

ANNE LOWY ETTLINGER

My name is Anne Ettliger. I was born on July 3rd 1924 in Vienna, Austria. I am 84 years old now. My father had been a lieutenant in the Austrian army during the First World War. He was a prisoner of war and my mother waited four years for him to come home.

I grew up with my parents and sister in a two bedroom apartment in the sixth district of Vienna which was just outside of the central area of the city. All of our relatives in Vienna lived very close to us. People didn't have a car so one mostly had to walk. There were very few street cars. I went to elementary school which was about a fifteen minute walk from my house and then to what would here be considered a middle school from fifth to eighth grade. We had a very happy and comfortable childhood. My parents took us swimming and to gym classes at the Maccabia, a Jewish sports club. We saw our grandparents on a regular basis. My mother's parents were five minutes from where I went to school. My father's parents were probably a good hour's walk, but we saw them quite often. We had a lot of fun with them. We would go on vacation with my father's father to a different place every summer. We went all around Austria and to Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Italy.

Hitler came to Vienna when I was twelve. I was not allowed to finish my middle school. I had to go to the public school which didn't have the classes I was used to taking. I was forced to leave when I was fourteen. At that point my parents decided it was important to have some kind of skill. They apprenticed me to a dress maker but in a few months that was also forbidden.

Then my father was taken to Dachau, one of the concentration camps and life turned topsy-turvy. My mother was trying to get him out of the camp which was not easy to do but she did succeed. She succeeded because she never threw anything away. She had kept the letter that she got from my father's commanding officer in World War I saying that he had been taken prisoner in the execution of his duties. The Nazis said that all Jews were cowards. If you could prove that you weren't a coward then they let you out of the concentration camp. That was in 1938. It's not easy to prove you are not a coward. If my mother had not kept that letter he would not have been released from Dachau. When he came home and rang the bell, she closed the door because she did not recognize him. Six weeks earlier when they had taken him his hair was black and he was a short, slim, sturdy man. When he came home his hair was white and he was swollen. It was a very scary thing to see. In the concentration camps they got very little food so we had to feed him very slowly. He finally got used to eating again and recovered to his normal self.

We decided that all of us had to leave Austria as soon as possible. They made all kinds of efforts to find places to go. It was not simple because no countries really wanted to take a Jewish family. We finally found an organization in England. A West London synagogue took Jewish children from Austria and put them in a kindertransport. This was a program initiated in Britain to rescue Jewish children under 17. There were about 100 children on the train my sister and I took to London to live with sponsoring families. Some sponsoring families wanted the children to do their housework and be a nanny to their children. My sister and I were very lucky because our sponsor was the chairman of the group. We did not live in his house because he had a teenage boy. He decided it wasn't a good idea to have strange teenage girls there. He did find a family friend who took us in.

We stayed there until we finished high school. The high school he found for us was one of the best of England's private schools. They offered us scholarships so that both my sister and I graduated. I graduated with a school certificate with enough credits to permit me to enter Cambridge. That was not an option so I decided I was going to be a nurse. The London County Council trained nurses in the hospitals in a four year program. They provided uniforms, food, a room and a little pocket money. The only expense was buying personal items.

My mother finally got to England on a housekeeper's visa and my father on a visitor's visa. Eventually he was employed. Then war between England and Germany started. The English became a little paranoid and took all Jewish men and boys over 16 to detention camps. It didn't last too long and my father came home. He

eventually became a bookkeeper for a carpet firm. I was in nursing school. My sister was doing work in factories until she was able to find a job as a secretary to a doctor. That went on until the war ended.

We finally got all the affidavits completed to come to the United States. Then my sister and I turned 21 so our sponsor had to make up new affidavits for the two of us. Eventually our number came up and we came to the United States. My sister couldn't wait so she went a week ahead of me and my parents. We met her at the dock in New York. Our sponsor provided us with a tiny little apartment. Apartments weren't easy to find in New York at that time. I found a job at Mount Sinai Hospital as a nurse. I still had to get my American RN which took a little while. My sister found a job and my parents found a bigger apartment. It all worked out and we lived together for about two years until I married. A month later my sister married. We found our own apartments and each of us had two children. My niece and nephew live in California. I have a son who lives in Peabody and a daughter who lives in Oakland, California. My son is married and has a son. I see them on a regular basis and we talk everyday.

I think for the future I would like to remind you that it is very easy to fall under the spell of a charismatic leader. If he has bad intentions and bad thoughts about race, color or creed, the same persecutions could happen again. We need to be very alert not to allow another Holocaust to happen ever again.

(Transcription edited from video recorded in 2009)