

# Kitty Suschny

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Vienna

Austria

Interviewer: Tanja Eckstein

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*Kitty Suschny is a woman who can hardly be discouraged from expressing her opinion in any situation. She lives in a marvelous art-nouveau villa in the 13th district with her reserved husband, Dr. Otto Suschny, who I have also interviewed. They are very gracious hosts and are always on hand with help and advice, even after long interviews.*



## My Family History

My grandfather on my father's side was named Hersch Pistol and my grandmother was named Ruchel or Rachel Pistol. Both were born in Lviv, but my grandfather had already gone to Vienna when he was 20. Grandfather and grandmother probably met in Vienna. They had five children: three sons and two daughters.

I didn't know my uncle, Samuel Pistol. He went to Czechoslovakia because he couldn't earn anything in Vienna. I later heard he became a chef, but I don't know exactly. [Samuel Pistol, born August 2nd, 1885, married to Charlotte, born October 31st, 1878, was deported from Brunn to Theresienstadt on December 5th, 1941 and from there to Izbica, Poland on March 11th, 1942. Source: Terezinska Pametni Kniha]

Uncle Friedrich Pistol was an actor, but supposedly never earned anything with acting. He was married before the war and had two sons with his wife; but they were divorced before 1938. Perhaps because he wasn't earning anything. He converted to Catholicism, but was deported to Theresienstadt [Theresienstadt ghetto] anyway. He survived and died in Vienna around the age of 75.

Aunt Franziska Pistol was married to Walter Schwarz. Franziska and Walter Schwarz had a son, Herbert Schwarz, born in 1909. They lived on Brigittenauer-Lände [20th district], quite close to us. As far as I know, my uncle was a social worker, which they called a welfare worker back then, and became unemployed. The son, Herbert, immigrated to England, was detained in 1939 and deported to Australia. Herbert was married; his wife, however, couldn't get away and might have died.

Aunt Helene Pistol married Josef Heller. They had a daughter, Sophie, born in 1914, and a son, Otto, who was born in August 1915. Both studied medicine in Vienna but had to cut their studies short after the German invasion of Austria in 1938. Otto and Sophie fled to France. From unoccupied France, Sophie was able to flee to Switzerland over Mont Blanc with help from a monk.

She survived the war in Switzerland and got married there; but this marriage fell apart. Then she married someone from Vienna called Sokal. He had a jewelry shop. Otto was arrested and interred in the Gurs concentration camp in France. During outdoor work he was able to escape. He then worked as a salesman, returned to Vienna after the war, and finished his studies as a dentist. He passed away a few years ago in Vienna at the age of 83.

My father, Doctor Saul Pistol, was born in Vienna on March 2nd, 1876. I think all my father's siblings were also born in Vienna.

My grandmother on my mother's side was called Franziska Löwe. She was born on June 11th, 1868. My grandfather was called Glaser. I don't know what his first name was. He died in 1924, fourteen days before I was born. My grandparents lived in Bisenz, Czechoslovakia. It took us a half a day on the train from Vienna in order to visit in grandmother in Bisenz, where there was a train station. The train was a colossal machine. Grandmother had a small shop with dressmaking supplies. There were sewing needles, pins, tape measurers, and lining in the shop. Grandmother also owned fields.

My grandmother lived in a house with a front garden. Some wine grapes had been planted in the front garden and there were also vegetables. There were a few melons and pumpkins in the fields, I think, and also grain. There must have been a vineyard because in the mornings my grandmother would go with an atomizer to spray cyanuric acid on the pests. She was a very tall, strong woman with a shoe size of 42 [UK: 8/8.5 US: 9/9.5]. My mother's shoe size was only 36 [UK: 3/3.5 US: 5/5.5]. At my grandmother's house there was electrical light, but also petroleum lamps. I think petroleum was cheaper than electricity or maybe my grandmother was afraid because electric light would turn on so quickly, since electric lights were still a novelty back then. The bathroom was an outhouse, of course. In front of my grandmother's house was a square with a fountain where everyone in the surrounding area came to retrieve water.

My mother was the oldest sibling. She had two brothers who were almost 2 meters tall [6ft. 5in.] with a shoe size of around 45 [UK: 10.5 US: 11.5]. They were real farmers.

My uncle, Alfred Glaser, was born in 1895. He married Margarete, who we called Aunt Grete. Their son Pavel was born in 1927. Aunt Grete embroidered flowers with silk onto bags. Whenever my mother was there for a visit she took some bags back with her to Vienna and sold them to friends for Aunt Grete. Once a year for three months Grete worked as a bookkeeper for a confectioner. That was only a seasonal thing in order to earn a little money. Uncle Alfred and his family lived in the house together with grandmother, who always wore many skirts on top of one another. She had a goat for the milk and chickens for the eggs. I was afraid of the chickens because I thought they would peck me with their pointy beaks. Uncle Alfred owned a horse-drawn cart with two horses and cultivated everything alone with my grandmother. They didn't have any money for help. Perhaps they employed someone on a daily basis who then slept on the hay with the animals in the stall, as was common earlier. Grandmother was a very hard worker but was never well off. She could survive, more or less.

