

Document No. 12

Gershon Evan

In Memory of Our Parents

Winds of Life  
The Destinies of a Young Viennese Jew  
1938-1958



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the back was our kitchen from which a door, reinforced by thick iron bars, led to the hallway of the apartment building.

At the moment everything was quiet, yet the silence felt more menacing than any noise. Anxiety seized me. I suppressed the impulse to ask what had happened. I dared not move a muscle for fear it would expose us to something terrible. Still, I did not know what had awakened me.

I sat rooted to the bed while invisible fingers of fear tightened their grip around my throat, terrorized my mind, and made my skin crawl. I was afraid, horribly afraid.

Suddenly, fists and boots smashed against the kitchen door, and someone barked, "*Aufmachen, Stadtpolizei!*" (open up, state police), through the shaky barrier.

"Don't move," father whispered. We held our breath. Swallowing hard to suppress the sudden feeling of nausea, I continued to stare intently into the dusk of the room.

"They" had stopped beating on the door. Paradoxically, the ensuing stillness seemed filled with noises of which I had never been aware before. As if to spite and taunt us, sounds came from every corner of the room. The wooden floor creaked loudly, the wardrobe seemed to move creating a rasping grind and an invisible hand rustled noisily through hanging dresses. Everything in the room conspired against us, cried out to those men outside our door: they are here, they are hiding.

"Please," I prayed in my mind, "please be still."

How much time had elapsed since they first banged on the entrance I could not guess. No noise came in from the outside. Had they given up? Gone away? Seconds became minutes. Nothing broke the silence but the imaginary sounds of all those inert objects coming to life and our suppressed intake of air through open mouths, a more silent way of breathing. My emotions alternated between hope that the men had left and the fear that we still had to face them. The only constant in that turmoil of feelings was fear burning like acid in my stomach.

Suddenly the metal shutter to the street was kicked in and the room became bathed in the pale light of early morning. The cat-and-mouse game was over.

If the wait in the dark dragged on endlessly, what followed proceeded swiftly. Or so it seemed. The visit lasted more than an hour, but so powerful was the shock of the men's presence that time could not be measured by normal means.

Shortly after the first kicks against the street shutter, my father jumped out of bed and, grabbing a coat on the way, rushed to the door. He barely had time to pull the lock lever aside when three black uniformed SS men followed by a leather-coated individual, the leader of the group, and obviously the representative of the Gestapo, burst into the

"Hitler does not want war. Hitler will never start a war. But one can't let the Poles get away with murder. One can take only so much." People in the streets repeated those characteristic statements that came from above and were printed in newspapers and believed them. And so, on September 1, 1939, Germany attacked Poland and World War II started.

The feelings of the Jews needed no interpretation. A feverish excitement took hold of every one of us. Events would hardly pass us quietly by. We were fearful of reprisals in case of German setbacks at the front. As no reversals occurred we sighed in selfish relief and hoped we had escaped trouble, at least for the time being. We were mistaken. The Germans needed no special incentives to persecute Jews; it came naturally to them.

But not only did the Germans advance victoriously, they also signed a pact with the Soviet Union. Poland was to be divided between the two former foes.

Among the Jews discussions about the war became more intense by the day. "Strategists" and war veterans of the First World War met at the offices of the Jewish Community Federation to discuss communiques from the front. The strategy of the majority of Jews, however, was to crowd consular offices of countries not at war with Germany with increased frenzy. Chances of leaving, though, were drastically reduced when France and the United Kingdom declared war on the Nazi State two days later. American and Italian shipping lines - shipping lines of countries still neutral - were barely able to accommodate the travel-anxious Jews who had valid travel papers and enough money to pay for the trip. *Reiß sich wer kann* (save yourself) was the motto.

Days passed and the German advance continued. The Jews waited. Something was going to happen, one could feel it, and something did.

Arrested by the Gestapo

Sleepily I sat up in bed. During the short interval between sleep and the first signs of awareness, I wondered why I had to get up so early. I had the uneasy feeling of having been aroused by something threatening. Judging by the darkness surrounding me, it had to be night. My eyes barely penetrated the gloom of the place where we slept and only slowly did they get used to the twilight in the room.

