An American Jew in Vienna

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I. *Aftermath of a Poll*

The awakening came in the morning paper two and a half years after we'd settled in Vienna–a three-column headline on page two of the Friday, November 9, 1973 morning edition of *Kurier:* "ARE 70% ANTI-SEMITES?" The subhead began to answer the question: "Only 30 Percent of Austrians Are Without Anti-Jewish Inclinations." A sociological institute based in Linz had used 197 researchers to interview 963 Austrians in one week–concentrating on five true-or-false statements:

- *It would be better for Austria to be without Jews.*
- *I would not marry a Jew.*
- *When a Jew does something good, mostly he does it only out of calculation.*
- *Most Jews are cowards.*
- *Most Jews are avaricious and greedy.*

Twenty-four percent gave three, four, or five *ja* answers and were rated "strongly anti-Semitic" on the institute's "intensity scale." Forty-six percent said *ja* once or twice and were rated "weakly anti-Semitic." Only 30 per cent said *nein* five times.

I stopped eating my breakfast. As an American Jew dwelling in the Old World, I'd started out most of my days enjoying the amenities that only the Viennese still take for granted: the freshly baked bread (still hot) that I could buy in the store downstairs from six o'clock on; the Turkish coffee that my wife filtered with the best city water in the world, piped in cold and clean from a mountain spring. My wife was eating her morning ration of *Magertopfen* (fat-free farmer cheese). One of my daughters had served herself Kellogg's Honig-Pops with a banana and milk; the other was groping to find her mouth with a forkful of scrambled egg and bacon. And I thought to myself: "Six of the small shopkeepers we cherish (five of them on our block) supplied our breakfast. Which two of them are our friends?" And then: "Which four are our enemies?"

My wife Valerie's only semi-anti-Semitic experience had come in the butcher shop across the way soon after we'd arrived in 1971 on the bounce from Prague. Val spoke German from the start, but one of the customers–a wizened old lady who looked like an owl–spotted her and screeched: "You're a foreigner!" When Val owned up to being an American, the woman switched to English and practically embraced her: "I'm a retired teacher of English in the Austrian public schools. . . . Let me do your ordering for you! Otherwise the storekeepers here like to cheat foreigners deaf, dumb, and blind."

Val already had a good relationship with the butcher lady behind the counter. But she deferred to her new friend and let her place our order for "a half-kilo of goulash meat." The way Val heard it come out in German, however, was "Give the rich foreigner a kilo of filet steak."

The butcher was the first to demur. She understood enough English to ask: "For goulash?"

"She's American," our benefactor explained. "They use filet mignon to make goulash."

The butcher wasn't dumb, and my wife wasn't about to be cheated blind, but fortunately our benefactor was a little deaf. Therefore, Val was able to murmur, "Do what I say, not what she says" to the butcher, who obligingly wrapped our goulash meat under the counter.

"Let me know when you're going shopping next, " the benefactor told Val. "Here's my card, and you can just call me up on short notice. I have nothing else to do since I retired."

Val took the card, thanked her, and started to leave.

"Wait!" said the old woman. "I don't have YOUR card."

"I don’t have a card."

"You don’t? Then tell me your name so I’ll know who you are when you call."

"Valerie Levy."

"Levy?!" The woman moved her spectacles forward–the better to peer at my wife. Then she screeched: "Why, you must be married to a Jewish man! What’s it like being married to a Jewish man?"

"Nothing special about it if you happen to be Jewish yourself," Val replied–and laughed all the way home. I thought it was pretty funny, too, and congratulated her on a good exit line. The next day, the butcher apologized to Val (unnecessarily but touchingly, we thought) and as a token presented her with a small pork salami.

We told this story a few times. None of our Viennese Jewish friends and not all of our other friends laughed. In the arguments that ensued, I insisted that the old woman must have been at least as anti-American as she was anti-Semitic, and Val said: "I still don’t take it seriously." One of our Jewish friends responded: "You don’t because a lot of them don’t know WHAT you are besides being Americans. And of course they’re not so open with foreigners. But when you live and work among them, well, they can kid you about YOUR religion, but you’d better not kid them about theirs." My wife said the encounter was worth it just to get the support and the salami from the butcher. But a friend said: "You’re a good customer, and the old lady is a pensioner trying to scrape by. See how your butcher would handle it if it were the other way around."

I hadn’t wondered then, but now I wondered. The day that survey appeared, I hardly ate and hardly worked; I just wondered. I reread the findings and bought *Profil* magazine, which (in conjunction with ORF Austrian Broadcasting) had commissioned the survey and printed it in depth. There, I read the neat but shocking background statistic that while the population ratio of Nazi Germany to Austria had been roughly four to one, the ratio of Austrians to Germans on Eichmann’s staff for "the final solution" had also been four to one! I remembered reading a while back how the Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal had located the Gestapo agent who’d arrested Anne Frank–an Austrian just doing his job–working as a cop in Vienna. And I recalled how just four years earlier Dr. Robert Jungk, the pacificist-futurist author who lived in Salzburg, had spoken up to an old stranger who’d accosted his son Peter with "Unless you cut your hair, you’ll never amount to anything." When Jungk objected, the old man had yelped "TAKE THIS MAN AWAY!" and Jungk, a Berlin Jew who’d fled the Nazis and been interned in Switzerland, had exclaimed: "I know who you are! You’re an old Nazi. People like you were responsible for taking away six million Jews." The man, a wealthy trucker who had indeed served some jail time for his sins as a Nazi and had been involved in the 1934 assassination of Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss in Vienna, brought suit against Jungk for offending his honor. Jungk lost the case because while he could prove that the plaintiff had a "brown past" (that’s a reference to the brown shirts worn by Hitler’s storm troopers), he has yet to

prove, at the very least, that his trucks had been used to transport any of those six million Jews.

Studying *Profil* and the *Kurier* that morning of the survey, I remembered, too, my greeting from one of the first Viennese I'd met after we'd landed there two years earlier. "Ah, here you are! It's good to see you!" he'd said cordially but not quite personally. "Vienna used to be a gay place, but, you know, we made a mistake in the 1930s and 1940s when we lost our Jews. Because we didn't know till later that you Jews were our salt and pepper, the main source of our gaiety and sparkle. So now at least we have you." I muttered: "Well, I wish you lots of laughs." But, truth to tell, I had taken more solace than offense from the incident because at least my welcomer was expressing *some* remorse—and, well, it was a bit better than the kind that says, "We never should have backed Hitler because he was doomed to defeat."

Some of the new reactions that buffeted me as I studied the survey were:

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• *If seventy percent say so, then ninety percent are.*

• *In a Catholic country, if someone doesn't want to marry a Jew, that doesn't make him an anti-Semite, even a weak one, any more than I'm a bigot for having married Jewish.*

• *A lot of the anti-Semites live in the provinces, where they've never met a Jew.*

• *Nothing has changed, Alan. People have been very nice to you here, and that survey's no reason for them to change toward you.*

But I kept coming back to the feeling—a totally new one in my life—that two out of three of my neighbors didn't like me for what I am.

Or what I was born. I recalled how back in my native New York when I said I wanted to go into journalism, one of my parents advised me to change my name from Levy to Leeds. On the outside, I said: "Well, Adolph Ochs made it without changing his name." (Ochs was the founder of the *New York Times;* I tried not to remember that some of his descendants changed their name to Oakes.) And inside, I told myself, "It wouldn't have made any difference to the Nazis if I'd changed my name *and* my religion." So I stayed Levy and stayed Jewish, and years later my wisdom was confirmed, in that same survey, by my Austrian neighbors. *Q:* "When a Jew converts to Christianity, do you consider him still a Jew or no longer a Jew?" *A:* 59 percent "still a Jew"; 23 percent "no longer a Jew"; 18 percent undecided.