Josef Glaser, who they called Joschi, was born in 1902. He married rich. I know that they cooked for many days for the wedding. His wife was called Martha and was from Mikulov [German: Nikolsburg. Today Czech Republic], on the Austrian border. The family had a brandy distillery, a brandy parlor, and fields. Joschi didn't know, however, that his wife wouldn't provide him with anything. Even her

father was very stingy. He lost a leg before the First World War and had a wooden prosthetic that was certainly the most expensive prosthetic they had back then.

My mother, Malwine, was born in Bzenec [*German: Bisenz*] on January 18th, 1893. She attended a home economics school where they also taught cooking. That was a German school where the wealthy people interested in German schools sent their children.

Everyone – my grandmother, my two uncles and aunts, my Cousin Pavel – were deported from Uhersky Brod to Theresienstadt on February 1st, 1943 and then to Auschwitz where they were murdered.

My father was an officer in the First World War and my mother was a Red Cross nurse. I assume that's how my parents met. My father was 17 years older than my mother.

They got married on September 9th, 1919. I don't know where my parents were married, but we lived in the 2nd district in Vienna, at Gaussplatz 3. The other buildings on Gaussplatz were in the 20th district, but number three belonged to the 2nd. The Maltilde Pharmacy was in our building. The pharmacist killed himself in 1938; his name was Altschul. The other pharmacist was called Nussbaum. He had two daughters that immigrated to England or America.

## **My Childhood**

My grandparents on my father's side lived in the same building as us, in apartment number 15. But they were already dead when I was born. My father's medical practice was in our two-and-a-half room apartment, and we lived there until I was one year old. Then we were able to rent another apartment, number 22, in the same building. But our dining room was still in number 15. The toilet and water were in the hall. That's how it was in 90 percent of the apartments back then, especially in the working-class neighborhoods. Back then it was also normal to have bedbugs and other animals in the apartment. You could only be so clean and take care, which was a plague then. It was embarrassing and my mother had an enema syringe that contained something for the bedbugs.

A lot of Jewish families lived in our building. Our neighbor, Mrs. Letfuss, was a Social Democrat; her sister was married to a Jewish waiter from Café Neptun. Café Neptun was a Jewish coffee house at Gaussplatz 7. Mrs. Letfuss was always afraid they would arrest her for being a Social Democrat. Her husband was a house painter. Their son, Josef, wanted to study law but didn't have any money.

A Jewish woman lived next door: Mrs. Wiesner. She was a widow and had two sons. I remember that the toilet was in the apartment and there was also water. She even had a bathroom where the maid slept. The bathroom was arranged as a living space but still had a bathtub in it. When the sons took a bath, the maid would have to leave. Mrs. Wiesner's brother had a carpet and curtain store; the family was called Weinberger. Mrs. Wiesner was an authorized signatory there. Next to Mrs. Wiesner lived the Jewish Haas family. They were two unmarried, small, black-haired sisters with their brother. The brother also wasn't very tall and was the youngest of the siblings. The sisters looked after him, cooked for him, and cleaned. They had a three-room apartment. Each had their own room. I don't know whatever happened to them. Two families lived on the corner; they weren't Jewish.

Only Jews lived on the first floor. There was a family of fur traders; I think they were called Nettel. The Taussig family lived on the first floor. My father's practice was on the second floor and on the left lived Mrs. Schmitz, who was the oldest tenant. She was a monarchist and very respectable. She had a sister in Steinhof. She had turned on her sister; they were living together. People were sent to Steinhof much quicker back then. My father and another doctor had to give the medical evaluation. In 1938 Mrs. Schmitz said to my mother, "Imagine, I really believe my sister is crazy now. I visited her in Steinhof and she said, 'Heil Hitler, Ida. The savior has come.' To which I said, 'you don't know what you're saying.'" They then killed the "insane" there. I had a distantly related cousin, her sister was also in Steinhof unfortunately, but she was afraid. When we visited her she said we should take her out of there. She was afraid that they would kill her.

My father was a general practitioner, gynecologist, and pediatrician all at once. That sort of thing doesn't exist today. He studied in Vienna and was probably finished around the turn of the century. He did his doctorate in 1901 and initially worked in a hospital. By the time I came into the world he already had his own practice. I know that my father was giving his siblings financial support because he said that they had to work so that he could study. I found out later that they couldn't study because they wouldn't have qualified.