Against the white wall, which now seemed gray, I saw the silhouettes of my parents and sister also sitting upright in their beds, listening.

Ever since a Nazi had taken over our apartment without compensation, we lived in our former store. The place consisted of two rooms. The former sales room, our living and sleeping area, was secured toward the street at night by a thin corrugated metal shutter. The other room in

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kitchen. My father found no time to apologize for the delayed opening because the enraged agent, without any introduction, demanded money, gold, radios, and "Communist materials."

I was not concerned with valuables, but remembered something dangerous when father denied having any of those items.

In our possession was a voluminous book whose bound in red cover carried the popular declaration: "*Der Jude ist schuldig*" (It is the Jews' fault). Nothing was more in line with the philosophy of the Third Reich than this often-used phrase. Unfortunately, however, the contents of this book contradicted its title and were written by communist and socialist authors of European countries. They disproved the trite clichés about Jews and demonstrated how they were unfairly made scapegoats for many adversities and misfortunes. To own this book in Nazi Germany was very dangerous for Jew or Gentile.

Always an avid reader, and not exclusively of the dime novels, I loved all sorts of books. Since we had little money now to buy them, I had built up an extensive library with books from persons planning to emigrate. Emigrants were permitted to take only a few of their belongings with them. Books, if not of special value or consequence, were not priority items.

That dangerous volume, among other books, had been given to me a few days earlier by a lady about to leave the country. I did not know what was in store for us, but I feared that the contents of that particular volume placed us in serious jeopardy.

Despite the small size of our living quarters, the SS men divided the task of searching, while the leather-coated agent stood in the middle of the room just looking on. My heartbeat doubled when one of the SS men turned his attention to the long rows of books on the shelves. Volumes wide and narrow, short and tall, a multitude of colors, but the one I furtively glanced at from the distance seemed to explode in its fiery red. The unlikely happened. The SS man, who picked up nearly everyone of the almost two hundred books ignored this "treasonable" publication.

The other SS men emptied the wardrobe, threw freshly washed laundry on the floor, looked under beds, in every corner, and found nothing. Then the two who had searched the room went to the kitchen. We heard them rummaging through things and suddenly they reappeared.

One held up an 8x5-inch lady's handbag that was made of flexible silver wire. I knew it to be soft to the touch and heavy in weight. The shiny fabric made from the silver strands seemed to have been crocheted.

The other SS man had in his hand a few pieces of gold jewelry. The unsatisfactory outcome of their search moved the Gestapo agent to a grotesque performance. He suddenly brandished an automatic

pistol and pressed it against my father's forehead. "How long have you got to live?" he asked. He used the intimate German "du", whose usage either expresses a close relationship between adults, is customary when addressing children, or as in this case, was meant as an insult. Nazis always employed it when addressing Jews.

Mother, who had sat quietly on the bed next to father during the search, exploded into a frightening scream. Her cry reverberated through the room as she threw herself on the hand holding the weapon. Her fingernails drew blood. Red spots formed on the skin between the thumb and the forefinger of the hand that held the gun.

"Do you know what we can do to you?" the agent hissed at my father, as if he had been the cause of attack. The man seemed ready to pull the trigger, and my father screamed in terror, raising his arm defensively over his head.

I was too shocked to move. The three SS men had stopped what they were doing and became part of a frozen scene.

My mother was the first to stir. Frightened by her outburst, she pulled back. The silence lasted only a moment, and suddenly, as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred, the agent replaced the gun in his coat pocket, and the SS men grinned. He had played with us. It was merely a sadistic game he found amusing.

"Get dressed," he commanded my father, and then pointing a finger at me, he inquired: "Who is this?" — "My son." — "How old?" — "Sixteen." — "Get dressed," he ordered me.

His questions proved that I was not on the list of those to be arrested yet was detained because of the man's whim. As it turned out, this freakish quirk of providence saved my life in the long run.

