



# 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of The National Fund

## A Closer Look and Future Prospects

National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism



10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Fund  
A Closer Look and Future Prospects

National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism

	<b>Foreword</b>	
	Dr. Heinz Fischer, Federal President .....	5
	Dr. Andreas Khol, President of the National Council and Chairman of the National Fund .....	6
	Secretary General Mag. Hannah M. Lessing .....	9
<b>1</b>	<b>Origin</b>	
	<b>Overview</b> 10 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Fund – Late Attempt at Building Bridges .....	12
	<i>Renate S. Meissner</i>	
<b>2</b>	<b>From Legislation to the Establishment of the Fund in Practice</b>	
	<b>Overview</b> .....	20
<b>3</b>	<b>Conditions for the Award of Benefits</b>	
	<b>Overview</b> .....	24
	“... finally recognised as a victim after all these years...” - Victim Groups .....	26
	<i>Maria Luise Lanzrath, Nina Bjalek</i>	
	<b>Life Stories:</b>	
	Franz Hahs, Austria .....	29
	Karl Bayer, Austria .....	30
	Julius Lintner, Australia .....	46
	August Weiß, Austria .....	50
	Frank P. Grad, USA .....	52
	Wilhelm Horvath, Austria .....	57
	Gerhard Heide-Mattkey, Austria .....	58
	Emilie Benda, Austria .....	60
	Maria Brumnik, Austria .....	64
	Maria Brežjak, Austria .....	66
	Erwin Widschwentner, Austria .....	67
	Johann Riebl, Germany .....	70
	Karl Hamedler, Austria .....	72
	Cölestine Ameisbichler, Austria .....	74
	Hella Fixel, Austria .....	76
	Charles Hirsch, USA .....	79
	Ilse Riegler, Israel .....	82
	Mano Fischer, Austria .....	84
	Benno Ruda, Israel .....	85
<b>4</b>	<b>Processing the Symbolic Payment</b>	
	<b>Overview</b> .....	88
	<b>Life Stories:</b>	
	Heinz Kalmar, Austria .....	93
	Kitty B. Wood, USA .....	94

<b>5</b>	<b>The National Fund's Tasks</b>	
	<b>Overview</b> .....	98
	5.1. Source of Information .....	98
	5.2. Compensation for Loss of Apartment and Small Business Leases .....	99
	<i>"It took until 2001 ..." – Compensation for apartment and small business leases</i> .....	100
	<i>Maria Luise Lanzrath</i>	
	<b>Life Stories:</b>	
	<i>Frances Howard, Great Britain</i> .....	102
	<i>Richard Horowitz, USA</i> .....	106
	<i>Lisa Granér and Susanne Ladow, Sweden</i> .....	111
	<i>Heinz Folk, Belgium</i> .....	114
	5.3. Restitution of Works of Art .....	116
	5.4. Project Development .....	118
	National Fund-supported projects – Creating a bridge between young and old, then and now .....	118
	<i>Evelina Merhaut</i>	
	<b>Life Story:</b>	
	<i>Helena Th., Austria</i> .....	135
	5.5. The Hardship Fund .....	138
	5.6. Administration of Looted Gold .....	138
	5.7. Administering the General Settlement Fund .....	139
	The General Settlement Fund for Victims of National Socialism	
	– Continuing the work of the National Fund?! .....	140
	<i>Christine Schwab</i>	
	Home Visits – "It's good that you're here ... even if you are 60 years too late!" .....	154
	<i>Walter Amtmann</i>	
<b>6</b>	<b>Summary and Perspectives</b>	
	<b>Overview</b> .....	158
	<i>"What has become of you?" – Reuniting families and friends</i> .....	160
	<i>Helmut Wartlik, Martin Niklas</i>	
	<b>Overview</b> .....	173
	Excerpts from Letters .....	174
	Abbreviations .....	177
	Authors .....	178
	Acknowledgments and Imprint .....	179





In this anniversary year of 2005, we remember many different historical events. The National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism is also celebrating its anniversary this year, as it is now ten years since the Fund

was established by a resolution of the National Council. Over the last ten years, as a gesture of goodwill, this fund has been able to make payments that express the special responsibility of the Republic of Austria towards the victims of the National Socialist regime.

Like its predecessor five years ago, the publication of this progress report of the National Fund offers the opportunity to take a look at the serious efforts that have been made towards reconciliation and the coming to terms with the darker side of the history of our country. As many people know, dealing with the victims of National Socialism has not always been what it should be in a democratic, open and tolerant society and state. But this look at our own weaknesses should not hold us back from noting and welcoming the progress that has been made in the search for historical truth. In the ten years of its existence the staff at the National Fund has done outstanding work. As part of the symbolic payments, over 31,000 questionnaires have been processed and more than 29,000 payments have been made to the victims of the Nazi dictatorship or their heirs. In the context of the compensation for loss of apartment and small business leases more than 22,000 questionnaires have been processed and more than 20,000 payments have been made.

We all know that these payments can never be more than a gesture, but even gestures are important if we are seeking true and lasting reconciliation. And I know from personal contacts that this gesture is certainly recognised and appreciated, even if it sometimes occurs away from the glare of publicity. Indeed, this makes it even more effective as a way of approaching those people who have long waited for a sign that Austria has not forgotten them. Many of the victims have not lived to experience this gesture. Even the eye-witnesses who can report at first hand what happened under National Socialism are becoming fewer by the day. So I regard it as an especially important task of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism to finance projects dedicated to documenting the past and to subjecting it to a critical scientific-historical review, as well as to remembering victims of National Socialism in an appropriate way. To keep the human dimension at the forefront of our minds, the present report by the National Fund includes descriptions of the fateful lives of some of these victims. It is hoped that this will help to keep their memory alive.

On the occasion of its tenth anniversary, I should like to express my great respect for the work of the National Fund and to thank all the staff for their outstanding work. They have carried it out with great understanding and commitment. The National Fund has become a symbol of how to deal with history and has accomplished much good work.

Federal President Dr. Heinz Fischer



**In the Moscow Declaration** of the four allied powers in the year 1943, Austria was designated the first victim of National Socialism. The Austrian identity was built up on this declaration in the first four decades following the restoration of the Re-

public of Austria. It defined Austria's legal status in national and international law.

On the other hand, this victim role also made it easier to overlook the many thousands of fellow-countrymen who themselves became perpetrators serving the wrongful rule of National Socialism. Self-delusion at the very outset of the Second Republic?