In my father's practice there was an examination table for women, a display case with instruments, a couch, and a sunlamp. That's how the office was set up. The toilet was in the office but wasn't connected to water. During office hours my mother poured pitchers of water from the hall into a tub and my father could wash his hands after every patient. If the water was cold before the patients arrived, my father would turn on the petroleum oven in the hall, since the oven really stunk. After ten minutes you could stick the pitcher in the water, as the oven didn't stink as much. There were also two nurses: Rosa and Anna. One cleaned and the other looked after the children. My mother wouldn't let anyone do the cooking for her.

I think my mother's native language was German, but she also spoke perfect Czech. My mother's cousin called every day at 1 o'clock when my father was hungry and already sitting down for lunch. He had to go back to work at 2 o'clock and so had to gobble down his food. He said: "This isn't acceptable. I sit and already the telephone is ringing and it is your cousin." My father had learned Latin and French as well. My mother and cousin always spoke in Czech with each other and my father, who didn't understand, would always say, "Mother is selling me." My father always asked mother to have her cousin call at 1:30, since he would already be downstairs in the office.

My brother's name is Harry; he was born in 1920. He was somewhat small and supposedly suffered because of it. He was a good learner, but was always a little jealous of me and always hit me. When I was born and they told him he had a sister. He said that he didn't want her and that he wanted to throw her out the window. And when no one was looking, he would hit me. We are called Harry and Kitty, as though my mother knew that we would one day have to immigrate to England.

I grew up on Gaussplatz. Just outside was a park where schoolmates and other neighborhood children played. In 1935 I once went home crying and for hours couldn't say why. My mother asked, "Did someone do something to you? Did someone hit you?" I didn't stop crying. I had seen how Police officers on horseback had ridden into a group of unemployed people, leaving a bloody pile. That was horrific, of course. I was eleven years old and that was a shock. It took my mother hours to get it out of me. Then she said it might not have been as serious as I had seen it. "But the

blood is serious," I said. She said, "Yes, who knows, maybe they were criminals." But my mother knew what I had seen. The unemployed had been playing with coins and die and without warning the police rode into them. The grass was red instead of green. It was a nightmare.

We spent the summer holidays somewhere in Austria; I don't recall anymore where that was. My father would come visit us by the day since he couldn't afford to take a longer vacation. We were in Carinthia once. There was a lake there. My father always brought my grandmother, my mother's mother. Every one would say: What a god son-in-law! Once we rode in a boat. It was windy and my grandmother got seasick. My father then brought her to the train so she could go home. She naturally spoke very good German; they spoke more German than Czech at her house.

My mother told me that we once had a Christmas tree because of the Christian nanny. I cried a lot when my mother took down the tree weeks later. After that she said, "I am never buying a Christmas tree again." I went to the neighbors; they knew me and said, "come, you don't have a tree so come to our place!"

My father worked a lot. Frequently he had to get up nights and didn't have a weekend. Every day at seven in the morning he would get up to make rounds. He even did home births. Later in England I met a man and he said, "Your father delivered me."

There was a restaurant where the proprietor always greeted my mother especially friendly, because my father once saved his wife's life. Later, after the German invasion, he could no longer make the effort to greet my mother.

My parents went to the theater and to concerts. On New Years Eve they always went to see "Die Fledermaus" [*Operetta from Johann Strauss*] and afterwards went out to dinner. They were always with doctors, the majority of whom were Jewish doctors. Sometimes they even invited guests over. I always wanted to be there and would hide under the dining room table.

My parents weren't very religious. But for the High Holidays, Rosh Hashanah [*Jewish New Year*] and Yom Kippur [*Jewish day of repentance; most important Jewish holiday*], we stayed home. We didn't even go to school. That's how the children at school knew who was a Jew.

## **My School Years**

I went to the elementary school on Treu-Strasse [20th district]. My elementary school teacher was called Maria Streit. She had dyed blonde hair and was very pretty. But above all, she was an anti-Semite and she let the children know it. When I started school I wasn't yet six years old. The entire eight years of school I lagged behind and always had difficulties. I wasn't a very good learner. That was probably because I was left-handed. They trained me to be right-handed, but that was really difficult for me. Somehow I pulled through. I'm surprised that my parents had watched that; they must have noticed my weaknesses at school.

My father passed away in September 1931. He was only 55 when he died. My mother was 37 years old when he died.

As a doctor he always had to go up and down the stairs. The 20th district was a working-class district; there were no elevators. My father died of a heart attack. On the death certificate it says

he died of obstruction of the heart veins. My father wasn't feeling well in the evening. I had opened a window so he could get some fresh air. He supposedly had heart discomfort months before, which he had hidden from my mother. My father smoked Virginia cigars and he had told the woman at the tobacco shop about his heart pains. But she wasn't to tell my mother. About 20 years ago my brother also died of heart failure at the age of 62. He never suffered; he just had heartburn and was dead by the evening. Today there are bypasses, pacemakers; I also had angina. It didn't only affect the men in my family.

