

Guten Tag.

My name is Matthew Piers. I am the grandson of Ernestine “Tina” Pisk and the nephew of Edith “Dita” Pisk. I never got to meet my grandmother or my aunt. Both were taken and deported from the home before which we stand today within the year following the Anschluss in 1938, and then tortured and murdered in Auschwitz. Today we mark their lives – and their untimely deaths – by placing a Remembrance Stone outside of the home here in Vienna, where they lived with the rest of their family, including my father, Gerhart (Pisk) Piers.

I am here today with the great love of my life, my wife, Maria Torres; the youngest of our two wonderful daughters, Paola Piers-Torres; as well as friends from both the US and from here in Vienna. The rest of immediate family: our older daughter, Alejandra Piers-Torres; our son-in-law, Matthew Wynter; our granddaughter, Havana Maria Wynter, and also my sister, Peggy Piers, are here as well in heart and in spirit.

We are also here today with my cousin Eveline Adler. Our fathers were cousins and friends. Although Eva and I were both born and raised in the US, and I met Eva’s father on occasion when I was very young and she was not yet born, Eva and I never knew each other until we established contact about two years ago. We never met in person until yesterday – here in Vienna. My family and I consider this belated contact to be a great blessing. Eva introduced to me the idea of this Stone of Remembrance and to Roswitha

Hammer. Thank you Roswitha for all you have done to make this happen.

As we lay this Stone of Remembrance for my grandmother and my aunt, it is important to keep in mind that while the most immediate and obvious victims of the Holocaust were those who were seized and tortured and murdered, there were a great many other victims – the friends and family of those murdered. They were “derivative victims.” The loved ones who survived and their families, all to various extents, felt the impact of the fate of their relatives. And that fate also created profound losses to the societies from which they came.

My parents were in many ways very fortunate. They came of age in loving Viennese families that supported both their love for each other and their professional aspirations. Both completed their formal education at the University of Vienna: my mother received a dual doctorate in anthropology and developmental psychology; and my father received his medical degree with a specialization in psychiatry and psychoanalysis.

My parents were greatly influenced by the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, under whom my father studied at the University of Vienna Medical School. But both of them were free and critical thinkers, who questioned orthodoxy and fundamentalism in all fields, including psychology.

After my parents fled to the US, my father became for almost two decades the head of the very prestigious and influential Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute. There, he challenged orthodoxy by, among many other things, arguing that homosexuality was a natural and healthy sexual orientation and not a “disorder.”

My mother, after coming to the United States and raising my sister Peggy and me, founded a leading graduate school for the study of early childhood education, The Erik Erikson Institute for Early Childhood Education. The ground breaking institution was remarkable for many reasons, including that all three of its co-founders were women.

My parents deeply loved their lives in Vienna in the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. They were young intellectuals, in love with each other and also with Vienna. Vienna was - and still is - not only one of the most beautiful cities in the world, but it was also at the time the epicenter of an extraordinary explosion of innovative intellectual and esthetic achievement in the arts, in sciences, in philosophy, and in cultural modernism that truly changed the world.

My mother’s parents were both part of the exciting world of musical Vienna. Her father was the classical composer, Karl Weigl, who as a young artist was often selected by Gustav Mahler to be his studio pianist. Her mother, Elsa Pazzeller, was a well-known Liedersinger, a performer of the popular classical song set to German poetic text.

And on my father's side, his cousin was the renowned musician, Kurt Adler, Eva's father, who served as the chorus master and conductor of the New York Metropolitan Opera for thirty years.

My parents were also active in progressive politics at the University of Vienna. This was a major reason why they quickly realized that the rise of the fascism in Germany and then the Anschluss in Austria were not, as many believed, simply unfortunate developments that would soon pass. They made plans to leave as soon as possible after the Anschluss in 1938. I have found out only on this trip to Vienna that both of them as well as my uncle Robert, were aided in their flight by members of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Association, including Anna Freud, the daughter of Sigmund, and later a close friend of my parents.

By the time of their flight from Austria, my parents had Reisepässe (passports) issued by the Nazi government of Germany. I still have those Reisepässe. As they did with all Jews, the Nazis assigned additional "Jewish names" to each of my parents lest there be any doubt as to their ethnic identities. My father was given the additional middle name of "Israel", and my mother, already baptized "Maria Johanna Serafina Beatrix Weigl Pisk," was assigned yet another name – "Sarah".

Jews were forbidden from leaving Austria after the Anschluss, and my mother, although raised Catholic (and

indeed the second cousin of the then Pope, Pius XII) was deemed Jewish both because both her husband and her father were Jewish.

My parents escaped by pretending to take a day trip to hike the Austrian Alps, a part of the country they both loved and had visited many times in their young lives. They took a train from Vienna to the Alps carrying only backpacks with hiking snacks, a change of clothes and towels – and a \$50 gold coin hidden in a bar of soap – and they hiked across the the mountains into Switzerland. There they stayed for a year until they were allowed to emigrate to the US. During that time, my father was able to work as an assistant in an office of a Swiss psychiatrist, a job that I now believe was likely arranged by Anna Freud and members of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Association.

During that year, Viennese Jews were being rounded up and and some already shipped off to what became extermination camps. At that time my parents knew of only one acquaintance who had been sent to the camps, and they used much of the meager wages that my father had earned in Switzerland to pay the Nazis, through a Swiss lawyer with connections to the SS, to buy this man's freedom. Many years later, he and his family lived only two blocks away from us in Chicago.

My parents hoped to get the rest of their families safely out as well. My maternal grandfather, Karl Weigl, was able to

escape to England and then to the United States. My father's brother, Robert, was also able to escape, and lived for many years near us in Chicago. My maternal grandmother, Elsa Pazeller, decided to stay in Vienna, where she remained active in sheltering and saving a number of Jewish friends until she died of natural causes during the war. My father's mother and sister, and a great many other relatives, were not so fortunate.