The fact that practically all the members of the Federal Government under Chancellor Leopold Figl in 1945 had themselves been victims of the regime helped to smooth over the differences between the two main parties that were to direct the fortunes of the young Second Republic after the first free elections in 1945. Their work of rebuilding began at a time when only a small percentage of Austrians really believed in the Austrian nation. The more Austria became a nation in the consciousness of its citizens, the more it was prepared to admit that many of its citizens became perpetrators under the wrongful rule of National Socialism and that the Republic bore the responsibility for this. Federal Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel formulated the Austrian consensus as follows: "I shall never agree to Austria not being seen as a victim. This country was the first military victim of the Nazis when it was robbed of its identity. But I don't wish to give the impression that we want to minimise or gloss over the individual guilt

of many perpetrators in any way,

As early as 1991 Federal Chancellor Franz Vranitzky declared from the government benches in front of the whole Austrian National Council that the Austrian Federal Government recognised "a moral responsibility for the actions of our citizens" in connection with the crimes of National Socialism. This new approach of getting distance to a more victim role was complemented and deepened by a key-note speech of the same Federal Chancellor at Hebrew University in Jerusalem on June 9, 1993: Austria should not be burdened with collective guilt, but "we recognise collective responsibility". Collective responsibility for every one of us to remember and to search for justice. All parties represented in the National Council concurred with this statement of principle; it expressed the new consensus, the condition for the foundation of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism.

When I took over the position of parliamentary group leader of the Austrian People's Party, the smaller partner in the Vranitzky-Busek government, in November 1994, the question of reparations to the victims of National Socialism as a gesture of goodwill was one of the great political projects of the Republic. The aim, as expressed by a declaration of intent by the Federal Government, was for the project to come to fruition in time for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Austria in April 1945. On the basis of consensus on the question of the role of Austria as victim and of the active role played by many Austrians in Nazi

crimes, Peter Kostelka, parliamentary group leader of the Austrian Social Democratic Party, and I were able to complete the legislative work and put forward a deputies' initiative setting up the National Fund. In our bill we emphasised that Austria had an obligation to remember the immeasurable suffering that National Socialism had inflicted on millions of people, and to bear in mind the fact that Austrians too had been involved in these crimes. This implies a moral responsibility "to recognise the suffering that was caused to people in Austria by National Socialism and to help them in a special way". The establishment of the Fund introduced a new and fruitful phase in Austrian legislation and for the support, or at least the partial compensation, of the victims.

The Reconciliation Fund Law for voluntary payments to former slave labourers and forced labourers of the Nazis was to follow in the year 2000. Then in 2001, as part of the Washington Agreement, compensation for loss of apartment and small business leases was provided for and the General Settlement Fund was created.

This all shows that there was a consensus of all the parties represented in the National Council that the time had come for the Republic of Austria to accept its responsibilities and take appropriate action without further delay. On my last visit to the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, in December last year, President Reuven Rivlin warmly acknowledged this in his speech of welcome – adding that it had all come "a little late" – a polite reference to the fact that Austria first had to find itself as an independent nation before it could

move on from its comfortable "victim" role to one of responsibility.

When we look back today at the last ten years of work in the National Fund and at the other more recently established funds, we find no grounds merely to sit back and feel satisfied with our achievements. The National Fund is an ongoing institution. Even if there are fewer and fewer applications from direct claimants, that is to say, those who themselves are victims of persecution by the National Socialist regime, the second essential task of the National Fund remains: support for projects. This project work – an ongoing task of the Fund – is becoming increasingly important as a way of keeping the memory of Nazi crimes alive and of recognising the suffering of the victims.

The General Settlement Fund covers a broad field. The international legal treaty underlying it stipulates that the Fund's provided should be divided proportionately among all the legitimate claims made. Only when the total amount claimed has been established and legal closure has been reached at the international level can this Fund commence payments. We must do everything we can to complete this work with the same efficiency and thoroughness as the other funds. We can therefore say that the ten years of work by the Austrian National Fund for Victims of National Socialism has been successful so far – but that more work remains to be done.

President of the National Council Dr. Andreas Khol,  
Chairman of the National Fund







The year of remembrance 2005 is also a special year for the National Fund. For more than ten years now we have been trying to make a contribution to Austria's efforts to achieve reconciliation, always con-

scious that no amount of reparations can ever compensate for what happened.

In many meetings with survivors now living in various countries throughout the world, I have constantly been impressed by the warmth and openness with which I as a representative of Austria have been welcomed – by people who experienced terrible things during the National Socialist period, having been forced into emigration and lost their youth and in many cases their families. Despite this, many of them still feel strong ties with their old homeland.

This volume is intended to do more than give an insight into the work done so far by the National Fund. It is also designed to give a voice to people who for far too long have not been heard and whose lives are a living part of Austria's history. Many of them were willing to share their memories with us for this volume and in doing so to revive the memory of painful experiences once again – we should like to express our special thanks to them at this point.

The Life Stories presented here are only a few of over 30,000 that are held by the National Fund. The staff of the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund are aware, however, that every single life story is something special and unique and is worthy of a book all to itself.

On my journeys to visit the people concerned, as well as through personal contacts here in Vienna in our offices, we have got to know people who have left their mark on our lives; people who have taught us humility; people who have shown us that, even if the pain never goes away, a coming together is still possible. We have met some fine people. It is a privilege for me and my colleagues to do this work.

The team that accompanies me has increased in number throughout these years. I should like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to everyone who has worked with me, whether from the beginning or for a limited time or only in recent years. Without my fellow-workers, especially my two deputies, Dr. Renate S. Meissner and Mag. Christine Schwab, I doubt whether we could have put the idea of this delayed reconciliation into practice.

Particular thanks are due to both the former Chairman of the Board of Trustees Dr. Heinz Fischer and the present Chairman Dr. Andreas Khol, who succeeded in guiding me along this path with thoughtfulness, sensitivity and a particular understanding of the importance of this work.

I should also like warmly to thank the members of the Committee and the Board of Trustees for their years of close co-operation.

General Secretary Mag. Hannah M. Lessing



# 1. Origin

# 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Fund

Late Attempt at Building Bridges

Renate S. Meissner

The aim of the National Fund is to acknowledge moral responsibility for the suffering that was caused to people in Austria by National Socialism, and to help the victims in a special way, in the full knowledge that no "reparations" can ever compensate for the suffering endured.<sup>1</sup>

**These were the words** of Federal President Dr. Heinz Fischer in his then function as first President of the National Council and Chairman of the Board of Trustees and Committee on the occasion of the establishment of the National Fund. They symbolise what has characterised the National Fund from the beginning. They represent the mission with which it has been charged by law, and for what its staff has achieved through it:

an institution that from the start recognised the importance of being a partner and a point of contact for all victims of National Socialism, and to do this within the framework of the symbolic payment process provided for in the National Fund Law more than fifty years after the re-establishment of the Republic.

<sup>1</sup>Quoted from: Die vergessene Schuld, in: Aufbau, 21 July 1995.