In the kitchen, the Gestapo agent filled out some forms (bureaucracy to the last) which he pushed toward my father. "Sign." My father did and returned the papers. When the man bent down to counter-sign, he ordered my father: "Turn around. You don't have to know my name." They did not seem as assured of their future as we thought they were.

As we were led away, mother and sister followed us to the house gate and, without touching, we said good-by. In the distance the bells of the St. Brigitta church tolled the seventh hour. The street was almost deserted. Only a couple of houses down the road some women waited for the butcher shop to open. Filled with curiosity they looked our way, having gotten over my initial shock and blissfully unaware of what awaited us, I almost enjoyed their stare and their furtively moving lips. I wondered if I knew any of them, but our guards gave us little time to study the scene. In a few steps we crossed the sidewalk and took our seats in a small black car parked at the curb. Obviously unafraid that the

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crowded night attempt something desperate, my father had to take his seat in front beside the SS driver while I shared the back seat with a second SS man. The vehicle made a U-turn on our street and we sped toward an unknown destination and destiny.

We wondered why we had been arrested or where we would be taken but dared not ask. It was enough to be a Jew or a Christian anti-Nazi. As Jews, we were automatically guilty.

To our right the greenery of the narrow park that had hidden me once from the Hitler Youth ran between us and the Danube Canal. When we crossed the Augarten Bridge the sun rose in a fiery red ball over the rooftops. Troubled thoughts occupied me. A foreboding, a fear of things to come came over me. Gazing at the beautiful sight outside the car, I wondered when and if I was going to see this again. It was Saturday morning, September 9, 1939, and the war was nine days old. It was to drag on for six years.

After the bridge, we turned right toward the Rossauer prison or Lisi, as it was called with ironic affection by the Viennese. In front of that huge building most of Vienna's motor vehicles appeared to have gathered. Cars were delivering Jews from every part of the capital.

Growing angrily, our driver snaked his way through the maze of vehicles and found an open spot across the street from the prison. I was disappointed that he had managed this feat without damaging another car.

"Raus," one of them barked, and father and I hastily jumped out into the street. Flanked on both sides by our black uniformed guards, we were led to a small entrance. At the door another SS escort brought in Jacki Runnstein, a fellow I knew from our Zionist club. Furtively our eyes met and imperceptibly I lifted my head in silent salutation.

The room we entered seemed filled with SS men but most of them were pushing past us, on their way out. I had no doubt that their assignment was to pick up more Jews and this proved to be true as the day progressed. Because of the tumult we walked one behind the other, one SS man ahead of me, the other following my father. A narrow corridor led eventually into a big hall filled with Jews. Muffled murmuring filled the air which was stale and acrid with the odor of so many people roused from bed without having a chance to wash. On the left side, near the entrance behind a long table, uniformed SS men and civilians, doubtless members of the Gestapo, sorted valuables confiscated from the arrested Jews. We were pushed into the mass of people and for the time being left to ourselves.

On one occasion our loosely congregated group was ordered to the rear of the hall. Everybody moved except one individual who, oblivious

to his surroundings, rocked back and forth in prayer. The lonely figure in black caftan and wide-brimmed black hat faced the wall to the east, the direction of Jerusalem. Deeply absorbed in his devotions, he occasionally twisted to the left and right, revealing a fox-colored red beard. His preoccupation exposed him to great danger, and he was lucky the SS had not yet paid attention to his failure to execute their order. Some of our men called his name imploringly, but either he refused to interrupt his prayer or he was unaware of their urgent appeal to join us. Finally a few courageous fellows ran over to him and pull the resisting rabbi to the relative safety of our crowd.

Red-bearded Rabbi Lusner was still a relatively young man. In the beginning of our confinement he shared his bread ration with individuals who said they were hungry. The only condition he placed on the recipient was that he should recite the blessing over the bread before consuming it.

The delivery of Jews continued and the hall finally seemed filled to capacity. Surrounded by people we could not see the table where confiscated valuables were still being collected by the Nazis. Their mocking laughter sounded across the room in a variety of accusations like: "Ah, a hoarder of silver." The sound of coins on the wooden surface could be heard, followed by the terrified stammer of the victim. "What's that? A Persian (Persian lamb skin fur coat)? It'll never again keep your Jewish whore warm," called another voice sardonically.