This particular finding had special meaning in a land whose Chancellor since 1970, Dr. Bruno Kreisky, was born to Jewish parents and had recently been "quoted" in both the *Kurier* and *Profil* as saying, "I am no longer a Jew." Even before then a popular quip had

it that "the only person in Austria who doesn't know Kreisky is Jewish is Kreisky himself," and this bore some superficial accuracy. (It was also considerably funnier than "Kreisky speaks slowly because he must first translate from the Hebrew" and the opposition tactic of labeling any man who ran against Kreisky a "*true* Austrian," which was both a racial slur and a reminder that Kreisky, choosing exile to extermination, spent the war years in Sweden.)

While Kreisky no longer practiced the religion of his mother and father, he always acknowledged his ancestry; in one of my meetings with him, he had boasted of "the best church-and-state relations ever" in a country run by "a politician of Jewish orgin." And I, too, had insisted on considering him a Jew—and on taking pride, comfort, and a certain security from living under Austria's first Jewish chancellor: the first Jew ever to be *elected* to a high position of power in a land where too many citizens out-Nazied the Nazis. Throughout Kreisky's thirteen years in power and right up to and beyond his death in 1990, I would be exploring the riddle of "how on earth he could have happened here, of all places."

It seemed to me that whatever Kreisky's political virtues, he also represented the Austrian people's putting the war behind them (for better or for worse). A few years later, when he ran against Josef Taus and our good neighbor from Bavaria, Minister-President Franz-Josef Strauß, a right-wing German politician, came across the border to campaign for Kreisky's opponent, a seemingly close election was transformed into a landslide for Kreisky. The tobacconist on our corner told me why he'd switched his vote: "I lost a leg on the Russian front, and when I heard those Hitler-style noises again, I decided I'd lost enough to this kind of talk." His wife said she'd lost her first husband and felt the same way. Everybody here had lost something, Austria had lost a whole generation and more, and this was what people wouldn't forget and didn't want to risk reliving.

I'd admired the way Kreisky handled a February 1972 eruption of Austria's brown past. In Parliament, as a list of newly awarded government contracts was being droned out, a couple of opposition deputies spotted a Jewish name among the many contractors. They started heckling Kreisky with shouts of "Nothing but Jews!" and "Are they Jews, too?" Kreisky, sitting on the government bench of Parliament, had taken no apparent notice. But he'd opened his next press conference with three paradoxes:

"Here we live in a country where people speak German, and yet we are not part of Germany." Then, pointing to the Republic of Austria's eagle—whose claws hold both a hammer and a sickle, signifying, in this case, the urban and agrarian populations breaking their shackles—he'd gone on to say, "There is a sickle in the emblem of Austria, and yet we are not a communist country. And Kreisky is the chancellor, and yet we don't have to fight the Arabs."

Much of this reassurance felt false now as I studied the survey once more before venturing outside that afternoon to the post office and the stationery store. In both places, I found myself counting heads: Which were the two-out-of-three? Was I being waited on by the one-in-three? I had a new outlook on daily life and, when you do, different

experiences start happening to you. Maybe because of this, I ran right into a revelation—not necessarily a religious one but a symbolic one—just before I reached home.

To set the scene, I must tell you something about the Viennese: To them, *you are how you dress.* Whenever I put on a coat and tie and shave, I was addressed as *Herr* or *Herr Professor* or even *Herr Doktor.* But I like to be informal and comfortable. Working at home in blue jeans and sport shirt or turtleneck, I refuse to dress up to run neighborhood errands. And so, even though I happened to be a forty-one-year-old father at the time , I was often addressed as some kind of teenager in the familiar *du* form and occasionally ordered to crawl under a Fiat and retrieve a hubcap. Like any male over forty, I was rather flattered by this mistaken identity—though I did resent it once when a small crowd clustered around a car stuck in an intersection welcomed me with great joy and one woman told the driver: "Here comes a young man! He’ll move your car for you." And so, aided only verbally by my recruiters, I’d been obliged to push a Volkswagen not merely out of the crossing but into a parking space—while behind the wheel the balding, thirtyish young man in a business suit steered with great dignity.

Now, on the day of the survey, I was wearing a turtleneck and had only to cross Alserstraße to be safely home. *(Already, the Jew-in-Berlin-1933 mentality!)* But I couldn’t cross because a halted trolley car was snarling Alserstraße’s traffic and completely blockading the side street where I lived. And why? Because up ahead a coal truck was parked with one wheel on the trolley track.

Sizing up the situation as an annoying but essentially uninteresting one about which I could do nothing, I jaywalked carefully toward a dozen people—the inconvenienced passengers, curious passersby, storekeepers, the conductor, and the motorman (who happened to be female)—grouped around the front of the obstructed tram. This was the only way around, but as I approached the people, I was ambushed by a wall of fury.

"There he is!" I heard. And: "Just look at how he takes his time!" I was then subjected to five of six simultaneous tirades against *Ausländer* (foreigners) and *Gastarbeiter* (emigrant workers: one tenth of Austria’s labor force) and even *Tschuschn* (pejorative for Slavs in general)—which led me to gather that someone had seen a foreign worker at the wheel of the abandoned truck. And, as the first turtlenecked, unshaven, possibly Slavic-looking person to happen upon the scene, I was the instant scapegoat. Fists were shaken at me, and I was even poked (with an umbrella) toward "my" truck by a woman who told me, "You ought to be in jail!"

During upheavals in Cuba and Czechoslovakia and a gang-up robbery attempt in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I’d learned to ascertain quickly who is the ringleader and try to neutralize him. In this case, it was the only person in this Viennese mini-mob I happened to know: the man from the corner fruit store. I recognized him, even though his everyday obsequious simper had given way to a snarl of hate, but he didn’t recognize me. "Ought to send them all back where they came from!" he was saying.

I looked around, too, for the only fairly friendly face. It belonged to the blonde middle-aged woman tram driver. She seemed in no hurry at all. So I said to her: "Please, this isn't my truck. I don't even have a car. I live in that building over there, and I'm just trying to get home."

She burst out laughing—and what a bell-like peal of song it was!

And since the laughter came from a person in uniform, the mob faltered. She told them how silly they were for accusing me, and they began to retreat. All except the Fruit Store Man, who insisted: "I tell you—he's the one! I saw him! I recognize him!"

"You recognize me," I said, "because I was a customer of yours—until today."

That silenced him long enough for me to thank the Trolley Lady and hurry toward home. As I did, I saw a handlebar-mustached, turtlenecked *Gastarbeiter* sauntering toward the truck. The mob spotted him a second later and took off down the trolley tracks after him, but he was safely inside the cab of his truck by the time fists appeared below him.

Exhausted and stunned by all the hatred I'd felt coming my way, I let myself into my flat and threw myself down on my bed. I had almost been on the receiving end of a re-enactment of a pogrom. Or was it a preview of a pogrom to come? But most of the questions I asked myself that afternoon were not yet sociological or prophetic but introspective. Where had I been during my first three years in Vienna? If nothing had changed, then why had this tidal wave of reality hit me all in one day? I consulted a psychiatrist a few days later.

Dr. Richard S. Reamer was a chunky, fortyish St. Louis-born Notre Dame Irishman, one of the heirs to the Alka-Seltzer fortune, who had come to Vienna twenty years earlier to study at the University and stayed on to work at its psychiatric clinic, specializing in psychosomatic medicine, examination neuroses, and suicide prevention. I went to him because we were friends, because my responses struck me as American as well as Jewish, and because I knew he would draw upon the Viennese insights of his boss, Prof. Dr. Erwin Ringel, whose research into anti-Semitism had earned him the title or epithet of "honorary Jew."

Dick Reamer started out by telling me I was lucky: "You had the good fortune to be awakened to your cultural identity by that small crisis of a headline. You're right to some extent in saying to yourself that 'nothing has changed,' but that's mostly because *it's always been here.* The headline in the *Kurier* brought you out of your writer's isolation into the reality of day-to-day existence here in Vienna. The nitty-gritty of everyday living here is just a massive wall of little hates that people build up—not just toward Jews, but toward foreigners, toward people of the group they want to be in (like the upper class), and toward people of the group they came from.