Although it was set up as a temporary institution, the National Fund is now celebrating its tenth anniversary and has gone far beyond its original mission. In the course of its activity it has been entrusted with responsibility for looted art works from the Austrian Federal Museums, the distribution of “looted gold” funds and for overseeing compensation for loss of apartment and small business leases, as well as with administrative support for the General Settlement Fund.

We should like this anniversary to be an opportunity to give those affected and their families, as well as the general public at home and abroad, an insight into the multi-faceted tasks of the National Fund and offer a retrospective over the ten years of the Fund’s existence.

When the National Fund was set up on 30 June 1995 it was founded under the auspices of parliament in order to underline its importance and to express the will of the Republic that the supreme representative body of the Austrian nation, the parliament, regards itself as responsible for the institution of the Fund and its aims.

The path leading to its creation was long, and would not have been possible without a process of re-thinking on the part of Austrians on a social and political level over a period of decades.

**It was a speech** by the then Federal Chancellor Dr. Franz Vranitzky, given in the National Council at the time of the crisis in Yugoslavia in July 1991, that helped to lay the foundation for the National Fund on a political level. In it he called for rigorous standards to be applied to an assessment of our own history as well as that of others. He stressed both Austria's shared responsibility and the readiness of the Federal Government to do something for the victims

who had been either insufficiently provided for or even completely overlooked or whose moral or material claims had been disregarded<sup>2</sup>.

This represented the first official departure from the myth of Austria as the very "first victim" of Hitler:

We acknowledge all the facts of our history and the actions, both good and evil, of all parts of our people; and just as we take pride in the good actions, we also apologise – to the survivors themselves and the surviving relatives of the dead – for the evil ones.<sup>3</sup>

For Austria these words mark the beginning of a new way of dealing with its past. In the same year the Committee for Petitions and Citizens' Initiatives dealt with the question of compensation for the "Döllersheimer", the group of persons who were re-settled from their villages – the "Döllersheimer Ländchen", Lower Austria – to make room for the Allentsteig military training ground.

On 13 March 1992 in the National Council the Green Party inquired at the Federal Government about crimes against Jews and all victims of the Third Reich in Austria, as well as the previous restitution and compensation measures taken by Austria after 1945.

<sup>2</sup>Shorthand records, National Council, XVIII<sup>th</sup> legislative period, 35<sup>th</sup> sitting, 8.7.1991, pp. 3282f.  
<sup>3</sup>ibid.

Finally, in November 1993, the Committee for Petitions, which was dealing with the question of compensation for the “Döllersheimer”, stated in its report that this problem arose not only in the case of these resettled people, but also in that of numerous other victims of National Socialism:

Therefore, ways ought to be found to help in the most unbureaucratic and humane manner possible all persons who were victims of National Socialism and had not been compensated for the suffering caused to them. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Second Republic should not be allowed to pass before this open question has been dealt with.<sup>4</sup>

These beginnings set political negotiations in motion; after an all-party resolution proposal and several debates, finally in 1994 a deputies’ initiative was tabled to establish a National Fund Law.

The question was how to express shared responsibility for the atrocities of the Nazi regime on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Republic. The idea was to finally set up a fund that in the form of a symbolic payment would express an official apology to those affected and serve as a recognition of their persecution under National Socialist rule. The fund would furthermore provide the opportunity to support victims of National Socialism on an individual basis in cases of special need, and also promote projects that would benefit victims of National Socialism, preserve their memory and serve as a warning from the past.

The cornerstone was laid by the deputies Dr. Peter Kostelka and Dr. Andreas Khol – the current Chairman of the Board of Trustees and of the Committee of the National Fund, when on 9 May 1995, exactly fifty years after the end of the Second World War in Europe,

<sup>4</sup>Shorthand records, National Council, XVIIIth legislative period, supplement 1350 of the appendices, p. 6.



they introduced their deputies' initiative in the National Council proposing a federal law to create a National Fund. It was passed by majority vote in the Constitutional Committee on 29 May 1995.

### Structure of the Fund

The organs of the Fund are the Board of Trustees, the Committee and the Secretary General. The Board of Trustees comprises the three Presidents of the National Council, the Federal Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Social Affairs and Generations, the Minister of Finance and the Minister for Education, Science and Cultural Affairs, plus a further twelve members chosen by the Principal Committee of the National Council. These latter members are representatives of victim groups, members of the National Council and the Federal Council and respected figures from cultural, scientific and public life in Austria.

The Chairman of the Board of Trustees and of the Committee is the President of the National Council. Among the most important functions of the Board of Trustees is the issuing of guidelines for the granting of benefits and establishing the benefits that must be decided by the Committee. The Committee is the body that offers speedy and unbureaucratic decisions; the General Secretary is responsible for presenting the information that forms the basis for the Committee's decisions.



The new office premises in Vienna 7, Kirchberggasse 33





## 2. From Legislation to the Establishment of the Fund in Practice

**When in July 1995** I was appointed by parliament to work with the Fund until the establishment of a General Secretariat\*, I set up a provisional office in one of the meeting rooms in the parliament building. As yet there were no definite ideas as to how the Republic was going to put this law into practice. All I knew was that the Fund was to become an office for people who had become victims of National Socialism sixty years earlier. A place where these people could meet present-day representatives of the Republic of Austria, a place of listening, a place of understanding, a place where it might be possible to make a mental connection with positive aspects of life before 1938.

Once my own temporary telephone connection had been installed, the phone calls began. Within 14 days I had already received numerous calls from individuals from all over the world and a whole variety of victim groups. Almost all of them expressed the wish to meet me personally. I set up a quiet corner behind a screen, away from other office staff, so that people could recount their life stories in an undisturbed way.

At this point in time there were no application forms, no organisational structures, and no contacts with institutions that held important documents relating to the legally required data such as residence, right of domicile etc.

After the nomination of the Secretary General, Hannah M. Lessing, the first task was to set up our own office, and build up an efficient but at the same time unbureaucratic administration and internal organisation. Thereafter, one of the most difficult and important jobs was to discover whereabouts in the world of the victims who qualified for recognition by the National Fund. This time we could not

\*Here I should like to express my particular thanks to Dr. Susanne Janistyn, who was charged by the then President of the National Council Dr. Heinz Fischer with overseeing the beginnings of the Fund's activities, for her sensitive approach and enthusiastic co-operation.

fail to reach as many people as possible, so that they could benefit from this late recognition by the Republic. How many people were entitled to claim and especially, how many of them had survived the Holocaust and how many of them were still alive now, in the middle of the 1990s? Finding the answers to these questions was a task that was very close to the heart of the Secretary General, who undertook many journeys all around the world in seeking out the relevant people and then talking to them, bringing them a message from a distant homeland from which many of them had since become alienated. In this way the National Fund succeeded in making contact with over 30,000 directly affected persons in 78 countries spread over all continents. The majority of them live in the USA, Austria, Israel, Great Britain, Australia, and Canada. Others reside today in Uruguay, Chile, Bolivia, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Panama, the Philippines, China, and India. There are also some in Zimbabwe, Kenya, Thailand, Malawi, Morocco, the Seychelles, Trinidad and Tobago, and Senegal. Yet others live in Andorra, Iceland, and Lithuania. And these are only some examples!

