

My mother, Gretel Bleich Rubin, the sole child of the couple whose lives we commemorate today, Lane Horoszowski (Hó-ro-shóu-ski) Bleich and Jakob Bleich, loved her childhood. She said so often and passionately. It is important to remember that the gruesome slaughter history compels us to recall not erase the flourishing and joyful lives that so many Jews like my grandparents and my mother enjoyed here in Vienna; lives filled with opportunity for excellence; lives complicated by the balance of aspiration and struggle, virtue and turpitude, love, and despair... lives of citizens free to aspire, struggle, succeed and fail. Jews, like my grandparents and my mother lived happy, sad, simple and complicated lives like citizens in any city - until they were no longer allowed to do so.

Our knowledge of the biographies of my grandparents are patchy, somewhat anecdotal and do not reach back terribly far, but that is not unusual for Jews, as persecution is not an aid to record keeping.

My grandmother, Lane, was born on June 19, 1887, in the town of Grossmost, district of Zokiev which was part of Galicia then a part of the Austro-Hungarian empire but returned to Poland in 1918. We know little about how her family arrived in Vienna but do know that they had a business selling postcards the most successful, commercial example of which I have in an ornate frame which depicts a wild circle of peasant dancers around a roaring fire in what appears to be a rustic inn – a portrait my mother displayed and which we, her children chidingly refer to as “the dancing fools.” Lane was, according to my mother, a music lover and singer, dedicatedly bourgeois, invested in good values, dress, and behavior. She insisted my mother take classes in proper manners and social skills which she, in turn resented, preferring to march in the Weinerwald surrounded by her fellow bundt members, fighting the Nazi youth with chains and knives, the scars from which she gloried in displaying.

My grandfather, Jakob Bleich, was born on December 4, 1884, also in Galicia, but in the district of Husiatyn (Haz-iyá-tin,) in the town of Grobuzna. We don't know how his family made its way to the outskirts of Bucharest, Romania, where my mother recounted, he grew up on a horse ranch which was his family's livelihood, from which he grew into an experienced horseman which skill allowed him, reputedly, to join the calvary as part of the Austro-Hungarian forces of WWI fighting in Yugoslavia. He was believed by my mother to have been awarded the Iron Cross, 2nd class, which my mother always maintained, had he not been Jewish, would have been the Iron Cross 1st class. He was a coffee consultant for Julius Meinl (Juliús My-nil,) a brand which still exists. The constant smell of coffee roasting throughout her childhood drove my mother to tea and yet each of her children has had a devoted personal coffee habit suggesting that love of coffee is either a genetic or geographically bred trait. He was a chess player, bon vivant, raconteur; encouraged my mother's political rebellion and group activities of self-preservation and apparently supported her when she bridled at the bourgeois values her mother advocated. My mother revered him.

For all but the first two years of my mother's life, from June 25, 1919, to August 1938, when she fled to Lichtenstein her parents Jakob and Lane lived in this building in apartment 7 on the first floor. They lived there until ten months after my mother fled Austria, June 6, 1939, when they were compelled to leave and move into a communal apartment at Obere (Ó-Be-rer) Donaustrasse, in the 2nd district until eleven and 1/2 months later, when they were compelled to

move to a more crowded apartment at Haidgasse, 4/24, until four and a half months later, when they were moved again to Im Verd, 7/25 until one year and seven months later, when they were moved to #2 Zwerggasse. These moves were to increasingly crowded and smaller apartments, all part of a system of collecting Jews into a progressively more compact ghetto in the 2nd district. Four months, 1 ½ weeks later, on Sept 11, 1942, they left the last address on Zwerggasse, and were taken or compelled to report to a nearby school – the Bundesgymnasium at 2 Kleine Spergasse - where they were held for two days... My Grandfather was 58, my grandmother, 55. They were accustomed to cleanliness, proper dress and decorum. How did they live, crowded into the school for two days with, we have to assume, all or a portion of the 1000 others of this, among the last group of Viennese Jews being prepared for deportation?