"You ran into that wall of hate in a very vivid way when you were mistaken for the *Gastarbeiter* truckdriver. For a minute or two in this mini-pogrom you were without your

emergency exit of a U.S. passport or the suit-and-tie of a potentially powerful gentleman. And what you describe sounds like a dream. I hope for both our sakes it isn't a prophetic dream.

"I showed your stories to Ringel. He says the Viennese, as an individual, despite living in a big city, is a psychologically isolated person. He builds up these little worlds of hate and you describe this phenomenon as a Jew when it finally spilled out at you. But you don't have to be Jewish to make people jealous here. It was an Irish writer who once described Vienna as a city 'of apartments glued together by eyeballs.' He was referring to all those little old ladies peeping out at you wherever you go, but they also hate you if you're different from or better off than themselves. Your wife happened to run into a pair of those eyeballs in the butcher shop, where the old lady, in effect, told the butcher to soak the rich foreigner."

"And how seriously," I asked, "do you take her reacting to us as Jews?"

"Well, that's when she found out you were Jewish. Such reactions are deeply rooted here. Until the Second Vatican Council [from 1962 to 1965], a lot of the Catholic catechisms here had references to 'Christ murderers' and the need to convert you 'heathens.' So the old lady was just responding to the obvious difference between your wife and what she'd been told Jews were."

"Would the experience change her?" I wondered.

"She must have met other Jews and that didn't change her. . ."

"But maybe they'd been degraded or worse by the time she saw them."

"Well, we don't really know how much of a bigot she is. Ringel says that the hardcore anti-Semite—the kind of Austrian who'll *do* something about it, like join the SS—suffers from a neurotic condition that needs to be treated. No amount of friendly face-to-face confrontation will cure or alleviate it. Proving to him that decent, open Jews aren't what he thinks or says they are won't jolt him out of his stereotype; it'll only make him want to obliterate this contradiction of what he lives by."

Returning to my problem, I told Dr. Reamer that in the time between survey and consultation our own cleaning woman had been told that her apartment house was without heat "because the Israelis are tying up our oil." We were enduring the oil shock of 1973, when after Egypt and Syria attacked Israel on its holiest day, Yom Kippur, the Arab oil-producing nations banned all exports to the U.S. and cut supplies to other nations. It was a time when a genteel Viennese dowager, hearing I had visited Japan that summer, said to me: "Isn't it a pity what Israel is doing to the Japanese?" It reminded me of something Simon Wiesenthal once said: "Kreisky will have nothing to do with the Jews, but I am sure that if his politics go wrong, the population will make the Jews guilty for him."

Dick Reamer wasn't surprised by any of this: "You might not even have noticed these things if you hadn't read that headline in the *Kurier*. Now you're just beginning to confront the new reality—of not belonging, of asking yourself whether you have the security to stay here."

"But it's the same reality that was here before it appeared in the *Kurier*!" I protested.

"Yes, but the new reality you're confronting is awareness of your own insecurity. And basically you should be. It doesn't hurt to be on your toes. Who was the philosopher who said that the Jews of this world always have to be ready to leave, which is why they always have their hats on?"

"I think," I replied, "it was Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*."

II. *The Jewish Chancellor*

I wanted to stay in Vienna as long as I could. The streets are safe. The air is clean. The schools are good. There are no slums. The Vienna Woods are for walking as well as waltzing: a four-hundred-square-mile Green Belt that puts countryside at the end of the 43 tram line from home. It is a city like no other for city people to live in, children to grow up in, parents to grow old in. But now, with my ears open, I discovered that an old Austrian joke about "What's the difference between a cello and a violin?" (A: "The cello burns longer") that had in Nazi times been applied to a Big Jew vs. a Small Jew was back in town in its Nazi uniform. Why did I stay? Because a joke is a joke—or is it?—and because I was reading, every now and then, about the "BURN JEWS, NOT OIL" stickers in the States and "JEWISH BLOOD MUST FLOW" graffiti in France, so how did I know it was any better elsewhere? Or just deeper beneath the surface?

Pondering this particular dilemma, I remembered how in the late 1930s some New York relatives of mine sent money to kinfolk in Poland for them to emigrate to America before it was too late. It took more than eight months for this acknowledgment to come in the mail:

- I suppose you're wondering why you haven't seen or heard from us. Well, I must confess that the money you sent us was more money than we'd ever seen in our lives—so we used it to fulfill a lifelong dream: *We bought our own store!* Thank you and please don't be angry.

Not many months later, they and their dream were liquidated by the Nazis.

The Viennese expert on such situations was Dr. Wilfried Daim, author of *Depth Psychology and Salvation*. A round-faced man of fifty with a few gold teeth that glittered

when he laughed, which was often, Dr. Daim stood up behind his desk to greet me in fluent English.

"Most Jewish psychoanalysts in Vienna managed to get out well before Hitler sealed it off for them," he told me, "and they achieved great success in America and elsewhere, which is why there are so few here. But one of the last to read the handwriting on the wall was Freud himself." Prodded by his daughter Anna, a distinguished child psychiatrist already in London, and his disciple and biographer Ernest Jones, the British government had to pay a large ransom to the Nazis for Freud, eighty-two and dying of cancer of the palate, to fly in June 1938 to London, where he died the following year.

Dr. Daim went on. "Non-Jewish Freudian psychoanalysts who had Jewish patients in 1938 were confronted by the problem of whether to interrupt the treatment and tell them to escape. The Freudian standard of normality is *how does a man adapt to society*? But this makes a presumption that society is normal. So when Jewish patients in the middle of their analysis said 'What do I do?', there were traditional analysts who said, 'You must adapt.' But the only adaptation for a Jewish person in a Nazi society was to kill himself."

All that Dr. Daim told me concretely about his own background was that he'd been not quite fifteen when Hitler annexed Austria in 1938 and that he'd been "wounded thrice—twice in the lungs" while serving in the German Army. But I learned a little more when I asked him how he would have counseled a Jewish patient in 1938. And he replied:

"In this Nazi society, there were only two possibilities other than death. The first was to make a revolution and change the system. This was barely possible for Austrians like myself to attempt. We sabotaged the Nazis and maybe even helped or sheltered partisans—but even we had to serve or our families would be punished. So what chance was there for a Jew to do any of this? He was, after all, the target.

"The second choice was to get out. The analysts I've admired the most were the ones who reminded their Jewish patients about the exodus of Moses and the Jewish people. When Moses recognized that he could not reform the Egyptian society, he said, 'I will make a new society outside,' and he acted accordingly."

As he spoke, I thought about Israel. But, when he stood up to show me to the door (punning all the way: "It is better to leave than to die"), I noticed he was limping. Later, when I looked him up in *Who's Who* in Austria, part of his half-column entry read:

- *Career:* 1940-45 member of the Austrian resistance movement; 1942-45 war service (wounded, amputation of right leg)

That had been the third wound he hadn't mentioned to me.

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Though all systems seemed to be saying go, I went to see one of the more solid reasons for staying in Austria: our chancellor "of Jewish origin," Dr. Bruno Kreisky, then sixty-three. Having profiled him for *Réalités* and *Reader's Digest*, I had little trouble securing a half-hour appointment on a week's notice early in 1974.

A few weeks earlier, in late 1973 in the no-man's-land between Czechoslovakia and Austria, two Arab gunmen had hijacked the Chopin Express, the overnight train that brought refugees out of Russia, Poland, and Slovakia to Vienna, by taking three Russian Jews and an Austrian customs officer hostage. Trying to avoid a sequel to the previous year's massacre at the summer Olympic Games in Munich, where eleven Israeli athletes were executed by Arab terrorists, Chancellor Kreisky saved all four lives by offering not only to deliver the hijackers to safety in Libya (by volunteer pilots willing to fly at gunpoint) but also to close the Jewish Agency's refugee transit camp at Schönau Castle, overlooking the Danube, if they would free the hostages. When they did, they won a major victory for terrorism and blackmail, but no one who saw Kreisky at three o'clock on the morning of Saturday, September 29, 1973, would question that this was a man who had been through hell.