Many of the victim groups who were forced to emigrate stayed where they had ended up after their flight, which lasted months or even years. Only a few of those who would have liked to return home were able to do so. By an irony of fate, those who still felt drawn towards their home country often used the long delayed symbolic payments to visit the home that they still loved despite everything – a re-union that filled many with deep satisfaction:

Your letter reached me a few days before my 88<sup>th</sup> birthday. This is like a wonderful present from a friend that I thought I had lost forever. I shall use your money to buy things that I couldn't otherwise afford. I shall use it for a long holiday in the home country after almost 60 years! You have made an old lady very happy.





## 3. Conditions for the Award of Benefits



**The National Fund** of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism was established per federal law (BGBl. Nr. 432/1995) on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Second Republic. The aim was to express Austria's special responsibility towards the victims of the Nazi regime.

The establishment of the National Fund with the Parliament reflects this objective. The President of the National Assembly presides over the Board of Trustees and the Committee, which are the executive bodies of the National Fund. Eligible for payments by the National Fund ("gesture payments") are all persons who were persecuted by the Nazi regime for "political reasons, reasons of origin, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, a physical or mental disability or for the accusation of so-called asociality" or "who were otherwise victims of typical national socialist injustice". The National Fund, for the first time, took into consideration Nazi victims who until then had experienced no or inadequate recognition by the Republic of Austria; the "Spiegelgrund children", homosexuals, victims of Nazi military justice, and Roma and Sinti.<sup>5</sup>

There was a great concern, in personal contact with people who visited the National Fund office, to listen to those who did not qualify for benefits under the National Fund Law as it stood. In some cases these persons were able to derive some comfort from being listened to, although for many the fact that they were not officially recognised by the Republic was emotionally hard to take. Such cases emerging in practice were brought to the attention of the Committee by the General Secretariat. By interpreting the relevant legal passages, the National Fund Committee then recognised broader categories of persons as victims in the meaning of the law.

<sup>5</sup>In accordance with the guidelines of the National Fund Law, comparable circumstances will always include birth in a ghetto, internment camp or similar constraints.



These categories now included widows and widowers and surviving dependants of people who had been executed. Originally not recognised as “heirs” of victims of Nazi persecution in the meaning of the law, they were now recognised as victims of Nazism themselves. This was based on the recognition that as widows or widowers and surviving dependants of those who were murdered because of their efforts to achieve a free and democratic Austria they were themselves exposed to harassment and discrimination of various kinds. For example, they received far fewer ration cards, or none at all. For this group it was a welcome gesture from the Republic to be given this late recognition in their own name as well as in the name of their murdered partners or parents.

"...finally recognised as a victim after all these years."

## Victim Groups

Maria Luise Lanzrath, Nina Bjalek

In **accordance** with the persecution criteria named in § 2 section 1.1, the National Fund Law recognises different groups of persons as victims of National Socialism. The symbolic payment is offered to all persons belonging to these groups as an expression of their recognition.

### Persecution on political grounds

Political persecution affected persons who were active in the resistance, of course, but it also affected those whose anti-Nazi stance was expressed, for example, in comments or actions critical of the regime. Many were arrested and prosecuted, charged with "undermining military morale", "preparation for high treason" or "breach of the Treachery Act". Persecution was directed both against civilians and against members of the Wehrmacht who were victims of Nazi military justice. Finally, in individual cases conscientious objectors and deserters from the Wehrmacht (only a few persons belong to this group in Austria today) were recognised as victims of political persecution, in recognition that their refusal to bear arms was a form of resistance. Every deserter faced the death penalty:

"At the front you may die, as a deserter you must die."

(Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf)

Deserters who had defected were sentenced to death in absentia and if later recaptured by German troops were not treated according to the Geneva Convention. They faced execution.

**N. N. | Austria**

N. N., a member of the Wehrmacht, was stationed in Slovenia in 1944. In the early autumn of 1944 he deserted, joined the antifascist movement and fought in a partisan unit. However, he was taken prisoner by the Germans and held in custody in Klagenfurt, accused of desertion and giving aid and comfort to the enemy. To save his life, he stated that he had not joined the partisans of his own free will, but that he had been kidnapped.

N. N. was sentenced to be posted to the front line as part of a probationary unit. Such units were deployed for particularly dangerous operations and were treated as cannon fodder.

Another category of persons recognised as victims of political persecution according to the National Fund Law were those who, motivated by their political beliefs, went to Spain to fight against General Franco in the Spanish Civil War, and who on their return from Spain were interned in French prison camps and subsequently handed over to the German Reich and held in concentration camps.



**Franz Hahs** was born in Vienna in 1914. In 1937 he went to Spain, where he joined the International Brigades of the Spanish Republican Army. On 9 February 1939, in the course of combat operations, he was taken prisoner by Franco's army and was then held in various prisoner-of-war

camps. In the autumn of 1941 he was handed over to the German authorities and survived several concentration camps.

#### *The Story of My Life*

*I was born on 8 December 1914 in Vienna, the son of Franz Hahs, a journeyman belt-maker, and Therese Hahs, née Faimann. I attended the elementary school for five years and the secondary school for three. During my school-days, I was a member of the "Rote Falken" [Red Falcons, social democratic youth organisation]. From 11 November 1929 to 11 November 1932, I trained as a mechanic with the firm of Metheor. On 14 December 1929 I joined the Austrian Metal Workers Association and remained in membership until February 1934. Through this association I was able to attend several courses in Trade Union*

## "...code name Ernst"

*affairs. On 16 February 1934 I lost my job for taking part in a strike. In March 1934 I began to work with the "Rote Front" [Red Front – Workers' Militia] and then joined the KPÖ [Austrian Communist Party] with the Leo Kuhn Group. This group was one cell in the "Unterbezirksleitung 13" [sub-district 13 executive group], where I functioned as First Man. After two months I was moved to the "Unterbezirksleitung 8", where I carried out the same function under the code name of Mayer until mid-1935. From June 1935 until March 1937 I was assigned to Band and later to Braun as courier for the "Wiener Bau" and to the Central Committee under the name of Lustig. From March to May I belonged to the "Wiener Bau" where I had the code name of Ernst. In early June I had to take a job that the Labour Exchange had assigned to me.*

*In September 1937, Regional Executive 3 gave their approval for me to travel to Spain. On 21 September I left Vienna and arrived in Spain on the 27<sup>th</sup> of the month. In Albacete I was kitted out and sent to Madrigueras, the recruitment base for Brigade 11. I was sent to the IMG School in Torsillo. In early November 1937 I travelled with the recruits to the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 2nd Battalion. In December I was taken to the hospital suspected of having ty-*

