

Introduction: *Bitte entschuldigen Sie mir dass ich nicht sehr gut Deutsch sprechen kann. Aber ich möchte auf Deutsch sagen das ich bin eine geborene Wienerin, aber leider war es nicht möglich dass ich hier in Wien leben könnte. Und so, jetzt – in English.*

I was born on 21 September 1937, and this past Wednesday I celebrated for the first time in my life a birthday in Vienna. My father, Walter Schwarz, was born in Vienna in 1905, in the very house we stand in front of today. My mother, *geb.* Flora Singer, was born in Vienna in 1907, and lived her entire life on Hernalserhauptstrasse 57.

My mother was a dress maker - *eine Schneiderin*- and my father was an accountant. He worked at *Möbel Winter* until June 30 1938 when the Nazis no longer allowed Jews to work. On a quiet evening in July of 1938, SA officers were going from house to house arresting Jewish men. A group of them came to the apartment building on Hernalserhauptstrasse and asked the *Hausbesorger* to show them the three Jewish families who lived in the building. The *Hausbesorger* identified one apartment where a merchant lived. He identified the next apartment, where a a widow lived next to her married daughter and son-in-law, who of course had a different family name than the widow. The *Hausbesorger* told the SA officers that those were the three Jewish families, and the officers took away the merchant and the young husband. But there was another Jewish family one floor above. Mine. The *Hausbesorger* anxiously told my father about it the next morning. “You must leave. They will be back. I will tell them I didn’t understand. Three different names – I just made a mistake.”

And so my family left Hernalserhauptstrasse and came to Bergasse 14, where my grandmother was still living with her daughter and son-in-law. Her daughter, my father's sister, had converted to Catholicism when she married and raised their daughter as Catholic. My parents hastily made plans to leave Vienna, which came to pass just few weeks later. The night before we left, we gathered right here, with *Omama* Emma and a few other relatives, to say goodbye. My parents pleaded with Emma to escape with them, but she said NO – she was too old and besides, she would be safe because she was living with her Catholic daughter. She insisted: she would be safe. We never saw her again.

On September 12, 1938, at 10:30 at night, my parents stood on the platform of *Westbahnhof*, me in their arms, for the train that took them to Köln. From there, they went to Aachen, where they got in touch with a group of brave souls who smuggled them over the border, through Maastricht and into Belgium. We waited in Antwerpen for 18 months until March 1940 when finally our quota number came up and we were able to sail for America. Hitler's troops marched into Belgium 6 weeks later.

I grew up in America with no personal memory of the Vienna I had left so hurriedly. I became an American kid, an American teenager. I attended American schools and had American friends. But... behind closed doors, in our own house, it was as though we were in still Vienna. My parents spoke German to each other and to me, and to my sister who was born in June 1945 just as the war ended. We ate Wiener Schnitzel, Goulash *Suppe*,

Kaiserschmarren, My parents drank coffee into which they would dunk a kaiser roll. My mother baked spritz cookies. She taught me Viennese songs and a German tongue twister. They loved music, especially *ein “Wiener Walzer.”* My father sang opera arias at the living room piano and translated the text from Italian to German, just the way it was sung at the Wieneroper. My mother stood in the kitchen humming “*Das gibt’s nur ein mal. Das kommt nicht wieder. Das ist zu schön um wahr zu sein*” I still remember the lullaby she sang to me:

*Kommt ein Vogel geflogen,
setzt sich nieder auf mein Fuss
hat ein Briefel im Schnabel,
von der Mama einen Gruss.*

*Lieber Vogel, flieg weiter,
nimm ein Gruss mit und ein Kuss
denn ich kann dich nicht begleiten,
weil ich hier bleiben muss.*

In their hearts, my parents never left their homeland. They gave me a life very different from the one they imagined for me when I was born. Yet they created in me a sense of connection with the city where I was born and with the family that was lost to me. Throughout my childhood, my parents told me the story of our escape: how frightened my mother was standing on the train platform and how *Omama- Emma -* had cried and cried the night before we left. “*Wie Sie hat mitgetrieht. Schrecklich. meine Kinder, meine Kinder*” were

the last words my parents heard. I have seen my mother's tears and heard the sadness in my father's voice when they spoke of Emma. I suffered their loss with them.

My cousin, Hedy, was 16 years older than I. She was with us on Bergasse that night. Her mother, my *Tante Rosa*, said to her, "Go and say goodbye to baby Susi. Who knows when we will see them again." Hedy was so unhappy. She picked me up and held me. Then she put me back in my crib and put her own necklace around my neck. A thin gold chain with a ceramic charm. On one side, a picture of a *Schützengel*. On the other side, the words, "*Gott Schütze Dich*." It was only many years later, after I had retrieved the necklace from a box of childhood memorabilia, that Hedy told me the full story of how it had been given to me.

That necklace is here with me today, and Hedy's son Paul is here with me today as well, along with his wife, Laura.

Not everyone may have such a personal trinket of remembrance and so what you are doing with the *Steine der Erinnerung* project is so important. Each stone honors the memory not only of one person but of everyone who was lost to us. The story the stones tell must be told to every new generation. Only by learning and teaching this history can we hope to prevent such a horror from ever happening again. The story of what happened to 6 million people is really the heart-wrenching story of what happened one person at a time. One name at a time. One plaque at a time. One building where someone lived, slept, brushed her teeth, drank her coffee, combed her hair, *schmnoozed* with

her friends and family, held her grandchild in her arms, laughed, and then cried out, “*Meine Kinder, meine Kinder!*”

Today is a day for remembering our sorrow, yet the very fact that we are gathered here together gives us hope for a better future, for a time when the kind of horrors we commemorate today will never again come to pass.

Thank you for honoring my grandmother and all the other women, men, and children whose lives were cut short during that terrible time, and whose stories will remain with us forever.

**Susanne R. Blatt
September 25, 2011
In memory of Emma Schwarz**