Only a handful of my Jewish friends in Austria agreed with Kreisky's handling of the situation and accepted his assurances, which were kept, that Russian refugee traffic would continue through Austria but not via Schönau. Others, however, renamed him "Ben Bruno Kreisky," and one of them said: "Israel has much to fear from Jews who bend over backwards like Henry Kissinger and Bruno Kreisky." It was around then that "quotes" of "Kreisky: 'I am no longer a Jew'" began appearing as headlines and photo captions, though one could never quite find the actual words in the news stories. An Israeli journalist christened Kreisky "an uneasy Jew," and Israel's ambassador appeared in print with a comparison of Kreisky to Neville Chamberlain, who sold out Czechoslovakia to Hitler in the name of "peace in our time." And a German newspaper editorialized ironically: "Now Kreisky has proved once and for all that he is an Austrian and not a Jew."

I had already seen Kreisky's answer to notions that he was overcompensating for his Jewishness. "This is a stupid idea! Perfectly stupid!" he had told United Press International a few days before my session. "One of the reasons I keep trying [with the Arabs] is peace, peace, peace —because peace is good for Israel. What will be the future of Israel without peace? Three million people and, in five years, there will be armies of five and six million Arabs. The future of Israel is peace. And peace must be created now when Israel is strong, not when it's weak. This [overcompensation] business is very primitive psychology because there is nobody in this country who doesn't know that I'm of Jewish birth. And I am happy. It was a very happy family."

The chancellor received me in the suite of offices on Ballhausplatz, where one of his predecessors, Dollfuß, was murdered by a Nazi assassination squad in 1934. Lumpy-faced, puffy-lipped, and carrot-topped, Bruno Kreisky looked more like an ex-prizefighter turned tavernkeeper than the Socialist son of a bourgeois Viennese Jewish family of Bohemian and Moravian extraction. In blunt, fluent English he came right to the point:

"I never said 'I am no longer a Jew.' The *Kurier* and *Profil* both printed it, and it spread into the world press, but when the Austrian Press Council asked them to produce proof, all they could come up with was two tapes, which didn't show I said it. So they were reprimanded by the Press Council for 'violating the ethical obligations of the press.'"

I hadn't seen this reprimand or any retraction in either *Profil* or the *Kurier*, so I asked Kreisky: "Then what did you say? And how would you put it to me?"

"What I did say was 'I am an Austrian of Jewish origin. I am not a Zionist.' And I would say this to you today: 'I am of Jewish origin, and I am not willing to deny this. But I am not a Zionist and never have been a Zionist.' I refuse the thesis that a Jew has to be Zionist. It is not true."

When I mentioned that Simon Wiesenthal had called him "the only Austrian who doesn't know Kreisky is Jewish," the Chancellor exploded: "I? This is a typical Jewish reaction, which is intolerant! The Jews—and this is a historical fact!—have a capacity for intolerance, just like any group. I never said I wasn't Jewish."

I asked him about anti-Semitism in Austria. He replied, "This is an obsession. Austria is less anti-Jewish than the United States. You can play golf anywhere in Austria without being asked what kind of religion you have, but not everywhere around Detroit. I can go play bridge anywhere in Austria, but I might have trouble in Stowe, Vermont; Chevy Chase, Maryland; or Washington, D.C. Here, everyone can go to any school. There is not a single sign that only a certain percenage of Jews can be in a certain school. And you know better than I do that you have this limit in other countries."

I agreed that there were no official expressions of anti-Semitism. But how did he feel about unofficial personal expressions of it?

"Well, I do get letters, but very, very seldom do I receive letters with an anti-Semitic tendency. Everyone can write a letter saying 'You dirty Jew!' It's not necessary to sign it; they seldom do."

He rang for an aide, who appeared immediately and acknowledged an average of twenty to twenty-five anti-Semitic hate letters received per week. "That many?" said Kreisky, who then comforted himself by calculating that this was only one and a half percent of his weekly fan mail. "But to make a special problem of anti-Semitism," Kreisky went on, "means to create it. Talking so much about anti-Semitism in a country that has so few Jews gets people interested in this phenomenon and gives it a new chance to be an outlet

for some aggression. To see ghosts everywhere is to make people resistant. They say: 'If being unwilling to marry a Jew makes me *a priori* an anti-Semite, then I'm an anti-Semite.' So this kind of thing is producing anti-Semitism!"

That brought us to the survey that had jolted me so.

"The way they asked those questions!" Kreisky exclaimed. "If someone asked me 'Do you like Hungarians?' I would say, 'Why should I?' I like a man, I like a woman, I like him, I like her, but I don't like him; so what if he happens to be Hungarian! Why should I like Hungarians more than Czechs? Why should someone like Jews more than others? Did they ask any of the people who said they wouldn't marry a Jew: *Would you marry at all?* or *Would you marry a Protestant?* What they did ask is a manipulative question.

"May I tell you one thing?" the chancellor asked rhetorically. "They are trying to make deep psychology. But, as far as anti-Semitism is concerned, they are only taking a surface impression. If someone said, 'I hate Jews!', I would say, 'You do? Tell me now why.'" Whereupon Kreisky acted out a scenario of face-to-face confrontation that was exactly what Drs. Ringel and Reamer had counseled against as counterproductive.

It was a hard act to follow, but Kreisky now handed me a letter he'd received from a Dr. Krochmal of Raleigh, North Carolina, saying, "I get some tough letters from Americans, too," he asked me to read it aloud. Bearing a sticker proclaiming "NEVER AGAIN! SAVE SOVIET JEWS!", Dr. Krochmal's letter began:

- *The dastardly action of the Austrian Government in denying Jewish refugees the right to come to Austria—*

"We never did," Kreisky interrupted, "as you know."

"Yes, only the method and place of processing them has changed."

"And it will change again," said Kreisky. On the assumption that it took terrorists six months to blueprint and execute a terror action, the Austrians were shifting transit camps "every three months – as we would have done with Schönau anyway," Kreisky told me, contending that he gave away only what he had been about to give away in any event. Now I resumed reading:

- *—is a relapse into the depth of disgrace your predecessors the Austrian Nazis fell into. As a former officer in the U.S. combat infantry, I can only regret that we did not destroy more of the nest of vipers than we did in capturing your Nazi headquarters in Salzburg and Berchtesgaden. It is clear to all thinking people that the Government of Austria is as much Nazi and as much devoted to the*

> *concentration camp philosophy as the other Austrian Nazi, Adolph Hitler. Your Government has earned the contempt of the civilized beings of the world as you have, an apostate Jew.*

Then, in a P.S. the North Carolina doctor had added a personal greeting:

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> *This letter was meant for you—to mark your betrayal of democracy and humanity. The revival of Nazism in Austria, where it had its beginnings, can be credited to you and you alone. Keep the letter, Herr Bruno, with my compliments.*

"Which you have," I remarked, "It reads like Jewish fascism to me."

"It’s the same mental attitude," Kreisky said. "And it makes no difference that this kind of person is a Jew or a Catholic or a Mohammedan. So I think this is much more a psychological problem than a social one. Intolerance is not interested in learning the *real* background—that we transfer twice as many as before! ‘Save Soviet Jews!’ We are the only ones who are saving Soviet Jews. The only ones! Nobody else! No country in the world is willing.

"Everyone asks me to understand the situation of a Soviet Jew! What I am doing, in practice, in a quite dangerous situation, is more than any other man who is criticizing me. But what about Palestinian refugees? They are human beings, too, and as a Socialist, I am refusing to make a difference between refugees and refugees. Justice means justice everywhere. Injustice means injustice everywhere. I am not a religious man. Religion means nothing to me."

"And yet," I pointed out, "you’ve suffered for your religious sins."

"I personally have never suffered religiously. Only politically."

"Well," I said, "you had to leave the country in 1938."

"Yes, but because I was a Social Democrat. We were in the avant-garde of millions of others. I was arrested by the Gestapo for the first time because I was a Socialist. The Jews were arrested eight months later—in October or November. And they were not the last victims. You know, there were American soldiers who suffered and died, too. All the victims of the war suffered because of Hitler."

