



As a Jewish girl born in Vienna in 1929 I grew up with various misconceptions. One that could be easily disproved was that all Jewish men in Vienna had to be doctors or dentists. Another, probably nearer the truth, was that when meeting socially, adults would always talk exclusively about politics. If you think about the troubled times of the thirties and the endangered position of the Jews, it is easy to understand their preoccupation with politics.

When I was five years old I remember being shown bullet holes in the flats of workers and also hearing about the assassination of Engelbert Dolfuss, the Austrian Chancellor. Four years later, when I was nine, I remember listening to the farewell speech of the Chancellor, Dr Kurt von Schuschnigg, which was cut off as he tried to say "God protect Austria". The world was transformed the next morning. Every building flew a Nazi flag with its black swastika and somehow every man managed to have a silver swastika in his lapel while hands flew up in an enthusiastic "Heil Hitler" salute.

Although nobody attacked us personally, as did happen to many people, one was always in danger of generalised humiliation and persecution. In a short time shop windows were marked as belonging to Jews and forbidden to Aryans, while Jewish men were beaten in the streets on the slightest pretext. I remember spending hours in the dark listening to news reports on the radio and also to Hitler's speeches, which were greeted with enthusiastic cheering. The effect of hearing those speeches at the time was very different from watching them on newsreels today. Now, they seem faintly comic and exaggerated, the words are not understood by most people giving the impression of the senseless ranting of a lunatic. Then, however, the menace was overpowering and the attack on Jews very frightening.

All Jews had to adopt a Jewish name — Abraham for men and Sarah for women. Jews with beards were made to scrub the streets clean of anti-Semitic scrawlings to the jeers of onlookers. My 16-year old cousin was taken to the police station where he had to scrub the lavatories. Signs appeared forbidding Jews from using parks, cinemas, theatres and street benches. We lived in perpetual dread; anyone coming home slightly late was a cause of worry. Firm steps along the corridor instantly stopped all conversation, while a loud knock or

ring would terrify us. We learned to knock gently on doors and call out first to reassure the people inside.

With hindsight it is difficult to understand why every Jew did not immediately make a great effort to leave at once. Leaving the country at this time was not a problem, they wanted a 'Judenfrei' empire and the 'Final Solution' had not yet been devised. The main problem was getting a visa to settle elsewhere. My own family did not leave because my father and his two brothers would not contemplate leaving their old parents, both were too frail. My father was a dentist and had to apply for permission to continue practicing as only a proportion of Jewish dentists were allowed to do so. This was given to him, but he had to move into inferior premises and could only treat Jews. I had to move to a school for Jewish children. In some ways my school life was more 'normal' than how life in my former school had become. There, every classroom had large pictures of Hitler in various noble poses, and every child entering the classroom had to give the Nazi salute. The journey to and from school also had its perils, we were always afraid of being attacked by the Hitler Youth.

Kristallnacht in November 1938 changed the entire family's attitude and brought home to us the fact our only hope for survival was to leave. When we heard that doctors and dentists were being rounded up we tried to evade this campaign by going to some friends. My father, however, was arrested by a 16-year old youth and sent home with the promise, that if he produced a sum of money he would be released. This was a cruel trick and he was deported to Dachau. We heard nothing for some days then received a printed postcard on which the sender had been allowed to tick the appropriate words and add his signature. Only a few hours after my father had been taken, the next-door neighbour knocked and said that as we would not now need our flat, could they have it? A chilling request. We moved into a flat with my paternal grandparents, an uncle, his wife and their daughter. This flat was roughly the same size as our flat had been.

With great tenacity and courage my mother set to work to achieve my father's release. This involved filling in countless forms, queuing at many offices and going through doors marked "No Entry". She produced many documents to prove my father had not only been a loyal citizen but also a brave soldier for the Austrian Empire in the First World War.

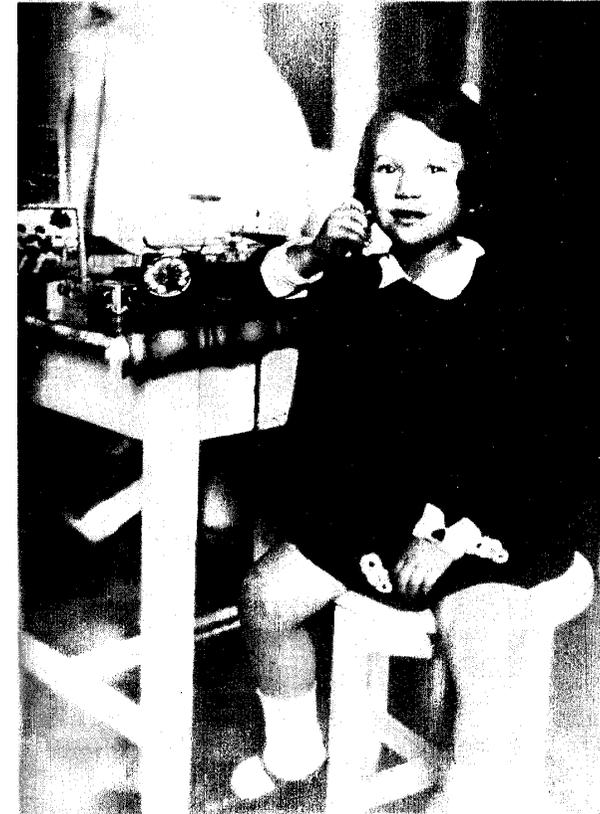
In February 1939 my father was released from Dachau. While he had a very bad cough and a rupture, otherwise he was apparently well. Although prisoners were ill-treated, badly fed and exposed to extreme cold, they were not executed at this time. Now the priority was to find a country which we could emigrate to; my father's life depended on it. Although our aim was to go to Palestine, there was no immediate hope of that. Then the Kitchener Camp was established in England which was for young Jewish German or Austrian men who wanted to leave their countries. My father was accepted because of his special need, and he left Vienna in April 1939. Once in England it was planned he would obtain entry permits for us, which is indeed what happened. My mother was given a Domestic Visa so she could enter the country on the understanding she would go into domestic service. My father found an English family for me who would guarantee to foster me for as long as necessary. This

household consisted of several elderly ladies who all contributed to paying for my maintenance.

Once these arrangements had been made my mother did not feel there was any great hurry about our actual departure and could not understand why my father was so anxious in his letters. We left Vienna on 28th August 1939 - seen off at the railway station by my grandmother, uncle, his wife and their little daughter - and had no idea how fine we were cutting it, as the press in Austria was so censored. My father was waiting to meet us at Dover and we savoured the great feeling of being safe and together. Although my uncle's family were able to travel to America, despite repeated efforts, they were unable to obtain a visa for my grandmother, who was later deported to one of the death camps where she perished.

HMD
"...AND THE BUSH BURNED WITH FIRE,
BUT WAS NOT CONSUMED!"
Exodus 32
HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY - NORTHWOOD

STELLA CURZON'S STORY



Further copies of this leaflet can be downloaded from our website
www.northwoodhmd.org.uk

Northwood Holocaust Memorial Day Events T: 08456 448 006
PO Box 288 F: 01923 820357
Northwood E: enquiries@northwoodhmd.org.uk
HA6 9BT www: northwoodhmd.org.uk
Facebook Group: Northwood HMD Pass It On