My father's death was terrible for my mother. My brother was barely eleven years old and I wasn't even seven yet. For those days my father had made a good living – 4,000 shillings a month, which was a fortune. They didn't save anything from the 4,000 shillings. My father needed money for his practice and he gave a large portion to his siblings. My mother couldn't keep supporting his siblings, because her pension wasn't very high. At the beginning she had a 1,000-shilling pension, which was a lot, but it kept decreasing. She then leased the practice.

After four years I went to secondary school; I had to walk the one station from our apartment. I was almost ten years old then, mind you. I had friend who was with me for four years at elementary school. We were also together for four years at secondary school. That was Ilse Maurer who lived at Gaussplatz 7. We were then on the same Kindertransport to England together.

At the beginning of 1938 my mother was coincidentally in Switzerland; we had a friend there. He was a businessman named Robert Hartmann and my mother met with him there. He told my mother that the Germans at the border were massively deploying, that they wouldn't come to Switzerland, but they would go to Austria. My mother told him he was crazy. She thought that wasn't true. My father was a Social Democrat, but he was already dead. Maybe he would have taken the situation more seriously.

## **The War Begins**

When the Germans invaded in March 1938 everything was covered in Nazi flags. The flags were already hanging the day before. There was a woman in our neighborhood that we knew and who could never speak correct German. She would always cry out, "Let's hear it for German Vienna!" But you can't say that all Austrians were Nazis. I only say that in a rage because there were a lot. There was also a lot of unemployment at that time, and so much poverty because of it.

My brother also went to the elementary school on Treu-Strasse and, after four years, to the High School on Unterberger-Gasse. He did his High School exit exams in 1938. He had always studied well. His Latin teacher gave him a 3 [*US: B UK: B/C; satisfactory*] for the exam and my mother said to the teacher, "But my son was always so good!" To which the teacher replied, "Your son will probably never need Latin again!"

There was a teacher named Popp at the secondary school who immediately became head teacher in 1938. He had two daughters who went to all the marches in 1938 and were very "Aryan." They simply stopped greeting us. They acted as though they couldn't see us. After Hitler's invasion, the schools were shut down for a week; they were celebrating the Fuehrer. Everyone went to the marches; we stayed at home, of course. My mother said it would be better if we didn't go outside too much.



After a week without school we were sitting in school and checked to see which teachers came. The class teacher, Mrs. Emma Schwiepel, didn't come because she was half-Jewish. The director was replaced; she had a cross potent. The new director came; I took him for Roma or Sinti because he had black hair and was dark.

We had a classmate – a certain Edith Gabel – she was very clever. She was one of nine siblings and they didn't have money. One sister was studying; she was receiving financial support from someone. Edith wrote a poem. Unfortunately she didn't tear it up, only crumpled it and threw it in the wastebasket. A girl pulled the paper from the wastebasket. On it was written, "The brown plague has arrived to the country." Thereupon the new director came and yelled: "You're not worthy of going to this school, you Jewish lowlives!" We were all shaking of course. I told my mother about that and was so surprised, because the director wasn't at all blonde and blue-eyed. He then left the class and slammed the door. There was a girl there whose father was a police officer. After the invasion he immediately became a staff sergeant in a prison. She said she didn't want to sit next to the Jews anymore. She suggested that the Jews should sit on one side and Catholic; Aryan girls sit on the other. The teacher moved us Jewish children to the window row where it was nice and light.

We had a math teacher – Karoline von Krassnig. She was a widow; I think her husband died in the First World War. She was the cousin of our former class teacher, Mrs. Schwiepel. Once she came into the classroom and everyone yelled "Heil Hitler!" She then replied, "Sit." For a moment we looked around a little baffled because she hadn't said "Heil Hilter," but rather, "sit." She took the class register, looked inside, and said, "Are you crazy, why did you change places?" She had only noted the names of the children according to their seats. The girl said she didn't want to sit next to the Jews anymore. A few days later the math teacher called the girl to the board for the math test. She couldn't do anything and, to our great surprise, the teacher said, "I see, so these days you can go to marches but no longer need to study." We all watched stealthily. The teacher was very nice to us Jewish students. It occurs to me that she gave us advantages whenever she could. She didn't test very strictly. There was a bunch of decent people, especially at the school. Another teacher came to us when we changed classes for Jewish religion lessons and the Catholic girls stayed behind. She came special to our class and said: what is happening now won't last for much longer. Her name was Seidel and we were afraid of responding because we didn't know if she was just trying to nose us out. But she only wanted to console us.