I felt Kreisky was evading the issue here, and in fact, it was there in his chancellery that I first began to perceive the essential enigma of Kreisky’s own Judaism. In the beginning, there was detachment, distancing, and deflection—shifting the martyrdom to GIs in very much the way others may think they dilute the Holocaust by noting that Gentiles and Gypsies and good Germans perished, too. All this, however, was quite remarkable for a man who lost his mother’s brother’s family to the gas chambers, another uncle to suicide

after the annexation of Austria (the Anschluß), and many other relatives to the Nazi camps. In the end, there would be denial (never denying that he was Jewish, but never acknowledging that he'd been endangered by being a Jew) and deception (not just self-deception) in attacks on Simon Wiesenthal for pointing out that Kreisky had four Nazis in his first cabinet, including one SS man who'd been arrested for neo-Nazi activities after the war, and for complaining when Kreisky considered a coalition with a party headed by a member of an SS extermination unit. Wiesenthal, as a Galician Jew, was anathema to genteel German-speaking, Middle European, assimilated Jews like Kreisky, just as Wiesenthal might have been to Freud, who found the company of his co-religionists from the East "more intolerable than any other." Wiesenthal has diagnosed Kreisky as a case of Jewish self-hate: "In my opinion, Kreisky is a Jewish tragic figure like we have in every generation. He hates himself because he is Jewish. He is a Jew and an anti-Jew in the same person."

Still, I did believe Kreisky when he concluded the interview with, "Hitler was a danger not just because he boasted that the Jews must be destroyed. This was only a symptom of a general political ideology, and we always said, 'Fascism is starting as a civil war and will end as a world war.'"

III. *Making Up My Mind*

- "A Jew kid" I was called in Hitler's time;

I had to flee from home into the world;

And years went by till I came back again.

The troops of Hitler are gone from the streets,

But not the people who hate as before

All those who differ in some way from them.

The poet Nestroy knew that redheads suffer.

"The Slavs," they say in Wien, "you should avoid."

And those who do not vote like you are bad.

In Wien you must howl with the wolves.

Joviality rests on its foundation,

For, deep inside the heart, it is a fake.

translated into English for me by the poet,

Renate C. Jeschaunig

This poem, published in the same issue of *Profil* that misquoted Kreisky as being "no longer a Jew," led me to the small but elegant downtown apartment of a forty-seven-year-old librarian, as tiny and delicate as Augarten porcelain, who fidgeted with the Jewish star around her neck. "I always wear my Mogen David now," Renée explained, "because otherwise I don’t look the way Austrians expect Jewish people to look, and I was having the misfortune of hearing their anti-Semitism all too often."

Over coffee and cookies I was told a familiar but nevertheless touching story that began in 1938, a few days after Hitler annexed Austria, with eleven-year-old Renée being spat on in the Volksgarten by a playmate who said "You Jew kids can’t play here! Go away!" It took Renée through the terror of *Kristallnacht* in Vienna and the perils of sanctuary in wartime England, and returned her safely home as a young woman. Soon thereafter, a young veterinarian invited her to attend a morning rehearsal at the Theater in der Josefstadt. On their way home, she thanked her date and asked him how he’d managed to wangle an invitation. "Oh," he said, "when I was paying my way through school, I worked in the theatre as an extra—and that *Saujud* (Jewish hog) of a director is crazy about me."

Renée’s ears could scarcely believe what they heard, but her mouth spoke a prompt response: "Well, you’ve now been to the theatre with just such a pig of a Jewish woman!" and she walked away from him.

"Ever since then," Renée told me, "I serve up my Jewishdom on a platter. I try to tell people I’m Jewish *before* they can say ‘ Jewish pig.’" Even so, she spent our next half hour cataloguing the everyday genocides of recent years: the cab drivers who blame detours on "those Jews sitting in City Hall" (where there aren’t many); the perfume store and hair salon and stationer’s, where for good reasons she will no longer shop; the teacher ("of German, not history!") who "taught" one of her children’s classes that "Hitler punished the Jews because they were usurers in the Middle Ages." (Many Austrian young people told me then that in their high school history courses, the older teachers tended to bog down in or dwell upon the monarchy to such an extent that the subject matter ended around 1925 because they’d "run out of time." This situation has improved in recent years in some places, but not everywhere.)

Renée’s husband, Ernst, came home while we were talking and said: "Tell about the apartment we live in."

Renée said: "This is the same building from which my family was evicted by two storm troopers in 1938. Throughout the war, my father hung on to the papers showing the apartment was ours and that he'd paid a lot of money to own such a big flat; he was a dermatologist and it had been our home and his office.

"The building was bombed in the war. So when it was being rebuilt, my father went and told the authorities that all he wanted back was a small apartment for his daughter, for me. But they said: 'Only people who were living in this house on the day it was bombed are given any priority on getting an apartment there.'"

"My father said: 'Well, we couldn't have lived there because the SA [Sturmabteilung] had thrown us out of there!' It didn't matter. We had no rights to it. But the SA men who'd taken it over had every right. They weren't here, but one of our neighbors today is a man who was a Nazi who took over a Jewish apartment in 1938. So he got an apartment here immediately, while I had to get a lawyer, pay a lot more money, and wait my turn until, long after my father had died, Ernst and our children and I could have the moral victory of living in a small part of the same house from which my parents and brother and I were evicted in 1938. This is why we're speaking English to you—just in case some of these 'more qualified' neighbors can hear us talking about them."

"Are your relations with them hostile?" I wondered.

"No," said Ernst. "Polite but subnormal."

"And do you feel at home," I asked, "living in this polite but subnormal moral victory of an apartment?"

"Yes, I do!" Renée said, almost defiantly. "But that has nothing to do with the apartment or the moral victory. My husband is the one person who's made me feel at home in Austria. When we were first married, we went to my father's grave in the Jewish cemetery and there Ernst swore that he would make me forget 'all that.' Of course, he hasn't, but I don't think I want him to or he wants me to."

Ernst is not Jewish—and now, as with Kreisky, I found myself exploring the gray matter inside the trinity around which my odyssey revolved: the Levys and Dick Reamer, Americans in Austria; non-Jewish Austrians, ranging from Dr. Daim to my neighbors and shopkeepers; and Jewish Austrians, ranging from Renée and the chancellor to some of my best friends.

A tall, tweedy, veddy-British-looking pipe smoker ten years older than Renée, Ernst turned out to be "the grandson of a Gypsy, so the same fate awaited me at Hitler's hands, yes? Instead, I went to Sweden, like Kreisky. I've had no religion and no religious problems," until Renée's poem appeared in *Profil* that autumn.

Ernst worked as a public servant in a large office where one of his many colleagues was described by him as a "textbook fascist: part of the new harvest of Nazis—at least,

potential Nazis. Of course, if the Communists came, he'd be a potential Communist. He's not a member of any movement, but it's in his character structure. He once told me his 'brother and sister are emancipated, but not I.' Well, can you imagine a single man of thirty-five not being emancipated? And before becoming a public servant, he'd worked in a bank. Since that's even more hierarchical and authoritarian than the bureaucracy, I wondered why he'd left it. 'Because my career was disturbed by Jews. They're intelligent, *but—'* Then he won't marry a woman because 'they all lie.' He's against *Gastarbeiter,* ethnic minorities, and foreigners in general; sometimes, he reacts violently to just the mention of them.

"I don't share my private life with such people—or, in fact, with many people where I work. So nobody knew about Renée's background until that poem appeared. The day I noticed *Profil* going around the office, he dropped by and just looked at me with what I could only call a lascivious grin. At this moment, I knew he knew.

"Then, ten minutes later, one of the typists that he and I share came in. She seemed very agitated. Without any explanation, she stared and stared at the picture of Renée on my desk. She'd seen that picture very often, but now she was looking to see if Renée *looked* Jewish.