The morning passed, noon came and went, and finally men were taken out of the hall in groups picked at random. Our turn came and we experienced our first physical encounter with those fiends in black uniforms. Two SS men began to chase our group up and down stairs and through corridors, calling out directions while we rushed forward. Running next to my father up front, I had not noticed that they carried rubber clubs, which they used indiscriminately to speed us on.

"Into the room," one screamed and for a moment there was confusion. Several open doors were on one side and in panic we crowded through the one closest to us. Inside sat SS men behind several small tables, and in front of each table stood a hapless person still terrorized by the unaccustomed viciousness of the chase. The prisoners looked pathetic standing at attention in response to their captors' orders.

The pursuit had been no problem for me, but the older men in my group parted and gasped for air, their chests heaving convulsively. The two SS men who had chased us and whom I now watched fearfully out of the corner of my eyes, showed no sign of exertion. Their bodies well trained and their minds brainwashed by the Nazi philosophy of Aryan superiority made them act the way they did. But all could not be blamed

on indoctrination. Their vicious behavior had to be, in part, inborn.

They wrote down our names and other vital information. Those finished were ordered to face a wall, exposed and defenseless. Those confronting danger, I thought, one could tense his muscles and at least try to avert the worst by raising one's arms or crouching. How little I knew then of SS methods, and how naive of me to believe that those physically abused could ward off punishing blows.

We became anxious when we were separated into two groups, one on each side of the room, after that. This did not necessarily have to be bad, I speculated. Perhaps there was even hope that for some of us the frightful experience of the last few hours was over and we would be set free. And if so, who would be the lucky ones? Those on the left or those on the right?

Some of us were lucky indeed - only we did not know it. Others were not. My father and I belonged to the fortunate ones. We were not let go but had to hasten in small groups to another section on the same floor. After a body search, including shoes, the SS gave us no time to get fully dressed, and another chase was on. The setting was terrifying, but it must have looked funny to the SS, for they laughed so hard they forgot to use their clubs on those running away. We ran down a corridor holding on to jackets, pants unfastened, flies open, and shirts fluttering. A hat got lost, someone lost a shoe, retrieving it, but had to limp along holding it in one hand. Chaotic disorder, but likely to be funny if you were on the side of the observers.

Our flight ended in a room where we were to remain for a while. The furniture of the place consisted of long wooden tables and benches arranged along three walls and straw mattresses stacked high in a corner.

Some of the men who had been sent to the other wall after questioning joined us. In time we became a band of about 40 inmates. As long as the SS was busy interrogating and sorting out prisoners nobody bothered us. During that calm spell, those who had been the unlucky ones and on the "wrong" side in the interrogation room began to tell their stories.

"They made me crawl on all fours and lick the floor with my tongue," one man told us. "But if things change..." He left the sentence unfinished, but took off his jacket to flex the unusually large biceps that had bulged his shirtsleeves. He was a piano mover.

"I was put opposite a man," another fellow related, "and ordered by an SS man: 'Hit him.'" When I barely touched the other guy the SS man smashed his fist into my face, and screamed: "That's the way to do it!" And the poor fellow's countenance showed the marks from that blow.

They talked about the physical pain and degradation they had undergone in the last few hours - hair-raising reports. We wished we could

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strike back at our tormentors, but years passed before this became possible. And yet, even when the time came, many of the most vicious murderers got away with the help of an incredible assortment of helpers.<sup>10</sup>

We heard more horror stories. Men had to face a wall once more and were made to stand on their toes, hands stretched high above their heads. When they fell back they were kicked in the rear with those high boots until they stood up again or collapsed to the floor. The frightening words: "Take him to the room" meant one was to be led to an empty room where SS men formed a circle around the victim to work him over. After kicking and beating from all sides, only an unrecognizable heap remained on the ground. We became familiar with sights of that sort when more victims were returned to us during the next few weeks.