We went rarely went out anymore. We stopped going to the Augarten park since there was sign: "Only for Aryans!"

For the last six weeks before summer vacation in 1938 I had to go to the "Jewish School" on Grosse Sperl-Gasse. There were four Jewish girls at my secondary school on Obere Donau-Strasse named Kitty. All four had to go to the "Jewish School."

At the end of July 1938, at the age of 18, my brother fled illegally to Switzerland. He wasn't alone. An SS officer helped him escape and said "run now" when it wasn't dangerous. His escape was successful. Later it was very difficult to get into to Switzerland. That's when Grüninger helped.

Until 1939 the Nazis made it easy for the Jews that wanted to emigrate. They took money from them. We may have stunk, but the money and jewelry didn't. You were allowed to take 10 marks

with you. It wasn't about extermination, but about personal gain. They wanted to be rid of the Jews.

The "Central Agency for Jewish Emigration," which Eichmann directed, was responsible for the emigration of the Jews. I joined Maccabi in 1938. My friend Ilse and I were at Maccabi tournaments once a week. My mother had said: In the current situation it's right to join a Jewish organization. I had heard something about Tchelet-Lavan and my friend Ilse and I went together. Ilse has been living in America for a long time. She immigrated with me to England and then went to America.

Ilse's father, Mr. Maurer, was a Polish Jew and her mother was from Vienna. In 1935 Ilse got a brother, a latecomer. Heinz was four years old when we immigrated to England. Mr. Maurer always said, "If Hitler comes, they will kill us." To which my mother said, "Mr. Maurer is a meshuggene, he should relax." But he knew, unfortunately! He knew from Poland what pogroms meant.

When my brother was in Switzerland my mother said to me, "You must also go, it doesn't matter how." My mother thought that nothing would happen to her because my father had never done anything to anyone, was very well liked, and besides, was an officer in the 1st World War. That was a fatal delusion, of course. She also hung onto our stuff like that. Back then you would purchase something to last forever – that's how it was. My mother said that my father had slaved away his whole life so that we could have furniture, to live reasonably well. When my brother had his Bar Mitzvah – that was after my father's death – my mother borrowed dishes for 100 people from a Jewish dish shop, god forbid any of our Karlsbad dishes broke. If I had known that I think I would have smashed every piece of Karlsbad dishware, even if she killed me after. A lot of people stayed because of their things. She packed a lot away in boxes and put them in the basement. She thought someone would look after them and she would get the things back. Apparently the other tenants took them.

### **Kindertransport to England**

Ilse and I wanted to go to Palestine at first. We went to the Palestine Office [*The Palestine Office operated entry into Palestine*] on Marc Aurel Strasse [*1st district*], at the corner of Vorlauf-Strasse, and submitted everything. It cost money, unfortunately, and my mother didn't have much more. The pension was getting smaller and smaller. I also didn't have any money. My mother complained because it cost so much money. The people at the Palestine Office said that outside of Tel Aviv there was an agricultural school you could register with. My friend and I then walked through the small park along the canal. Mrs. Maurer and Heinz came our way and said, "Get to the Jewish Community right away; there is a Kindertransport to England there." That was after November 10, 1938. I said, "But I don't have my papers on me." But Mrs. Maurer had already been to my mothers and had my papers. My mother didn't come since she had poor eyesight; she had glaucoma. They couldn't operate on that back then. Mrs. Maurer went with us to the Jewish Community and signed us up for the Kindertransport to England. We had to have a medical examination; that was to separate us out.

There were 1,000 of us back then; it was already the second Kindertransport to England. My mother said, "Don't go to England, go to Holland! You can walk back from there. Take a handcart and a farmer will give you a ride for part of the way or you can walk home. You won't be able to get across the water."



My mother, Mrs. Maurer, Mr. Maurer, and little Heinz said goodbye to us in Hütteldorf [14th district] at 11:30PM. There were small children there, but also nurses from the Rothschild Hospital. They youngest child was six weeks old. This was about life and death! Some parents were able to come after, but many weren't.

You weren't allowed to give anything to the children so that the Transport, god forbid, wasn't jeopardized. That was strictly forbidden. But Ilse had jewelry and some money. She had hidden it. I learned that after we'd arrived in England. Back then you got two pennies for one mark. The mark wasn't worth anything. You could officially take ten marks, so we had very little money.

My mother was supposed to follow, but then it was 14 days too late. In the last weeks before the war the English weren't letting any more in. She could have worked for a German chef with an English family in Liverpool. The English family even had contact with the Home Office, but that was already in 1939, right before the start of the Second World War. It was too late!