"Things happened more slowly after that. Some people avoided me. Some didn't answer my greeting. A few people, of course, suddenly became more friendly to me, so I knew they knew also. Nobody, though, alluded to Renée's poem, of which I happen to be very proud. And then, some time later, I was talking to a lawyer in the ministry we're under and he told me that several of those people had, individually, come to the ministry and dutifully reported that I have a Jewish wife!"

"Are they trying to get you fired? Or what?" I asked.

"No," said Ernst, "they just want it to be known."

"Because," Renée added, "they know what Kreisky doesn't know, what he tries to repress, but which all people living here know—that the people decide if you're Jewish or not."

"And if I'm married to a Jewish woman," said Ernst, "for them I'm Jewish, too. And you, Alan, are a teenage boy or a Slavic *Gastarbeiter* if the people make you so."

Renée said, "The more I think about it, I know I'm not secure in this country. Just because I'm Jewish and Kreisky is my chancellor and my whole intellect, my whole liberalism, even Kreisky, tells me to try to understand the other fellow, it's no use, *because the other fellow will not try to understand me."*

Ernst begged to differ. "But it may be of use, because if you don't understand the other fellow, you may pass the point of danger. You have to know if this fellow intends to hurt you, to hurt me. I never have any illusions and I don't want any illusions. Now that I'm a

Jew by *their* definition, I want to know, every day and every hour, who *they* are and what *they* do – because only then can I make an intelligent decision and go while the going is good."

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I thought about this often in the next few months as I seriously considered returning to America to live. But I read about the president of the United States (Richard Nixon) telling his tapes and his intimates that the arts harbor Jews; about his railings against "the Jew boys at Justice," the department that would eventually do him in; about the Attorney General (William Saxbe) blaming the whole McCarthy era on distrust of the Jewish intellectual; and about the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (General George Brown) telling the Duke University Law School Forum that Jews "own, you know, the banks in this country, the newspapers." I was reminded of the inmate who, after he was deported from the "privileged" concentration camp of Theresienstadt to the death camp at Auschwitz and perceived what awaited him, escaped. But his slave mentality was so circumscribed that he made his way back to Theresienstadt, where he was executed on the spot. I vowed not to retreat from the fire into the frying pan.

What made up my mind to stay and fight, if need be, right where the enemy shows its face from time to time, was a friendship we formed over Purim at the synagogue on the Seitenstettengasse. The American couple we met were in their thirties: Lawrence D. Berger (who bore the incredible title of Fulbright Professor of Jazz Dancing at the Academy in Vienna; he went from there to Brooklyn College and, last I heard, was head of the dance department at Florida State University in Tampa) and his petite wife, Dorita, a pianist and housewife conceived in Galicia, born in Argentina, naturalized in New York. And one day, after we knew the Bergers better, Dori told me a story—from within the faceless bowels of American criminal justice—that made me decide to stay put.

"Y'know, we almost didn't get here for the start of Larry's Fulbright," Dori began, "because I was facing trial for shoplifting." A few weeks before their departure from Larry's teaching post in California, Dori had taken their younger daughter Sabrina with her in a stroller while shopping in a Beverly Hills department store. Dori saw a dress she liked that was several sizes too large for her, so she took it over to a salesgirl with the intention of asking if it came in her size. Just then, Sabrina threw a tantrum and the can of Coca-Cola from which she'd been sipping. Dori cleaned up the mess, asked the salesgirl to throw away the can, and when the child raged on, wheeled her out of the store. As soon as she did, two woman detectives arrested her—for the dress was still on the rack of the stroller!

The store and the authorities elected to "make an issue" of her "crime," to make an example of the "professor's wife as shoplifter." To the Bergers' astonishment, the case went to trial. To their amazement, the jury came back after several hours and said it was deadlocked 8-to-4. (In America, you need a unanimous vote.)

"You mean," Dori whispered to her lawyer, "four people in this world could find me guilty?"

"For all we know," he replied, "it's eight to convict and four to acquit."

The judge said he'd wasted enough time on this open-and-shut case, but he'd keep the jury in deliberations till midnight, if necessary. Toward midnight, the jury reported itself hopelessly hung 10-to-2.

Calling both sides to the bench, the judge offered to dismiss the case if the prosecution would agree not to retry Dori and if Dori would agree not to sue the store. Shaken and terrified by this time, she said yes.

On the Bergers' way home, they gave a lift to one of the jurors, a woman who told Dori she'd sympathized and empathized because she'd absentmindedly walked out of stores with goods and the public library with books and then had gone right back in without getting caught. Dori asked her how any four jurors could have seen her situation in any other light.

"Well," said the woman, "the two who finally came around were storekeepers themselves, so they were afraid at first that you'd sue the store—but justice is justice, they decided. The other two were against you from start to finish and nothing was ever going to change their minds."

"But why?" Dori asked – and the answer she elicited was my answer, too, months before she and I ever met.

"Because you and your lawyer are Jews."

* * * * * * * * * *

Once Dori Berger's experience made up my mind for me to stay put in Vienna—where one can know thy enemy and watch him (or her), too—I had a number of adventures. After you put something into perspective, it stops being the greatest single truth in your life and tends to stay in the background—which is just as well. The handful of personal experiences on one subject that I've related is, admittedly, few and far between. But I've found that on this particular subject when you're Jewish, a little goes a long way.

Oh, every now and then, I’d get the question, "Levy? Is that a typical American name?" To which I’d reply, "It’s a typical American Jewish name. There are nine columns of us in the Manhattan phone book," but I was answering that question in the spirit in which it was asked, which usually put the attacker on the defensive. Push back early at most aggressors, and they back down—sometimes. It’s the episodes I couldn’t cope with quite that easily that are the ones that linger.

June 27, 1979, was a sweltering summer Wednesday of the kind that happens to Vienna only twice or thrice a year. It was also the last day my family and I were spending there before paying a summer visit to our relatives and friends in the States. I had sweated out this unbearably hot day running around collecting our plane tickets, traveler’s checks, and insurance; getting the phone switched off; and all the usual prevacation errands. Toward 5:30 p.m., I found myself packed into the back of a crowded, creaky J-line streetcar that I’d boarded near the Opera. It had just turned off the Ring and was crawling up the Josefstädterstrasse toward my home.

Two stops before mine, a very familiar type boarded the tram. He wore a green suit, checkerboard shirt, porkpie hat, a number of gold teeth, and a walking stick; beyond a certain age (and he was in his late sixties or early seventies), this could be almost as much of a political statement as wearing a Hitler mustache. Still, he was huffing and puffing so much that I, hanging out the window of the rear car and gasping for air, offered him my choice standing room and he accepted, saying in German: "That is very nice of you. That’s really very nice."

After he’d told me three or four times how nice I was, I told him I was getting off in a couple of stops, because I didn’t want him, of all people, to think I was the Messiah or Jesus Christ Superstar. "It doesn’t matter," he said in German. "That’s very nice of you."

At the next stop, Albertgasse, the conductor’s voice from the front car announced that, because of delay on the J-line, our tram would be turning around at the Gürtel, two stops away and halfway along the J’s route, but another tram was right behind us—which we could see from where we were – and those who were traveling farther could change at the Gürtel.

Well, this provoked the usual grumbling about delay and heat and crowding and public transport in Vienna, which gives very little to grumble about. Suddenly, I heard one voice cut through all the rest to proclaim in German: "Es ist eine Judische Krankheit aus New York." ("This is a Jewish disease from New York.")

I looked around to see the doctor who had diagnosed this special condition, and lo and behold, it was my "friend" in the Tyrolean hat. My German failed me. Even my English failed me. I just stood there, sputtering, trying to find the words to say to him: Do you know who gave you your place by the window so you could fill your lungs with enough wind to spit out such garbage?

I didn’t find the words, and before I could, the tram was at Blindengasse, my stop. I stepped down, still speechless, but gazing up at the open door in case I found the words. And my "friend" looked down upon me with his smile of gold and said in English: "I know—what— you—are!" Then the door shut and the J-line streetcar pulled away.

