than a century later?

These are questions I will probably never answer. But what I do have now is something more precious than a timeline: a tangible connection to Pauline. A piece of her skill, her patience, her life's work, was returned to her family entirely by chance.

Except, perhaps, it wasn't chance. It happened because her name was placed into the world again—because remembrance made retrieval possible. Without Steine der Erinnerung, and the posting on their website, this coat would have never found its way back to me.

Now, it hangs in my home in Berlin and sometimes I even wear it out. It reminds me that history is not only recorded in archives and monuments. It is sewn quietly into the things we make, the names we carry, and the stories waiting to be found.