Zur Vorlage bei  
 Herr, Frau, Gel. Franz Hahs, August, 8.12.1914  
in Wien geb., öster., eh., gesch., seit 2.9.1950  
KM, Laimthalerberg 6 gem. wurde am 24.1.1942  
von d. Geh. Staatspolizei dem Polizeigefängnis  
eingeliefert und am 27.3.1942 dem KL. Dachau  
überstellt.

phus. I was discharged in January. After the retreat from Belchite I was decorated by the Brigade Commander. Shortly after, I was posted to the special company of the 35<sup>th</sup> Division. In the Ebro offensive I was wounded by a bomb fragment. In the great retreat in Catalonia I volunteered for front line duty and on 2 February 1939 I was hit twice and seriously wounded and taken prisoner by the Fascists (concentration camps in Barcelona and Burgos). In December 1939, the Labour Disciplinary Battalion 75 was created from the International Brigade prisoners in Belchite. In June 1941 the battalion was sent to Palencia. After most of the prisoners had voluntarily gone home there were only seven Austrians remaining in captivity, along with other prisoners. Through the mediation of a former member of the Czech Embassy we tried to make contact with the Austrian Freedom Committee in London and sent them a letter in which we declared our desire to continue. At the end of October 1941 I was moved along with the rest of the Austrians to the internment camp at Meranda de Ebro. A protest note to the Camp Commandant was

fruitless, and on 28 November we were handed over to the Gestapo. In Cologne I spent seven weeks in jail and was then transferred to Vienna.

On 28 March 1942 I was sent to Dachau. In January 1944 I was taken to Lublin, and from there to Auschwitz and Mauthausen. In March 1945 I was sent to the Heinckel Works in Mödling. On 1 April I had to leave the Heinckel Works and was sent back to Mauthausen where I contracted pneumonia and then, about two weeks later, typhus. Until 28 May I was in the sickbay. The Americans transferred me to Gusen Camp, which was cleared on 14 June. On 15 June I left Mauthausen and headed for Vienna.

(written on 13 July 1945)

Franz Hahs died in Vienna on 20 May 1997. Fortunately, the symbolic payment by the Republic of Austria reached him before his death.

His widow Fini Hahs agreed to the publication of his life story: *I am very deeply touched that seven years after his death he's been remembered in this way.*



## „... I was transferred to Mauthausen.“

In 1944, at the age of 22, the airman Karl Bayer was sentenced to death for “undermining military morale”. English leaflets had been found in his aeroplane:

*One of the leaflets showed the bloodstained hand of Hitler resting on the globe.*

Der ehemalige Flieger Karl Bayer wurde mit Urteil des Feldgerichtes EbV d.I.G. Aktenzeichen 4 K St. L. 20/44 vom 19.2.1944, wegen Zersetzung der Wehrkraft zum Tode verurteilt.

*After the sentence, I was transferred to the Wehrmacht prison in Torgau, where for six months, fettered hand and foot, I awaited my execution.*

Torgau was one of eight big Wehrmacht prisons. These were not prisons as traditionally understood. The inmates were deprived of food and subjected to harassment and abuse, which often ended in death.

*I was never pardoned. In 1944, however, I was transferred to the Mauthausen Concentration Camp. Here I was assigned to the punishment battalion and was forced to work in the quarry – the “Vienna trench” – under the worst possible conditions.*





Karl Bayer, 1939

*This meant climbing the “death steps”, all 189 of them, out of the quarry, in wooden clogs, 14 times a day, carrying heavy stones on your back. I was severely ill-treated; very often beaten. The food was the same every day – a quarter of a litre of beetroot soup with unpeeled potatoes and one loaf of bread for 24 men. Later I was assigned to the bombing*

*command together with other companions from the concentration camp at the Hermann Göring Works in Linz, where we had to defuse bombs. I became seriously ill while doing this heavy work. I was taken back to Mauthausen, where, seriously ill with jaundice and pneumonia, I lay among men suffering from typhus in what was known as the Russians’ camp.*

Shortly before the liberation of Mauthausen by the Allies, Karl Bayer succeeded in escaping together with two other inmates. One of his companions fell victim to the “Volkssturm” [People’s Militia] in the last days of the war. He was shot dead before Karl Bayer’s eyes.

At his liberation Karl Bayer weighed just 46 kg; to this day he still suffers from the after-effects of his imprisonment.



FOTO: WALTER REICHL



FOTOS: WALTER REICHL

The former concentration  
camp Mauthausen in the  
commemorative year 2005







Küchen-  
Baracke





























## “I refused to comprehend the spirit of the Nazi times”

**Julius Lintner** came from a traditionally monarchist family with Austro-Hungarian roots. At the time of the occupation of Austria he was 18 years old.

*I remember the day of the plebiscite. My father came home and said: “From today I no longer have a homeland. Now I want to die ...”*

*Up to that point I had been relatively non-political. In 1938 I read Adolf Hitler’s “Mein Kampf” and was horrified. From then on I opposed National Socialism. I was not prepared to fight for this regime at any price. Since the outbreak of the war I had listened daily to the news from the Austrian foreign service broadcasting from Paris. At first, I hoped the war would end quickly and that there would be a revolution.*

In 1940, Julius Lintner was drafted into the Reich Labour Service (Reichsarbeitsdienst or RAD). This was unacceptable to him, as it was a paramilitary National Socialist organisation. As he was also unwilling to serve in the German Wehrmacht, he deserted the RAD after

only three days. After having been stationed in Burgenland, he first fled across the nearby border to Budapest. He wanted to keep going until he reached France, so that he could join an Austrian battalion and fight against Nazi Germany. However he was handed over to the Gestapo and taken back to Vienna.

Julius Lintner recalls:

*At the court-martial the prosecutor pointed at me and said: “The accused is a typical representative of that corrupt minority in our nation that refuses to comprehend the spirit of our modern times.” This was of course quite true. I did refuse to comprehend the spirit of the Nazi times.*

On 8 February 1941, after six months in custody, the court-martial finally announced the sentence: Three years imprisonment.

Julius Lintner was first imprisoned in Fortress Glatz in Upper Silesia, and then in the Wehrmacht prison camp at Salzgitter, where he had to carry out forced labour under the harshest possible conditions. After a year the sen-



tence was commuted to probation, and Julius Lintner was drafted into the army.

*During the time when I was forced to be in the Wehrmacht I did everything possible to harm it by propaganda and acts of sabotage. I often risked my life.*

In December 1943 Julius Lintner finally succeeded in deserting from the Wehrmacht. In order to avoid further persecution he managed to make his way to Sweden.