These details of my grandparents' forced moves and the ones that follow of the transport to their deaths are the largest trove and most specific details we have about their lives, and so I must recount them. I know many stories about their habits, wit and foibles from my mother, but none of that captivated me or my sisters until we began to grasp the detailed ruination of their lives. Maybe because these details have compelled me to look at my own life and wonder, as I'm sure so many of us commemorating our murdered relatives must, how I would have endured these circumstances. The very details impose a disruptive empathy upon us, compelling us to feel vicariously their circumstances, to live their torments. But, because they are my grandparents, this empathy bears with it a sudden and unexpected quotient of pain. And guilt. Suddenly, I know them more and more deeply. And I crave... more knowledge. More detail.

Jakob and Lane were obliged to part with the last of their money, 14RM, probably used to 'purchase' tickets for the next leg of their journey. They were taken from the school in open trucks to the Aspang railway depot, a station for livestock. They were given 'baggage tickets' for luggage they'd never see again. Transport No. 41, departed from Aspangbahnhof, Vienna on September 14th, 1942, at 7:08 pm. The transport consisted of 1000 Jews, 138 of whom were older than 61. The average age of the deportees was 43.

The train traveled from Vienna's Nordbahnhof Station, to Kolodishchi outside of Minsk, Belorussia. Fifteen armed, uniformed policemen guarded the Jews throughout the ride.

Transport 41 arrived at Wolkowysk (Wel-ka-wósk,) 44 hours and 27 minutes later. There they were transferred to freight cars, while a passenger car was attached for the guards. There were five more legs to the journey in the freight car, including layovers in each station bringing them to Kolodishchi, outside of Minsk, 33 hours and 1 minute later. The total time of the journey was 72 hours and 28 minutes. Were my grandparents still alive? I wonder if I would have been. I'm 13 years older than Jakob was and 16 years older than Lane.

Commencing in August 1942, following the roundup and murder of the Jews in the Minsk ghetto and to save gasoline and time, the trains were diverted to a sidetrack in the vicinity of Maly Trostenets, the notorious labor camp. Members of the security service rounded up the Jews in a meadow close to the camp, where they were quickly robbed of their last remaining belongings. A selection was conducted in which 20 - 50 young men were then sent to forced labor in the camp.

The remaining Jews on this transport were brought directly to open pits in the Blagovshchina forest where they were shot to death by the Waffen-SS. The very old and the very young, those who had difficulty walking, were loaded into gas vans so crowded most were killed by suffocation rather than the engine exhausts.

This narrative of my grandparents' final days compelled my family to begin a process including three trips to Vienna, much research and the installation of this stone of Remembrance. There are two parts to this narrative I would like to celebrate: 1) Lane and Jakob Bleich will not be forgotten. This stone is permanent and will remain here along with so many others to commemorate lives lost in horrible, torturous circumstances which must be remembered. 2) My grandparents, Jakob and Lane Bleich are now memorialized by their family and loved. They are part of our flesh and bones and the blood that runs within each of us. They are me, my four sisters, all of our children and grandchildren forever.

All my siblings, many of their children and their children's children have applied for Austrian citizenship. My son and I were the first to succeed and I can happily report that we entered this country yesterday as Austrians. Ich bin Österreicher! My mother said often and emphatically of our lives in the US: "Never, ever believe that you are more secure here than I was in Vienna." There is no shortage of irony in the fact that my family seeks a secure future from growing dangers we fear in the US through citizenship in Austria, the very country my mother fled to save her life. I hope this commemoration today, while celebrating the lives of my grandparents, fortifies our alarm for the future. For their efforts, I wish to thank the Jewish Welcome Services, Vienna. And to my grandparents, we say: We wish we had known you; We are profoundly sorry for what you endured and most importantly: We will never forget.

Thank you.