After many years in the US, my mother was, with much effort, able to reestablish a relationship to the place of her roots. She travelled here many times, starting in the early 1960s. She even received an award from the City of Vienna for her contributions to the field of early child development. But my father found it much harder to bring himself to return.

My father's father, Hermann Pisk, had died of illness when my dad was 13 years old. My father then became "the man of the family." He took on that responsibility with great seriousness, working his way through school, graduating at the top of his class at the University and its Medical School, and supporting his close and loving family.

Although my father rebuilt his life in the United States, and had a distinguished career and a loving family in Chicago, he was haunted until the day he died by the fact that he had "failed" – as the "man of his family" – to save his beloved mother and sister. My father died in 1979, when I was 28

years old and still in the early years of my own career as a civil rights and human rights lawyer. Although we were close, he did not talk with me about his family in Vienna. It was just too painful.

My father was finally able to bring himself to visit Vienna about thirty years after he fled Austria. We took a family summer vacation to Europe that was memorable in many ways.

My father was not a man who coveted material possessions, but he apparently quietly longed to own one of those big old Mercedes sedan automobiles. So that summer, we first went briefly to Germany, where we picked up a new car from the Mercedes factory, and then my father drove us to France to visit a cousin. From there we dropped off my sister in Geneva, where she was enrolled in a two-week intensive college course in French. My parents and I then went on to Vienna. The car was shipped from there by train and boat back to the US.

In France we stayed with my father's cousin, Margareta "Greta" Scheyer. She had converted to Catholicism in large part because after the Anschluss, she was hidden by nuns in a convent near Vienna. From there she went to France, where she joined up with the French anti-fascist resistance, and married the local resistance leader in the Town of Belves, in the Dordogne Valley. My father loved Cousin Greta, and the visit was memorable and utterly delightful -

save for one significant detail. When we first drove into Belves, the local kids, seeing a Mercedes sedan with German license plates, threw rocks at our car. My father was stunned at what he saw as his own insensitivity - and perhaps even a betrayal of some sort. But the warm reception from his cousin, who was a bit of a local legend for her late husband's escapades as a leader of the local resistance - soon allowed him to cheer up and thoroughly enjoy the stay in the picturesque Dordogne Valley.

Our next stop was Vienna. My mother had a conference there, and the plan was for my father to take me on a walking tour of his old haunts - the family home, Dr. Freud's house, the University, his favorite coffee shops, and so on. I was particularly looking forward to this walking tour.

But as soon as my father and I hit the streets, he went into shock and found it impossible to speak. We walked around central city Vienna for two days, and he uttered literally not a word. He just led me on, staring at the ghosts of his past, in complete silence. At the end of the first day of this silent tour, I reported my father's silence to my mother. She wisely explained to me that the pain of his memories was overwhelming him. She hugged me, and said that I should know how much he loved me, and that my just being with him was very important. I learned little about Vienna on that trip, but a great deal about my parents.



What my sister and I learned of our parents lives in Vienna came mostly from our mother. And also from her father, who died before I was born, but was a great presence in my sister's early years. My mother's brother John (Johannes Wolfgang) Weigl, and his family were a big part of our lives growing up in the US. But other than a very occasional visit to a cousin or two, I knew next to nothing about my father's family. Until a few years ago, I lived under the very wrong understanding that he came from a small family in Vienna, diminished further by the early death of his father and the murder of his mother and sister. Then, a few years ago, I received a phone call from a man I knew nothing about, Arthur Spira, who introduced himself as my cousin. Art explained to me that my paternal grandmother, Tina Pisk, had been the youngest of 11 children in the Adler family, and that his great grandmother (Sofie Adler) was the eldest. Art informed me there were also other Adler descendent family members scattered around the globe, including Eva Adler.

This diaspora of family, and the deep trauma that not only rendered my father speechless on his visit to Vienna, but also burdened and saddened him deeply his entire life – this is an example of the “derivative trauma” of the holocaust. We, the descendants of the once vibrant, proud, distinguished and loving Jewish community of Vienna and the surrounding areas, lost not only our ancestors, but also to a great extent our cultural roots and family ties. This happened not only because of death and diaspora, but also because of the deep pain of those who lived with the sorrow

of loss and the guilt of survival. They had lived when so many other loved ones died, and while life was a gift, it came with the immense suffering of profound loss.

Being able to reestablish ties with at least some small parts of a family I never really knew existed has been a blessing for me and my family.

Making new friends from and in my parents' beloved Vienna has likewise been a joy.

I have recently become a citizen of Austria, and this is my first visit to Vienna as a dual citizen of the country of my birth and also that of my parents' birth. My children and grandchild are also in the process of applying for Austrian citizenship. This is important to our family not only as a matter of reclaiming a very small part of what was lost, but also – as my mother often said – to have options in an uncertain world.

So let me close by again saying how grateful Nena, Paola and I are for the family and friends that have joined us today. You honor us with your presence.

And to the spirits of Grossmutter Tina and Tanta Dita, I send our love. I never met either of you, but knowing at least a bit more about you is indeed a blessing. We profoundly hope that the placement of this Stone of Remembrance serves to keep you in our hearts and minds.

And on behalf of my parents and our family, we also hope that this Stone serves in some small way to remind us all that what happened here, while uniquely horrific in its scale, is in fact all too common in human history - and it continues today.

The dehumanization, hatred and destruction of human beings, whether based on race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, imperial greed or simple cruelty – and whether it takes place in Palestine, Lebanon, Israel, the Ukraine, the Sudan, or elsewhere – must be opposed by all of us. This opposition is nothing less than the essence of the fight for the human soul.

Vielen Dank.