*The Wehrmacht sent my personal belongings to my family – officially I was classified as missing. But my parents knew at once that I was either in Sweden or in England.*

Today Julius Lintner lives in Australia. Recognition by the National Fund means a lot to him:

*I was very pleased to receive the 5,000 Euro. But I was even more pleased to be finally recognised by the Austrian Government as a victim of National Socialism.*

FOTO: WALTER REICHL



Today Julius Lintner lives in Australia where the memories of his former homeland are still alive.



Julius Lintner as a 17-year-old in the Ötztal mountains.

### **Reich Labour Service (RAD)**

In Germany compulsory service in the RAD was introduced, alongside universal compulsory military service, by a law of 26 June 1935. It comprised, alongside work for the community, military and war-related tasks, and was based on the National Socialist ideology. Like the Wehrmacht, the Reich Labour Service too was compulsory in the case of call-up.

The Labour Service camps of the Third Reich were organised on military principles. In the early years the senior RAD leaders were all recruited without exception from among former officers of the old Prussian army or the “Reichswehr”.

Anyone who, after medical examination, was drafted into the RAD, had to go through basic training like that for recruits. It was based on the military model of drill, marching and field exercises, as well as political indoctrination. The military aspect of the Reich Labour Service was emphasised by the system of uniforms and rank badges.

## “We, the deserters, were hated and despised“

**August Weiss** was drafted to serve in the Wehrmacht in 1941. Because of his anti-National Socialist and anti-militarist convictions, he soon deserted and was arrested at the Swiss border. The Military Court of Salzburg sentenced him for desertion, and he was transferred to the Aschendorfer Moor camp.

*“The moor was hell on earth. We were forced to discharge inhuman workloads and frequently clubbed with truncheons, some of my companions in suffering were beaten to death, others were shot while trying to escape.“*

The Aschendorfer Moor was one of the feared Emsland camps in Germany, where 1,200 to 1,500 military prisoners worked as forced labourers in the nearby moors under conditions similar to a concentration camp. Despite 10 to 14 hours of very hard daily labour, the food rations for the inmates were extremely poor.

After serving 15 months at the camp, August Weiss was transferred to the Wehrmacht prison of Torgau, Fort Zinna. Subsequently, he was dispatched to the front; at the end of the war, he was taken prisoner by the Soviets.

### Persecution on the grounds of racial origin

The overwhelming majority of persons persecuted by National Socialism on account of their racial origin were Jews. Immediately after the Anschluss, which went hand in hand with the introduction of the Nuremberg Race Laws, acts of persecution began to be committed, in form of both unauthorised and organised Aryanism, discriminatory tax levies, exclusion from school and professions, as well as violent attacks. The persecution reached its first climax in November 1938 – the “Reichskristallnacht” [Night of Broken Glass]. A policy of expulsion was followed by increasingly systematic deportations to concentration camps and finally to extermination camps. Those who by various means succeeded in fleeing the country were faced with a range of problems of emigration, such as poverty, loneliness and homesickness.

My mother managed to obtain a booking for me on board of a ship, and on 6 December 1938 I left Vienna to begin my journey to Shanghai, which was then the only place you could emigrate to without a visa. As a parting gift an SS-man who was standing guard at the tax office gave me a hefty kick. In the end I got a permit for Australia, where I arrived on 18 May 1939 and found a new homeland ... but if I have forgotten my old one I really do not know ...

Some parents who were unable to emigrate themselves did at least succeed in rescuing their children, with the aid of operations known as “Kindertransporte”. Most of these children never saw their parents again.



FOTO: DÖW

Jewish women were forced to scrub the streets.

## “The injustice of being singled out as a lesser being ...”



FOTO: ROBERT DANIEL ULLMANN

**Franz Grad** lived with his parents and sister in Vienna; in 1938 he was 14 years old and attended a “Humanistisches Gymnasium” [Grammar School focussing on the classics].

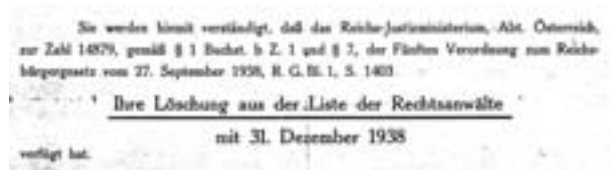
*I was a good patriotic person who belonged to the Austrian Boy Scouts. I considered Vienna my city and Austria my country and was devoted to the place, its language and its customs. I felt at home in my neighbourhood and my school. I belonged to a close family and I was close to my parents, my grandmother and my uncles.*

The Anschluss destroyed this familiar world: Jewish school children were separated from the other students and some were actually forced out of the school. Franz was excluded from the school on account of his religion.

*It was a time when I lived in fear and was exposed to persecution by the Nazis on a daily basis. Soon after the Anschluss, as I walked along the street with my mother, we were seized by a mob and forced to rub out some Dollfuss slogans from the street. Fellow students*

*and teachers who had treated me and my Jewish classmates as fellow human beings all of a sudden turned into bitter enemies, enemies moreover whom one was unable to fight.*

His father was barred from practising as a lawyer.



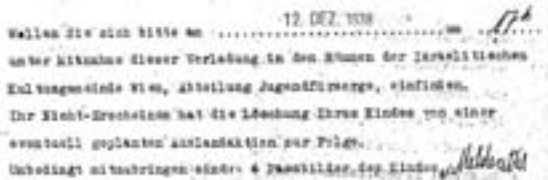
*I was present when my father received notification from the Bar that he had been disbarred as a Jew. I still remember his shock when he realised that he was no longer allowed to practise his chosen profession. All he said was: “I was afraid this would happen ...”*

Finally, in November 1938, his father was arrested and sent to the Dachau concentration camp.

*When I came home from school I did not only find that my father had been arrested but also that storm troopers had broken into my grandmother’s apartment. My grandmother*

*and my parents lived in the same house. The storm troopers had smashed the furniture and wrecked most of the apartment.*

On 12 December 1938 Franz Grad, who was then aged 15, left Vienna for England together with his younger sister on a Kindertransport – a decisive moment in his life; the next time they saw their parents again was in New York in 1939.



*The imprint and marks of my early experience, and the constant awareness, not only of the loss of so many of my relatives, but also of the loss of a significant part of my identity, is ineradicable. The injustice of being singled out as a lesser being, and the deprivation of one's right to fight back when treated as guilty of heaven knows what crimes, is still hard to bear.*

*I had to flee my country and experience many changes – I had to get used to a new lang-*

*uage and leave my mother tongue behind – and I suffered from the long separation from my parents and my family. I had planned to become a lawyer in Vienna and to follow in my father's footsteps in the Austrian courts. Instead, I had to become better than fluent in English in order to become a lawyer and law professor in the United States. Many members of my family perished in the Holocaust, including my grandmother, some of my uncles, and others who had been very close to me as a child. Me and my family lost a sense of belonging and our sense of connection with the world in which we had grown and developed.*

*As a survivor and refugee, I consider myself fortunate in many respects, simply because I am a survivor. But survival also has its problems, including the continuing sense of the losses one has experienced, the pressures of the need to adjust to a different society, as well as the very sense of guilt of being a survivor when so many were not.*

Today Frank P. Grad lives with his family in New York. He was able to achieve his original aim of becoming a lawyer like his father and is now an Emeritus Professor of Columbia University.