First we lived on the coast in Dovercourt, in a summer camp in wooden cabins with bunk beds on each side. That's where they accommodated us in winter. It was a cold winter. There was snow for the first time in 20 years. During that winter, of all things. Even the doors were frozen; we could barely force them open. There was a large restaurant that was empty during the winter where people were also given accommodations. They didn't know where to put them.

In the camp they said it wasn't good to have girls and boys together. That's why they sent us to Lowestoft – but there were also boys there.

Everyday people came that wanted to take children. They wanted to adopt small, blonde boys, up to two years old. Most of the small children had older siblings that they didn't want to take. Some then took an older child anyway.

## **My Time in England**

One day Mrs. Jacobs came from Manchester looking for ten girls from 14 years of age. I said to Ilse, "Come, let's go to the dog selection. Maybe they'll take us." Even back then I found that outrageous. They all wanted younger children or else ones who could work. But at 14 years old you weren't ready to work. They wanted us as housemaids and at 14 we were too young for this job.

Mrs. Jacobs took us with her to Manchester. They brought us to a pub. People came and took a look at us. We had numbers over us that also had our name, age, and other information. A Mrs. Burns from Southport, a doctor's wife, indicated she wanted to take me because my father was a doctor. I felt very honored! My friend Ilse went with a Mrs. Kaplan who had four children of her own. They were very nice. Unfortunately my Mrs. Burns didn't have any children. She couldn't have any and was so jealous of me that I needed to go to another family. Then I was with Mrs. Royce, a tall, energetic woman, who also didn't have any children but who was very nice. Her husband was a furniture salesman. We lived privately for six weeks.

Then the Jewish Committee set up a house for us in Southport. We were nine girls in the house; one girl was adopted. Other girls from Germany also joined.

We met the old Mrs. Marks of “Marks & Spencer” [*A large British retailer*]. She was already 90 years old in 1939. She was very nice, looked like an old Queen Mary, and spoke English and also a little Yiddish. I said that I couldn’t speak Yiddish and that my English also wasn’t very good. Astonished, she asked me, “Didn’t you speak Yiddish at home?” She looked after us. We were invited round to her place and fed. Mrs. Marks was also there for the founding of the committee. “Marks & Spencer” spent a lot of money on us: we received linens and comforters, pads and clothes. Mrs. Marks always made sure we got new things. If something didn’t fit, it was exchanged. Some of the children were very poor; they had next to nothing. We had doctors that cared for us free of charge. There was a certain Dr. Adler who had already emigrated from Germany in 1933. He had treated important people in Berlin. They stopped coming to him after Hitler’s take-over in 1933.

In the home we received one shilling for pocket money; that’s what we had to pay for toiletries: toothpaste, toothbrushes, and soap were all paid for with the one shilling. We were four to a room and often went in on a piece of soap together. We also got jobs, but they were poorly paid because, officially, as refugees we weren’t allowed to work. They only gave us an eighth of a pound. That was very little.

After they had to start keeping kosher in the home, the cutlery for meat was painted red and the cutlery for milk products was painted blue. Most of us weren’t religious, but the religious ones always looked at everything very carefully and re-painted the cutlery if it got faded from washing. We also had to go to temple every Saturday. I spoke with the shames [*an official in the synagogue*] once. I told him that my mother would really like to come to England. He promised he would try to do something. It didn’t work of course, because the English weren’t letting anyone in anymore. It would have cost 50 pounds, which was a lot of money back then. If you convert it to today’s value that would be about 100,000 shillings.

We were in the home in Southport until March 1940. Then we relocated to Manchester.

I saw my brother again in 1940. I didn’t miss him when he fled to Switzerland. The first thing I said when I saw him again was, “If you hit me again then don’t bother visiting.” To which he gave me a funny look; he was already 18, after all. He had worked for a farmer and then after the war studied at the University for Natural Resources and Applied Sciences in Vienna and became an agricultural engineer.

Every month I wrote my mother two to three letters as long . At first the letters went through Switzerland, then, until America joined the war, through America, and from 1942 through the Red Cross. You could only write 20 words in every letter. One day a letter came back: undeliverable.

In her letters my mother had asked my brother and me to make sure she got out, otherwise she would end up in the place where Josef and Walter Fischkus – those were relatives of ours – had landed. They were deported to Nisko in Poland. She had stopped writing, “Dear child or Dear Putzi.” My mother had called me Putzi and my brother Punti. If my mother called Kitty I would come very slowly, because I knew I had been up to something. She had written the letters as though they were directed to a friend.

When my brother and I were still in Vienna we gave up an apartment in the building. We then lived together with our mother in the larger apartment. My mother had to move out. At the end she was

in the 1st district, in the Lazenhof. There were four women to a room. That was her last address: Lazenhof 2/Door 13. These buildings were owned by the Jewish Community. That's where they housed the Jews before they were deported. My mother was deported to Minsk on May 22nd, 1942 [*Malwine Pistol was deported to Maly Trostinec near Minsk on May 20th, 1942 and murdered on May 26th, 1942. Source: DÖW Database*].