In the late afternoon, bands of four or five SS men began to show up in our place. They appeared repeatedly but at different time intervals. During their first visit, they ordered us to pick a *Zimmerkommandant*, room commander, and then left. The choice was easy. A short, chubby fellow in his fifties had told us of his recent release from the concentration camp at Dachau. With his experience he seemed the best choice, and to his discomfort, he was elected.

Ten minutes later the SS men were back. "Zimmerkommandant," one roared. - "Jawohl, Herr Hauptsturmführer," our new room commander shouted. - "How many present?" - "Forty-two men present. Herr Hauptsturmführer," our fellow said smartly, standing at attention. - "And where is the Zimmerkommandant?" the SS man asked in a voice much too quiet for comfort. Many times a subdued tone was a prelude to a vicious action.

We could see our man stiffen even more. "Forty-one men and one Zimmerkommandant, Herr Hauptsturmführer," he barked.

While this went on, the other SS men strolled around the room staring at people, all of whom avoided eye contact. It was as if an SS man, by forcing a person to look down, subjugated him mentally and physically. This "I dare you to look at me" was a sadistic game. It challenged a "lesser" creature to risk rebellion by looking back. And to challenge this power by just a look certainly would have produced the next victim. They left, only to reappear a while later.

"Zimmerkommandant. Count?" - "Forty-one men, and one Zim-

<sup>10</sup> They escaped justice because of bureaucratic confusion or absence of evidence. *Die Spinn*, the spider, a Nazi underground organization arranged passages to places in South America (mostly Peron's Argentina) and the Middle East (Syria). The Allies used their services after the war for their own purposes and most extraordinary of all the benefactors were members of the Jesuit Order.

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merkommandant present, Herr Hauptscharführer" - "Forty-one prisoners and one Zimmerkommandant you have to report," shouted enraged the same SS man who had accepted the term "men" before.

More frightening visits by the SS followed, and again we heard: "Zimmerkommandant Count?" - "Forty-one prisoners, and one ass," bellowed the tormentor. "Forty-one Jews and one Zimmerkommandant, you say."

"Jawohl, Herr Hauptscharführer," yelled our man. It was obvious, he could never deliver a report to their satisfaction if they did not want him to.

In the evening we received our first meal. Beans boiled to a paste and spiced with lots of black pepper. A slice of stale bread.

During the three days in the Rossauer prison the composition and wretchedness of the food never changed. Breakfast was black water soup with a few lonely noodles in it. Bread. Dinner, beans or split peas cooked to a pulp. Bread.

Our stomachs rebelled against the unaccustomed food but this was suppose to be the diet fed to all prisoners here. A few weeks later we would have been very happy had we received as much as they served us here. At least there was a surplus of bread. Unconsumed slices were molded into chess figures. Almost everybody played chess. It helped to pass the time.

The SS continued to harass and torment us. They came to our room throughout the day. Once one of them asked for the youngest person. There was another fellow about my age and we looked at each other across the room, a few seconds went by with neither of us stringing. Father had grabbed my left hand under the table and, holding it down, tried to convey to me not to move. The silence in the room grew threatening, for it was obvious the SS would react violently to the none compliance of their order.

I raised my right hand.

"Come with me," the SS man ordered. When we passed the door I heard my father address the remaining SS. It was an act of desperation and his daring could have had serious consequences for him. Nobody spoke to an SS man without being addressed. As father later told me, he begged for my safety, saying he was a war invalid and I was his only son. Luckily he got away with his audacity. In my eyes he was a hero. Meanwhile, always half a stride behind the quick-stepping SS man, we walked down a long corridor, turned a corner, and stopped at a small table.

"Pick up the cigarette butts," he ordered me and obediently I

squatted down to a floor littered with half-smoked cigarettes.

My heart beat like drumfire, and my fingers trembled when the other SS men showed up. For a while they talked among themselves and though I seemed focused on my task, I cast furtive glances at the group. Looking at their highly polished, knee-high black boots that could so easily become brutal weapons, I became uncomfortably aware of their glances toward me and expected the worst.