I was forty-seven years old at the time, but I trudged home like a very old man. "Oh, hell!" I thought. "We’re going to have dinner, and then we have to finish packing and go to bed early because the taxi to the airport is coming at six in the morning. And unless the cabdriver has something scintillating to say at that hour, those are going to be the last words I’ve heard here, and I’m going to be carrying them around all summer and dreading coming back."

Then I asked myself what I was afraid of: Meeting this man again? Or others like him? And I began to reflect that he was rather old and in pretty bad physical condition. He’d had a lot of trouble just getting up those two steps into the tram, and he’d really been leaning on that stick of his, so he might not even be around when I got back. But, more than that, I realized that *I’m gonna outlive that bastard!* and, in that moment I became a Jewish survivor who sleeps with his hat on and one eye open but who still sleeps fairly well. And suddenly I found myself exhilarated, walking home with a spring in my step, taking the stairs of our apartment house two at a time, and bursting in on my family with the news that "something wonderful just happened to me!"

Of course, the euphoria wore off, but it got me through, with my eyes a little wider open. It scarcely held into the 1980s, when I started hearing young people on streetcars—mostly teenagers—addressing each other as *"du Saujud!"* and I knew that I wasn’t likely to outlive them. I wondered where they were getting it from. Their parents? Their teachers? Or just their peers? In the 1980s, as I became better known and more involved in the Austrian community around me, I began feeling occasional slight pressure on my written truth, which, even at its most absurd, is sacred to me. Twice in articles I wrote for Austrian magazines that commissioned them editors tried to cut out references to Austria "as loser in both world wars" on the grounds that Austria was Hitler’s "first victim" in World War II. Both times, I told them that if they deleted that phrase, they could not publish the piece; in both cases, they backed down. Once, I wrote an article about heart surgery in Vienna; six doctors were so involved in transplanting calves’ hearts that they were all too busy to talk to me, but several of them suggested a young, English-speaking assistant named Dr. Mohl should serve as their spokesman. When my article came out quoting Dr. Mohl and mostly just naming his six bosses, one of them complained to the publisher: "One always writes about another." The publisher passed this on to my editor, who interpreted it the way I would. I called Dr. Mohl and said, "I didn’t know you were Jewish."

"I’m not," he said, but when I told him what happened, he acknowledged that this one particular "superior" was indeed an outspoken anti-Semite. To his credit, Dr. Mohl has never bothered to tell his bosses he *isn’t* Jewish. To the editor’s dismay and mine, the publisher banned me from further appearances in his magazine "because of complaints" about my "one-sidedness," but this lasted barely a year until they needed me again. And,

yes, I sold them reprint rights to an article in English that they wanted to publish in German because while I don't believe in blacklists, I do believe in breaking them, and I like to think that the people who run them aren't clever or capable enough to maintain them, amen.

The 1986 Austrian Presidential election, which seemed to pit Kurt Waldheim and his wartime past against the World Jewish Congress in New York instead of against his Socalist opponent, polarized Austria in a way that seemed very unhealthy at first but, in the end, may have served a purpose. My wife and I had the good fortune to miss out on the whole election because Val, who taught French at the American International School in Vienna, had made a teaching exchange, and we spent the 1985-1986 school year at Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire. So all I'd seen of Austria that spring were headlines and brief snippets on the CBS and NBC news. I cringed when I saw and heard Israel Singer of the World Jewish Congress calling Dr. Waldheim a "sleazebag" and telling Austrian Jews they should emigrate. I watched attentively when Dr. Waldheim was on the CBS *60 Minutes* news magazine program going twenty minutes with Mike Wallace, then the toughest TV interviewer in my profession. When the questioning grew rough, Dr. Waldheim suddenly turned away from Wallace and addressed the TV viewer, saying "I want to sincerely apologize to any of my American friends who think I may have misled them."

That's all he said, but this glimpse of humility in his icy façade of stonewall arrogance was very effective, and I wondered whether he ever said such a thing in Austria. Then, after two elections, in the second of which Waldheim achieved a majority, NBC morning news of June 9 showed Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies in Los Angeles, saying he had a message for the people of Austria: "You've been given two chances to reject Waldheim, and now we will keep your president busy cutting ribbons for the next seven years."

This was an easy threat to keep, for the presidency of Austria can be, to a large extent, a ceremonial post, and ribbon cutting is precisely what it's about (unless there is a parliamentary or cabinet emergency, in which case the president could dissolve a government, reject a cabinet, or call elections). Nevertheless, of the enlightened couple with whom we were watching the news in Leonia, New Jersey, he—an American Jew—exclaimed "Wow! That's putting it to them!" and she—born German, but not Jewish—turned to my wife with concern and said: "Val, you can't go back there now!" But when we thought of Simon Wiesenthal, alone in his cluttered office in Vienna speaking out not *for* Waldheim but for fair play for Waldheim while others made resounding pronouncements in his name, we knew we were going back. Even as our American friends were fearing for our return to Austria, I was realizing, as I had in Kreisky's office when he showed me the letter from the doctor in North Carolina, that bigotry and hatred can be two-way streets.

And we didn't change our mind when a poll taken in Vienna in mid-1986 showed that "forty-three percent of a representative sample said Jews were not Austrians and a

staggering seventy-nine percent thought the Jews had at least been partly responsible for their own fate." *

As with night to night at the opera, the Vienna to which Val and I returned in August 1986 had a different tenor from the one we left in August 1985. I recognized this my first morning back, when I went into our neighborhood post office, which had always been a very politicized place. The woman who put aside the most decorative postage stamps for me was the ranking Socialist in the hierarchy there, while Peter Klima, the man on the motorcycle who delivered telegrams, happened to be the head of the pro-Waldheim People's Party faction that dominated our post office. Though he was nearing fifty, we used to call Peter "the Eastern Union boy," and he was the first to spot me that hot summer day. All at once, he embraced me like a long-lost brother and I found myself smothering in sweaty leather.

"Ah, Mr. Levy," Peter said, "I'm so glad you came back. You can't imagine how many times I thought of you, sitting in America and hearing so many terrible things being said about us Austrians, and I thought to myself, 'I wonder if Mr. Levy and his family are going to come back after this.'"

I told him there had never been any question in my mind about coming back, and as he released me from his embrace, Peter drew himself up to full height and said to me, quite formally: "Mr. Levy, I want you to know that the following Jewish people in this district voted for Dr. Waldheim for President." Whereupon he reeled off a list of about thirty-five names—a few of which I recognized as merchants and neighbors that I hadn't even suspected were Jewish.

I don't know if Peter's information was any more accurate than the anti-Semitic cardiologist's, but I do know that after barely two hours back in a city of bricks glued together by eyeballs, I already felt under unwanted presidential protection.

In the Heurigen, the wine gardens of Vienna, the sounds of a summer night invariably reverberated with discussions of Waldheim, Wiesenthal, "the Jews," "the American Jews," and "the Jews from New York." As Jewish natives of New York, my wife and I could scarcely help bristling, even though none of it was ever directed at us personally or even consciously. So defensive were we that once, when we overheard a cluster of little old ladies in loden sweaters and pointy hats chatting about "Jews," I was ready to wheel around and impale them with a glare until I realized that they were talking against Jörg Haider, then a rising young politician, now the governor of the province of Carinthia and until recently head of the FPÖ (Freedom Party), saying he was a no-goodnik whose wealth came from inherited property that had been expropriated from a Jewish family.

In 1987 and 1988, as historians and other investigators dredged up President Waldheim's wartime record, only to show that while he may have been all things to all people, he was neither a Nazi nor a war criminal, even Simon Wiesenthal called for his resignation on moral grounds. But I never favored this, for I preferred his presidential status as "The Prisoner of the Hofburg," the Habsburgs' winter palace where his offices were and where

he sat uninvited and unvisited by foreign heads of state and even (unjustly, I think) high atop the United States' Watch List of persons to be refused entry on private visits. So long as Kurt Waldheim remained in the Hofburg, the memories of what Austrians are so good at forgetting would not go away.