Wien, 15. XII. 1938

157 2. Merkblatt für die Eltern.

Kindertransport  
nach England.

- 1.) Die Abreise der Kinder erfolgt S o n n t a g, den 18. Dezember 1938 um 23 Uhr vom Westbahnhof in Wien (Abfahrt).

Es wird nochmals darauf aufmerksam gemacht, dass das Gepäck nichts enthalten darf als Gebrauchsgegenstände des Kindes und dass jedes Zuwiderhandeln zur Folge hätte, dass das Kind nicht mitgenommen werden könnte. Das Gepäck bleibt in zollamtlicher Verwahrung.

Den Kindern darf auf die Reise keinerlei Schmuck oder Wertgegenstand mitgegeben werden, ebenso ist das Mitnehmen von Musikinstrumenten und Fotoapparaten untersagt. Geld ist den Kindern gleichfall nicht mitzugeben.

Der das Gepäck abliefernde Angehörige des Kindes erhält eine N u m m e r, die das Kind s i c h t b a r bei der Abreise zu tragen hat.

- 2.) Die Kinder werden S o n n t a g, den 18. Dezember, um 21 Uhr, von bloß e i n e m Familienangehörigen zum Platze vor der Wartehalle III. Klasse, Westbahnhof, (Abfahrt), gebracht.

Die Begleitpersonen haben sich im Wartesaale von den Kindern zu verabschieden; Das Betreten des Bahnsteiges durch Begleitpersonen ist behördlicherseits ausnahmslos untersagt.

- 3.) Jedes Kind hat einen unzerbrechlichen Becher und Waschutensilien, ferner an Proviant ein Gabelfrühstück, ein Mittagessen, ein Nachtmahl auf die Reise mitzunehmen.

- 4.) Sollte ein Kind in der Zwischenzeit von der stattgehabten ärztlichen Untersuchung bis S o n n t a g, erkranken, so ist dies s o f o r t der Jugendfürsorge, beziehungsweise der Reiseleitung, bekanntzugeben.

Durch den Arzt der Kultusgemeinde wird sodann nach erfolgter Untersuchung des Kindes festgestellt werden, ob dasselbe mitgenommen werden kann oder nicht.

Heuray  
Kugel

Children with only one Jewish parent – in Nazi terminology “first-degree half-breeds” – were fundamentally vulnerable to discrimination on account of their parentage. In most cases they were exposed to concrete acts of persecution such as exclusion from school attendance or professional activity, loss of their homes and various forms of harassment. Then from 1942 there was an increasing risk of them being sent to a concentration camp. In the case of what was known as mixed marriages the “Aryan” partners were often also exposed to animosity and persecution, and quite a few of them divorced their Jewish partners.

Persons with one Jewish grandparent – “second-degree half-breeds” – were not subject to systematic discrimination in general. Where proven persecution took place, however, these persons too are treated as victims in the meaning of the National Fund Law.

11 July 1936 – the day of the “July Agreement” between Austria and the German Reich – was regarded as the day from which close observers of the political situation could have foreseen future developments in Austria. For this reason people who went into exile from 12 July 1936 to escape the threat of persecution on account of their racial origin or on political grounds have been recognised as entitled to claim.

Also, some 11,000 Austrian Roma and Sinti were exposed to systematic persecution as “gypsies”, accused of being “asocial”, or social misfits. These groups were often on the fringes of society before the National Socialist period, but now they were totally excluded and persecuted. The children were banned from attending school, and the families were deported to concentration and extermination camps and their homes destroyed. Of all the Roma and Sinti living in Austria



An affidavit from abroad could make emigration easier.



only between 2,000 and 2,500 survived. The Jewish people – mostly landless travelling traders – were subjected to similar persecution.

The biggest “gypsy camp” on Austrian territory was Lackenbach in Burgenland, from where deportations to the extermination camps took place. For the Roma and Sinti it was also difficult after the war to achieve recognition as victims of National Socialism. As recently as in the 1960s the view was expressed

... that detention in the Lackenbach camp could not be described as imprisonment or loss of liberty within the meaning of the Law on Victim Welfare ...

(Extract from a statement by the Federal Ministry for Social Administration, November 1963)



FOTO: DÖW

### Persecution on grounds of religion

Fundamentally, every person who was persecuted on grounds of religious conviction – of whatever religion – is considered a victim in the meaning of the National Fund Law. In addition to those persons persecuted on the grounds of their Jewish religion, the Jehovah’s Witnesses (“Bible Students”) also belong to this group of victims. They were regarded as enemies of the state, as they refused to join state organisations or to give the “Hitler salute”, to swear an oath on the flag or to serve in the armed forces. Up to 1945 about 2,000 Jehovah’s Witnesses were interned in concentration camps in the German Reich, and some 250 persons were executed as conscientious objectors.

Es sollte mein, erster Schultag  
werden, im September 1940.  
Aber es wurde kein Schultag  
Meine Eltern und meine  
6 Geschwister wurden an dem  
Tag Abgeschleppt nach Lackenbach.  
Mein erster Schultag war nach

“It was supposed to be  
my first day at school ...”

**Wilhelm Horvath** was born in 1934 in Langental in Burgenland. His family lived in a small house there.

*It was supposed to be my first day at school in September 1940. But it did not turn out to be a school day. On this day my parents and my six brothers and sisters were taken away and sent to Lackenbach.*

*My first day at school was not until after the*

*war, when I was almost twelve years old.*

*I wanted to learn a trade, but my three years at elementary school were not sufficient. At 15 I started to study music.*

On my return from the camp I found that the family home and everything in it had been looted and wrecked.

This is why Wilhelm Horvath has no photos from his childhood before 1945.

## “... why I didn’t give the ‘Heil Hitler’ salute ...”

**Gerhard Heide-Mattkey** came from the first Jehovah’s Witnesses family in Carinthia. He was born in Klagenfurt on 1 January 1932. In late 1942, at the age of ten, he was taken away from his father on the grounds that it was dangerous to leave a child in the care of a father who was a Bible Student (Jehovah’s Witness) and who forbade his son to give the Hitler salute and sing patriotic songs. After the war the whole Heide family was reunited.