Suddenly they came over, positioning themselves around me. My muscles tensed to reduce the expected impact of a blow, and I was startled when, instead of a kick, a question came at me. "Why do Jews wear that thing with the tassels under their shirts?" (A ritual undergarment.)

As a child I had asked that same question. The answer at the time had been that it shielded one from harm. In our situation, I thought it certainly had not helped any of the people that wore them. Without raising my eyes I said, "I don't know."

More questions about religion followed, and though I knew most of the answers, my reply was always the same: "I don't know. I'm not certain."

I was lucky. They took no offense, as they usually did in situations where one professed no knowledge of issues that one should have known at least something about. I must have sounded convincing for one of the SS men suddenly said: "Let him go, he is not a Jew like the others." His classification of me might have been odd, but relieved, I raced back to our room.

Everyone wanted to know what had happened, and I gave a condensed version of my experience.

The SS reappeared. "Who can play the piano?" - No answer. - "Who knows how to type?" the SS continued. - The silence was tense.

"What? Nobody knows how to use a typewriter?" It sounded threatening. - "I know a little," one fellow admitted timidly.

He was handed scissors and told to cut off half the beards of the several religious Jews in our room. To make it more insulting, he had to shear off only the right side of the beard, from its lowest central point to the chin and up to the ear. It left a grotesquely pointed growth on half their faces.

With us was a friendly little fellow. He wore a small skullcap. The SS declared him to be a rabbi who knew how to read the torah. They made him a toilet cleaner, a job he had to do with one pail of water. After he finished one large facility, the foul-smelling liquid was poured over his head and body. Penetrating and sticking to his clothes, the poor man filled our room with his stench when he returned to us.

We had no doctor in the room. As we later found out, the Nazis

singed them out for an extra thrashing. Jewish doctors, they said, raped Christian women and performed abortions.

After three days we were told to get ready to move. Rumors circulated yet nobody knew anything for certain.

We were apprehensive about the transfer, but when regular policemen moved us downstairs and into police vans we felt relieved. Father had on him a few Polish coins that had escaped the inspection by the SS. They were only worth a few German marks, but to keep them would have been foolish. During the trip he slipped them into a crack in the bench we sat on.

Inside the crowded van the air was hot and stuffy. Although the vehicle rolled through sun-flooded streets, only a little light entered our prison through the small window in the back door. The dimness and this brought home, once more, the uncertainty of our future. Misery and hopelessness engulfed everyone.

Being near the door, I watched the scenery outside. People were going about their business, scarcely looking at the infamous "grüne Minne" or "grüne Heinrich," as the green-colored prison vans were called. Had they known about us, I wondered, how many would have cared?

Still shaken by the horrors of the last three days, everyone worried about our destination. We were pleasantly surprised.

The Hermannsgasse district prison was an old building in the seventh district of Vienna. I remembered the place for we had visited father there during his last imprisonment not that long ago. Now he was back and I was in his company.

Having left the van, we waited in the prison yard for things to come. It was late afternoon before a police inspector appeared to address us. He spoke for 15 minutes, and we listened to a human being for a change. He promised humane treatment if our conduct warranted it, as if any of these frightened men had any thought of misconduct or rebellion. His assurance of no violence by police was followed by an approving murmur of our people. This genuine expression of relief would hardly have been dared at the Rossauer prison — even had there been a reason for it.

One police officer read names off a list while other officers led small groups of our men into the jail. The end of the day found father, five more inmates, and me sharing one room. Prisoners still, but happy ones. A rather inadequate evening meal left us hungry but no one complained. The radical difference between the jailers of yesterday and those of today and the fundamental contrast between the places of detention were so overwhelming that nothing could spoil our contentment.

Before lights-out, straw mattresses were placed on the floor. Physically and mentally exhausted, we stretched out on them.

After the terrors of the Rossauer prison, the next four days at Hermannsgasse felt like vacation time. Food portions continued to be small, yet had it been up to us, we gladly would have chosen to stay here for the duration of our imprisonment.