In Manchester we lived in a Bed & Breakfast that was rented to the Jewish Committee. The owner was Mr. Ackermann, also Jewish. It was a two-story house. Beneath it was an air-raid shelter with bunk beds. My friend Ilse and I signed up for the Air Raid wardens. We had helmets and dark blue uniforms with gold buttons. When the sirens went off we went to the outpost. During Christmas 1940 the Germans began to bomb Manchester – the harbors, the churches, even the horse racetracks where dog races also took place. Bombs even fell on our street. There was a sort of vacant field there where the children always played soccer. The next day there was suddenly a large hole. There were rockets that bounced along the entire street, destroying all the houses. The people ran below the stairs in their houses because there weren't that many air-raid shelters. Many survived there. Then the German airplanes stopped flying to Manchester; it was too far for them. At first I worked in a factory that manufactured uniforms. I earned 2.10 pounds a week there.

The collapse of France was in June 1940. That's when the English began to detain people. They said that Austrians were also Germans, because there was no more Austria after Hitler's invasion. But the majority didn't know that. There were also non-Jews that fled for political reasons. They were also interned. I was only 15; they interned women starting at 16. My brother was detained for nine months. First in an old factory in Manchester, then he was brought to the Isle of Man. Refugees were also sent to Australia and Canada and interned there. They just wanted to cast them away; they simply weren't needed. My cousin was also on one of these ships and stayed in Australia. They robbed the whole crew. They even took the wedding rings from their fingers. There was a trial after the war, but they claimed they had been drunk. They said they were sorry, but of course couldn't say where the things had ended up.

In Canada, the English said to the Germans from the merchant fleet captured at sea, "You can be pleased, a couple more Germans are coming." They then wrote on banners: "Welcome, German brothers!" But then a lot of Jews with beards, hats, and with long caftans stepped out. The Germans ran away because they were afraid of them. The Jews assimilated very quickly and worked with the Germans. At the end they all laughed about it.

My brother was released from internment after nine months. He then worked in the countryside and could sign up with the English military. To start with, the people in the Pioneer Corps only had shovels and brooms. My brother said he wouldn't let himself get shot. Then they were allowed to carry weapons. My brother was sent relatively quickly to the second front. He arrived on an American ship where everyone from the captain to the runners were Jewish. They went to France and eventually my brother landed at the Lüneburg Heath. He experienced a lot of horrible things; there was still much fighting.

In 1946 I once danced with a Russian in plainclothes in the Vienna city park. He spoke good German. He asked me why I couldn't speak German very well. I said that I was in England for eight years. He was from somewhere near Minsk. I asked him about the murder of the Jews there. He said, "Yes, there was something there, an incineration site. There was always smoke rising from it."

He was still a child but his parents told him there was a German extermination camp there.

I don't know for how long people were in transit. Many railway workers in Vienna were in the resistance. I was told that they sealed up boxcars and in Gross-Enzersdorf, just outside of Vienna, ran gas into the cars. I thought, at least my mother suffered less. The people were in the cattle cars without water, food, without a toilet, without everything.

When this letter returned with the "undeliverable" note it still wasn't clear to me what had happened. I only found out in 1943. Ships with weapons and food were sent to Russia. That was called Lend Lease. They had loaned the goods to Russia, so to speak, since Russia naturally couldn't pay for them. I met a sailor who said they had always called into port at Murmansk because all the other ports were frozen in winter. They weren't allowed to go down; the Russians came on board. And that's when the Russians told them that the Germans were murdering many, many Jews – in various camps in Russia and Poland. I didn't know yet that my mother was sent to Minsk. I only learned that after the war from the Religious Community, where she had been deregistered. I also wrote to the Police Registry Office in Vienna. They asked me why I wanted to know that. Because of inheritance, I said. And it was also written there: departed to Minsk in May 1942 – as per the Jewish Religious Community. The Jewish Community apparently deregistered people.

In Manchester I had begun working in an exports office that exported textiles to Africa. Then I had a post in the office of a steel factory. My friend Ilse moved in with an English family and was working as an elevator girl at Henry Brothers, a small department store. Her parents got in touch after the war. The Maurer family survived the war. Mrs. Maurer's mother died of old age – they said later – in an old age home on See-Gasse. She was already well over 80. Ilse's parents and her brother immigrated to America in 1949 and Ilse went in early 1950. Ilse and her brother live in America.

In June 1946 I went to London and worked for the same company, but at the headquarters.

