

ROSEN HOUSE
MAX-EMANUEL-STRASSE 17

JOE

Joseph PORAS
Peter PORAS

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Servus, wie mich meine österreichischen Verwandten vorgestellt hätten, lautet mein Name Herr Doktor Joseph Poras, aber jetzt dürfen Sie mich als eine Austro-Amerikaner Joe nennen. Da mein Deutsch so schlecht ist, machen wir auf Englisch weiter.

First a big "thank you" goes out to the organizers of Steine der Erinnerung for helping to bring us together for this solemn occasion.

My brother Peter and I are moved to be with our wonderful family members who have flown to Vienna from around the world for this meaningful occasion. Its also important to us that we have many new friends joining us this morning to commemorate the lives of Johanna and Robert Rosen, my great-grandmother and great-uncle, who lived in this beautiful villa next to us.

PETER

Our mother Marietta grew up in this house with three generations of her family - her father Louis, her uncle Robert and his wife Jenny, her uncle Berchie, and her grandparents, Johanna and Edward Rosen. Even today, seeing the run down state of the house, it is not hard to imagine what a magical place this home must have been for the family.

My mother was 17 when she was forced to leave behind the only country she'd ever known. She fled with her father and her fiancé - **our** father - to Switzerland, and then eventually found safe harbor in America. Her grandmother Johanna escaped to her hometown in Croatia. Our mother's uncle Robert escaped to Belgium — both of them hoping against hope that Hitler's horrors would't reach them.

1

JOE

Its difficult to talk about the fates of Johanna and Robert. Johanna met her end at Jes_on-o-vak, a barbaric camp in Croatia where she was killed with many of her family members. She was 72 years old. After being sent to a transit camp in France for a few months, Robert was finally shipped to and gassed in Auschwitz. He was 54 years old.

PETER

Growing up in Massachusetts, my brother and I had no grandparents to celebrate holidays with, and only one uncle nearby. We sensed haunting shadows around my parents, who were totally silent about their European past. We had little to no idea about their lives in the old world or what they went through after Hiter invaded Austria.

JOE

I have a strong memory from when I was about 10 years of age -of a gigantic shipping crate from Europe arriving at our house. Wow, what was this? The crate was slowly pried open. Inside were a series of enormous, elegant, gilded portraits of people I'd never seen before. One by one, my European relatives were revealed to me. For the first time, I saw my beautiful grandmother Katie and my dapper grandfather Louis. I vaguely remember catching a glimpse of an elegant, austere looking older woman, but her portrait must have been moved to a corner of the basement, because it was decades before I laid eyes on it again, before I finally understood why Johanna had been hidden the shadows.

PETER

Our parents were so successful in burying the past that it wasn't until I was in my 50s that I finally learned that Johanna and her son Robert were victims of the Shoah. I now understand that their horrific fates must have been too painful, too bound up with survivor's guilt, for my parents to discuss, or even to look at.

We know next to nothing about the lives Johanna and Robert lived, about their personalities, their likes or dislikes. Although we do know that, like my brother Joe, Johanna was an obsessive bridge player. She kept a strict household in which children were to be seen but not heard. Robert, on the other hand, was a playful, loving uncle to our mother Marietta. When her father was away at work, Uncle Robert and his wife Tanta Jenny took good care of Marietta and kept her entertained.

JOE

After my mother passed away a few years ago, we found Johanna's portrait in her basement. I brought it to my house, where it hangs prominently. My Austrian family is now with me in my home. And I can feel my Austrian family with me here today — with all of us — as we attempt to bring Johanna and Robert Rosen out of the shadows, as we commemorate their lives, as we mourn their deaths, together.

These small “Stumpfsteins” scattered throughout Austria are a moving and important reminder of how fragile our democracies are, and a warning of the consequences that would result if our institutions break down.

On behalf of our families, we thank you for being here.

Diese Kleinen Stumpfsteinen über ganz österreich verstreuten sind eine bewegende und wichtige Erinnerung daran, wie zerbrechlich unsere Demokratien sind, und eine Warnung an die Flogen, wenn diese Institutionen zusammenbrechen sollten.

In Namen unserer Familien danken wir Ihnen, dass Sie hier sind.