The building had housed political prisoners in the past. Their penciled graffiti and party-oriented carvings on the wooden window frames of our room were still there. The three parallel arrows of the Social Democrats, the hammer and sickle of the Communists, and the swastika of the Nazis, appeared in harmonious company. Any free space was filled with faded initials and dates, some barely legible.

One day we were taken to bathe. The time allocated for undressing, taking the shower and dressing again was three minutes. Since we were told this ahead of time, we began to remove our clothes on the way in order to spend more time under the shower. It seemed funny and everybody was laughing. If this had been the rule for an extended stay at Hermannsgasse it might have become less amusing.

Despite our preparations, we barely succeeded in getting thoroughly wet before the officers screamed: "Get dressed, get dressed." We had no towels, and in the short time allotted to us they would have been useless. Wet as we were, we jumped back into our clothing and speedily returned to our room.

On our second day at Hermannsgasse, Mother and Berta came to visit. They were not permitted to see us. But for a moment, while we crossed the yard on our way to lunch, I glimpsed them near the gate to the street. They brought clean underwear, which we urgently needed, five marks (the German currency in use now instead of the Austrian schilling), and something that made me very happy, a little bag of hard candies. It seemed an eternity since I had last seen my mother and sister, though it had only been a few days.

For people who smoked, it was a trying time, but I found a way to alleviate their cravings. I had been given the job of sweeping and dusting the two rooms of the duty officers. Every morning, while emptying the ashtrays and garbage cans, I collected cigarette butts and hid them in my pocket. In our room everybody except father and me smoked, and my return was eagerly awaited. The tobacco extracted from the butts was rolled into any kind of paper the men could lay their hands on, mostly old newspapers. Then, like an Indian peace pipe, the cigarette thus produced, went from hand to hand, and mouth to mouth. Persons who never would have put anything to their mouth that somebody else's lips had touched smoked in brotherly union. I never saw such enraptured faces as when they inhaled the smoke of that primitive tobacco roll.



At one time, I decided to check the little stove in our room. Not having been cleaned out for months, I found a gold mine of butts among discards and rubbish. The tobacco, dry as fallen leaves in autumn, disintegrated to the touch. Yet despite its condition it was looked upon as a gift from heaven. The men puffed on that withered weed as if it were the finest of smokes.

Four days we spent here, four wonderful days, they were remembered like a peaceful island in a stormy sea of terror. We then put our meager belongings together to move on to a new and unknown fate. Closer to the hell that awaited us after our exposure to those two different kinds of law enforcers in the "genial city of waltzes," Vienna. Strangely enough, our next abode was a large section of the Viennese soccer stadium. Our mode of transportation was again prison vans and the guards were once more policemen. But how different their behavior from the ones of Hernanngassel! They wore the uniform of the regular police force, yet behaved almost as barbarously as Stormtroopers. Screamed orders and pushing preceded every move we had to make.

It was our third transfer in one week, and it all began to look as if they did not know what to do with us. We had been arrested in the twentieth district of Vienna, taken to the Rossauer prison in the ninth, transferred to Hernanngasse in the seventh, and finally ended up in the stadium, which was in the second district. We were riding a merry-go-round in brutality land.

Once more, our names were checked off a list after which we were divided into five groups of about 200 each and placed in huge hallways under the bleachers. Each assembly was separated from its neighbor by a squad of rifle carrying police guards. Inside those big concrete and steel caverns, straw mattresses for the night were piled high, the stacks leaning precariously against walls and pillars. During the daytime we were permitted to sit outside on the concrete steps of the stadium, which in the nice weather we had was very pleasant.

We met people seemingly for the first time. In the big hall of the Rossauer prison still we had been dazed by the arrest, and the mass of ship of sorts developed between my father, me, and our roommates. We also recognized the faces of Jewish prisoners we passed on our way to the shower and meals. At the stadium, we acknowledged more of those taken into custody on that unforgettable Saturday. But what we saw was even more appalling than what we had seen until then.

Bandaged heads with broken noses held in place by strips of gauze crossed over the face and then tied into a knot at the back of the victim's kicking bout. But the shocks wore off and an almost normal daily

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routine developed. People talked a lot, argued, played chess with bread figures, and took walks from one end of the restricted area to the other. The little bag of sweets mother had brought me lasted for a while. I kept to my resolve and consumed only one candy per day.