## **Back to Vienna**

I came back to Austria in October 1946. My brother arrived in December. I went immediately to Vienna. My father's eldest brother went to the Jewish Community and said, "My niece is coming to Vienna. I would like to rent a room for her." They said, "When is your niece coming?" He said, "On October 2nd." They said, "Your niece must not be a Jew." He asked, "What is that supposed to mean?" "October 2nd is Yom Kippur." I had no idea that it was Yom Kippur – this was six weeks before, mind you. My Uncle then angrily left the Jewish Community.

I then lived with a friend of my mother's and worked for some time in an office for the English in Vienna. Later I got a room from the Jewish Community in the 1st district on Maria-Theresien-Strasse, right behind the Community. I lived there for a few months. That's where I met my future husband. The parents of my husband, Dr. Otto Suschny, who was born in Vienna on August 28th, 1924, were deported to Minsk in 1942 and murdered. His father, Siegfried, was a sales representative and his mother, Adele, was a seamstress. He was an only child and spent his childhood in Vienna. In 1939 he escaped to Palestine by legal means. He studied and worked on a kibbutz there and was with the military, the Royal Army Service Corps, for three and a half years. After returning to Vienna my husband studied chemistry. I met him in 1947 during a Passover [

*Holiday commemorating Jewish liberation from Egypt*] celebration. He worked for the International Atomic Energy Agency from 1957 until retirement.

## **My Own Family History**

Just before we were married we moved to a home on Tempel-Gasse [2nd district]. That was a home from the Jewish Community for the homeless. There was a communal kitchen on Tempel-Gasse; a lot of poor wretches lived there who were in the camps or doing forced labor. We had a giant room, but with borrowed furniture that was taken from the Nazis. Then I went to Rosa Jochmann regarding an apartment. She was a unique woman. I told her that I had been in England, and she said to me something like, "Don't trust people! I was in a concentration camp so I know what I'm talking about. They're all criminals and crooks, including my tenants." She said she received almost nothing assigned by the Jewish Community. When my husband and I got married we would have been happy to come by an apartment. We didn't have any money, of course. At the time my husband had a scholarship and I wasn't earning very much. I then went to the Jewish National Fund. They said it was difficult; they would see what they could do. Then we got a really small apartment in the 18th district from the Jewish Community. Finally, four walls of our own!

About three years later, in 1957, we had our first daughter, Eva-Ruth, who will be 45 this summer. We tried to get a larger apartment, of course. After three years, in 1960, I was pregnant again and we had our second daughter, Dinah. The apartment was then much too small. Then we looked for a larger apartment and received one from the "Sozialbau" [*non-profit housing association*] in the 6th district. All of sudden we had a four-room apartment. It was three-times bigger than our previous apartment, plus very centrally located. There were also two or three other Jewish families in the building. We lived there from 1961 to 1972. Our son was born in 1962. In 1972 we moved into the house where we are still living.

Eva-Ruth, married Dombrowski, lives consciously Jewish with her family. She was also in Israel in her youth, studied medicine in Vienna, and works as a doctor. She has three children: Daliah, Sonja, and Raphael. Her children attend Jewish religious lessons.

Dinah, married Nemesszeghy, works as a medical engineering employee. She has a son, Joachim.

Peter is a conscious Jew, but doesn't live accordingly whatsoever. He is married and has a son, Martin, and a daughter, Yvonne. He is self-employed.

Gradually our children got married and moved out. First the younger daughter, a little bit later our elder daughter, and then our son.

In 1984 there was a meeting of emigrants in Southport. There I spoke with Mrs. Livingston, who worked in the Jewish Committee, about my mother. And I said to her that my mother was killed because of a lousy 50 pounds, which I could have later paid back ten times over. Mrs. Livingstone felt personally attacked, but I hadn't meant it that way.

We have a lot of friends. Our non-Jewish friends are all 20 years younger than us; some are even from Nazi families.

We've been back in Vienna for over 50 years now. No one thought about reparations or provisions. They even tried to prevent people, who had hoped they'd be called back, from returning. There are

so many examples: There was the couple, Charlotte and Karl Bühler, both psychologists, who had to emigrate. They waited the entire time for Austria to call them back, which Austria didn't do. Then he received an honorary distinction and they named a pavilion after him. It's all window dressing in my eyes. The Kuffner family was the proprietor of the Ottakringer brewery. The Kuffner family legalized the sale of the brewery to Mr. Harner in 1946, but no one was interested in Mr. Kuffner. There is a Kuffner Observatory and a Kuffner-Gasse. And if I even think about the Klimt paintings that belonged to Mrs. Altmann – it's all so unbelievable! I was at an event that discussed this topic. There was a blonde, blue-eyed, very stylish woman who said that they took away her grandparents' banking license, which no one had found worth the while to return. Maria Altmann also sat on the podium. There are so many examples. The state got rich and was able to restore itself from the displacement and murder of the Jews.