On June 15, 1987, my wife and I took the Mozart Express to Stuttgart and found ourselves sharing the compartment with a compact and charming eighty-five-year-old couple: Romanians resident in Vienna for forty years. Before long they told us that he had been a Romanian soldier fighting on the German side in World War II. Absorbed into the German Army, he'd been captured by the British, which was lucky, but then the British "repatriated" him to the Russians, which was unlucky, for they shipped him to Siberia. When he got back to Romania in 1947, he took his wife and kept moving west to Vienna. Over the years, they brought many of their relatives and a few friends out of Romania to the West, too. Now they were going to visit some of them in Augsburg.

They had given or been given a going-away party the day before, and now they shared their leftovers, which were delicious and unusual, with us. "You're eating far better Romanian food than people in Romania eat," she assured us. At Salzburg I ran out to buy us all some soft drinks for schillings before the train crossed into Germany. We had by then given our name as Levy, but it clearly didn't register as Jewish with them.

The party continued past Munich, but then it came apart. Out of the blue, the man said to my wife: "What do you as Americans think of the theatre the Jews over there are making of the Waldheim affair?"

Val gave the kind of noncommittal reply we'd learned to give lately: "Well, if it's theatre, then we're all spectators."

"But we can't just sit back!" The man fulminated. "It's a terrible thing those American Jews are doing to Austria. It's too bad Hitler didn't finish that part of the job."

Trembling, Val lifted her book to her face. "Is that what you think?" she said—and I could see a tear or two forming even as I buried my nose in the *International Herald Tribune*. Neither of us wanted to confront our generous hosts with our identity as American Jews. Besides, without communicating, we both knew from our six hours with him that this man was not an original thinker and was just repeating what he'd heard in the Heuriger or at the going-away party. He ranted for a minute or so more, but his wife seemed to sense something and shushed him. The trip continued in silence and at Augsburg we shook hands coldly and thanked them for the food.

As the train pulled out of Augsburg, Val began to sob. I comforted her, but I also said: "Don't waste your tears on him. If you'd met him in his German uniform in '44 or '45, he might have wasted a bullet on you."

"I know that," she said, "but I can't stand how two minutes can destroy six wonderful hours together."

"Thirty seconds," I reminded her, "can destroy a human life."

IV. *Epilogue: Mr. Mayor Mayr*

I gave much of this paper as a talk to a Catholic Student Association in late 1986 and again in early 1987 at Club Wien International, an association for furthering contact between hospitable Viennese and resident foreigners. The discussion period lasted until almost midnight. Even when I'm speaking, I try to keep my ears as well as my mind open, and that was how I learned that City Hall was planning to close this extremely worthwhile organization (to which I'd belonged almost from its inception in 1975) without consulting or even informing its five hundred loyal and active members. A Viennese member named Elfi Klier was circulating petitions that eventually netted 340 signatures but no stay of execution. The meeting at which the Socialist-dominated board of directors would decree the final death sentence had been set for April 8.

On that fateful afternoon, I appeared at the directors' meeting with Mrs. Klier, four other concerned members, and a brief appeal in writing from U.S. Ambassador Ronald S. Lauder:

- Gentlemen: I do not agree with the proposed closing of Wien International and request that today's meeting be postponed until the members of Wien International are informed of its purpose and permitted to participate in the decision. Sincerely,

Having sought, unsuccessfully, to attend the closed session on behalf of the Viennese and foreign members, we handed Lauder's letter to every board member we could identify on the way in. One of the two People's Party members, Parliament Deputy Robert Kauer, and the sole member of the right-wing Freedom Party stepped out into the anteroom to assure us that while they would vote against closing Wien International, it was doomed by the determined Socialist majority. I'd already learned that at the previous month's closed meeting the Socialists had "for economic reasons" recommended dismissing the three staff members who had been placed there by the People's Party minority: two of them happen to be the very glue that made Wien International cohere. When Kauer had balked at this, the majority had said, in effect, that they might as well dissolve the whole organization and would do so in April.

A few minutes later, Hans Mayr, the Socialist deputy mayor of Vienna who was also president of Wien International, and *his* deputy, a Socialist member of Parliament, came out to pay us a condolence call even before they could pronounce Wien International dead. Mayr was the top-ranking bottom-line bureaucrat who controlled the city's purse

strings (and by 1990 headed the Socialist Party in Vienna). Mrs. Klier argued gently and I pointed out that if the members had been informed, we could have taken life-saving measures, such as organizing fund-raising benefits at Vienna's English Theatre and the international schools. The Socialist M.P. found this funny because "individual rescue actions aren't enough, ha-ha," while Mr. Mayor Mayr noted, quite irrelevantly, that the English Theatre was subsidized by the city of Vienna, too. I said that as a paying member of Wien International I expected a full year's value of my dues, including participation in crucial decisions and not just to be informed in the mail that the club was dead. Then I alluded to "your wanting to dismiss three staff members who belong to another party."

A Wien International stenographer was present and what follows is from her transcript:

- MAYR: (*screams*) The whole thing is *not* a political decision. I'm not prepared to negotiate with anyone under pressure. I have enough of your kind accusing me!

LEVY: I am accusing the board of not informing the members.

MAYR: Do not interfere in our politics. The letter from Ambassador Lauder is a command. Three lines are more than a request. Listen, that's a command! I take it as an order! I have enough of your kind!

LEVY: What kind? American?

MAYR: I have enough. It is not right what you do! First you say you are a journalist and then—

LEVY: And a private citizen, Austrian taxpayer, and member of Wien International!

MAYR: I was in the German Army at the end of the war, and I am sick and tired of people from big countries who tell small countries how to run things. So you think the tax you pay has to be returned to you three times through the Club of Wien International?

LEVY: I pay taxes. That gives me the right to protest!

MAYR: Look up the bylaws and find out what your rights are!

LEVY: Is that democratic?

MAYR: You can take over the leadership—but without the City of Vienna!

LEVY: We are all willing to help and to pay.

This from a Socialist from City Hall, not from the "notorious" Kurt Waldheim and his devout loyalists in the People's Party! After our exchange, Mayr calmed down, and I kept my cool, but I couldn't help wondering whether I'd be standing there now if I'd met him toward the end of the war. Within minutes, however, he had countered with an offer of 1.6 million schillings ($128,000) in subsidy from the City to Wien International if Mrs. Klier and her committee could raise the other two-thirds of the budget. They couldn't. An hour or so later, he said to me, "I apologize about my temper." I replied, with a Good-Soldier-Schweikian ambiguity I'd learned from living in Prague, "There is nothing to forgive."

During a break in the proceedings, I asked the stenographer for a transcript, and two weeks later, I obtained it and later published it in *Profil* magazine. While the story was being checked, Mr. Mayor Mayr wrote to inform me that "[I] could not have said what *your* transcript has me saying about being in the German Army at the end of the war," for "I deserted from the German Army in December of 1944." (When *Profil* looked into this, it found that all records had been conveniently "destroyed" in the bombing of Vienna.) Mayr made no effort to deny his multiple remarks about "your kind," but he concluded by warning me against "spreading false information." I wrote back that I was for personal reasons a little relieved to learn of his desertion, but that *his* stenographer's notes jibed with my (and my witnesses') recollection of his words.

The *Profil* editor, Erhard Stackl, asked me if I thought Mayr's words were "anti-Semitic" and I told him to draw his own conclusions from the transcript; he later wrote: "Inwardly, the American has the feeling that he was nonetheless being addressed as a Jew...." But Stackl didn't have space to print my own analysis of the affair.

I have frequently been asked to give my personal definition of anti-Semitism, and I reply instinctively as an assimilated Jew forced to fly the flag in a state of siege: "It's when anyone thinks of me as a Jew first and Alan Levy second—a definition, I admit, that makes a number of Jews anti-Semitic, too." The encounter with the deputy mayor of Vienna enabled me to expand my horizons of thought. We all like to think we are unique. I even like to think Mr. Mayor Mayr is unique. Anyone who tells me he knows my kind is not only diminishing himself and me but also his fellow beings.

Alan Levy

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