For a few days, our daily routine was interrupted. High ranking SS officers in the company of "scientists," as the rumor had it, appeared. They walked through our quarters, looked us over as if we were some extraordinary specimens, and then names of individuals were registered, mine included. The purpose of the registration became known a little while later.

The first few men on the list were called and then taken away. When they returned, we found the answer, "racial research."

The Nazis were obsessed with studies of race and breeding. In our case, presumably, they wanted to find out how close we came, or how remote we were, from what they believed a Jew should look like. It was an insane project they relentlessly pursued. For "scientific" studies of this kind, a great variety of subjects were essential, and Jews offered the best assortment. Although the more than 1,000 prisoners concentrated in one place provided a splendid supply of different types, I doubt the researchers found the stereotypical Jew the Nazi press displayed in their research-cartoons. Many faces with "characteristic" features certainly were among us. Countenances varied from "Nordic" to "Semitic", from straight blonde hair to curly black hair. Out of this mixture of men individuals were selected and I was among them.

Then my turn came.

I was taken to a room whose furniture consisted of a chair and two tables. Tools covered one tabletop; the other one had just one small pillow. A camera mounted on a tripod stood in front of a wall that was partly covered by a large, white sheet. Had I not known what to expect, the instruments would have given me the creeps.

A man in a white coat, the only person in the room, received me in a friendly manner, and throughout the performing of his work tried to set my mind at ease.

Against the white sheet as a background, my face was photographed from the front and side; then my name, age, and additional background information was recorded. Subsequently the man entered the color of my hair, eyebrows, and eyes as well as the complexion of my skin. While he picked the tools to measure the length and width of my nose, ears, lips and eyebrows, I glanced at the cluttered table. Among the calipers, rulers, and unfamiliar things were a metal bowl, spauldas of different sizes, narrow flat sticks, a jar of water, and towels. A bag of plaster of paris, its

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top torn open, leaned against the leg of the table.

Then, as far as I was concerned, came the main feature, the highlight of my contribution to the research. It seemed only fitting to me that I was able to contradict the stereotypes the anti-Semitic newspaper *Der Stürmer* tried to convey to the Germans: the Jew with the big, fleshy hooked nose and the thick, protruding lips.

My head on the pillow, I stretched out on the table and closed my eyes. The man advised me to relax, while he coated my face with a greasy substance. He applied it from the top of my forehead down to the throat and from ear to ear. The lubricant, he explained, was to prevent the hardened plaster of paris from sticking to my skin. He instructed me to breathe naturally through my nose and not move once he started to apply the mixture. I heard scraping sounds as he stirred powder and water to the right consistency in the bowl, and then felt the creamy paste being spread over my face. From time to time he used the narrow, flat stick to keep the passage to my nostrils open.

Eerie emotions and thoughts passed through my head as I waited for the plaster to harden. Perhaps I imagined it, but the soft mixture seemed to get heavier as it turned into a mask. After quite a while the man loosened the hardened cast by wiggling it from side to side. When he lifted it carefully off my face it did not hurt. The only sensation was a suction-cup effect. I would have loved to find out how I fit into their statistics. For all I know, my mask and personal details may still exist in some crates in a storage room somewhere in Germany.

Before I left, he smilingly handed me a cigarette. A precious gift for a smoker, but hardly one for me. At least I made one fellow prisoner happy.

Women came to visit, but no physical contact was permitted. They pushed against a fence some distance away, trying desperately to locate their men among the many hundreds of faces pressing against the huge windows two or three stories up.

One day Mother and Berta came, and we, like so many others before us, frantically attempted to get their attention. When we finally succeeded, joyful waving on both sides followed. The happiness of the reunion, though it had been only visual and from a distance, remained with us long after our family had left.

A package containing shirts, socks, and underwear, another little bag of candies, and five marks (money, useless to us, and surely needed more by mother), rounded out an almost perfect day.