*After my father had been dismissed from his job working for the post office for refusing to give the Hitler salute and because he would not swear the oath to Hitler, he left to join the Obweger family in St. Walburgen and to work on the farm there. I also lived there from 1940 to 1942. At the end of 1942 I was removed from my parents, which also happened to the other children of Jehovah’s Witnesses. At that time I was ten years old. As my Aunt Anna, who was then a member of the Nazi Party, used her influence on my behalf, I didn’t have to move into a reformato-*

*ry but was allowed to live with a woman in St. Veit, who was at that time headmistress of a girls’ secondary school in St. Veit. Although my guardian never put any pressure on me about my opinions, there were problems at school because I refused to join in giving the Hitler salute. So one day the headmaster called me into his study and asked me why I didn’t give the Hitler salute. When I started to explain the reasons from the Bible he started to rant and rave at me. Under these circumstances I couldn’t stay at this school in St. Veit any longer and after a few months I went to Klagenfurt, back into a “National Socialist” environment of course. But I didn’t stay there very long either and ended up in Pörtschach, where other Nazi-inclined relatives tried to bring me up along the same lines. But they couldn’t change my attitude which was in accordance with the Bible. For example, my uncle always got cross when he came home and I greeted him with a simple “Guten Tag”. He would ask me: “Why do you always just say ‘Guten Tag’. Why don’t you say ‘Guten Teig’?” (In the Carinthian*

dialect we say “Teig” rather than “Tag”.) Of course, he really wanted me to greet him with “Heil Hitler”, but I carried on with “Guten Tag”. The upshot of all that was that I was moved once again to a different place. This time it was a so-called “Kinderlandverschickungslager” [evacuation camp for children], or KLV Camp. This was not a camp in the political sense, but rather a place where children from towns and cities in danger of bombing could be packed off to the country. This KLV Camp was accommodated in Castle Lengberg in Nikolsdorf near Lienz (East Tirol). It was there I spent my last year of school up to the end of the war in May 1945. Although the political pressure on us children was not all that intense, Nazi propaganda was of course ever-present, especially when military successes were announced over the radio. However, these announcements became increasingly rare as time went on, and they finally ceased altogether. Instead we often heard: “There has been a correction to the front line”, which, the boys whispered, really meant “victorious retreat”. But what I experienced when the Third

Reich collapsed is something I shall never forget. The camp leader gathered the boys together in the dining hall and announced that Adolf Hitler was dead and the Third Reich was finished. Whilst I felt enormous relief at this announcement, I suddenly noticed that all my schoolmates around me were starting to cry. Their world had collapsed, which anyone who has lived through that period will understand. It is difficult to find words to describe the impression this experience had on me at that time, witnessing the despair of these 13- and 14-year-old boys, who felt as if they were standing on the edge of an abyss, whilst I was able to look forward with joy and confidence to the future, knowing that our family would now soon be reunited. It was then that I realised most clearly what a blessing it is if you don’t rest your hopes on one man, as my schoolmates had been taught to rest their hopes on Hitler. How thankful I was to my parents – and remain so to this day – that from an early age they had taught me to put my trust in Jehovah and not in men.

## “... salvation comes not from men but from Jehovah God”

**Emilie Benda's family** belongs to the Jehovah's Witnesses. On the grounds of her religious convictions she refused to give the Hitler salute or to take part in the Nazi celebrations at school. Her parents were accordingly classified as “unfit to bring up children”. In order to take her away from her father's influence, Emilie Benda was removed from her parents by court order together with her sister and initially accommodated in a children's home in Lustkandlgasse in Vienna.

Der Erstrichter hat die Abnahme der beiden Mädchen aus der Obhut der Kindeseltern und die Unterbringung in einer Erziehungsanstalt der Gemeinde Wien angeordnet und zugleich ein Ausfuhrverbot erlassen. Er hat gleichzeitig die sofortige Vollstreckbarkeit ausgesprochen. Er hat seine Massnahmen damit begründet, dass die Kindeseltern für die Erziehung vollkommen ungeeignet seien. Die Kinder seien verstockt und ungehorsam. Ermahnungen von seiten der Lehrpersonen seien ohne Erfolg. Sie weigerten sich an den NS-Schulfestern teilzunehmen, völkische Lieder zu singen und den deutschen Gruß zu leisten. Der Kindesvater beziehe sich als Bibelforscher, er lehne zwar nicht den nationalsozialistischen Staat ab, doch erziehe er die Kinder nach den Gesetzen der Bibel.

Her father appealed against the order at the Regional Court of Vienna, but met with no success. He had argued that he was merely

bringing up his children in accordance with Biblical laws. The court declared his behaviour “mentally abnormal” and justified the decision as follows:

*The father of the child is drawing his family into the orbit of his “overdominant idea” with powerful suggestive force and thereby thrusting them into severe conflict with the world. By contrast, the children were very well behaved. It could even be said that – apart from the problems already mentioned – this was a particularly good family with high standards of morality. The two girls deserved to be cared for particularly well ...*

Accordingly, between 1939 and 1942 Emilie Benda was cared for in the Central Children's Home in Bastiengasse, the children's home in Mayerhofen, in the Döbling orphanage and the Luisenheim children's home.

She describes everyday life in the Döbling orphanage as follows:

*Every Sunday morning there was a ceremony of consecration of the flag. With arms rai-*

sed, the Horst Wessel song was sung and this was followed by an address by the warden of the orphanage. On the first occasion my sister and I were completely unprepared for what was to happen. We were standing in the front row. First of all everyone had to make the Heil Hitler salute. But we just stood there with our arms at our sides. Although we were ordered to give the salute three times, we stood there without a word. After the ceremony we had to report to the warden's office. He gave us a stern lecture, telling us that we must conform to rules of the home. Again we answered that we must obey God rather than men, and that salvation came not from men but from Jehovah God, who is the creator of heaven and earth and the creator of all men. Thereupon, the warden said that we could think what we liked in our hearts. But if we would only give the Hitler salute and say "Heil Hitler" we would enjoy more privileges. We could attend a better school and learn the piano. "You would be the ideal German girls, you're good students and you love sports and music. Think about it – I'll ask you again later." He repeated this several times. Later, though, we could only give him the same answer, which made him very angry. After that there was no more free time for us, we had to set the table for all 60 girls

and later clear away again, do the washing-up, keep the kitchen clean and do all this in the morning, at lunch time and in the evening. The kitchen was in the basement and while we worked my sister and I sang many Kingdom songs in two parts and despite everything stayed cheerful. In the evening, when the lights in the dormitory were switched off, we were closely questioned by the other girls about the whys and wherefores of our presence there. That was our opportunity. It gave us the chance to tell the children a lot about what the Bible says: That we must obey God rather than men, as so many young people in ancient times had done, as we could read in the Bible. The story of Daniel, how he stood in front of the statue and refused to bow down but obeyed God rather than a human being because he loved his God and was completely devoted to him. This was our favourite story. It strengthened us greatly in our own beliefs. We also loved to pray to our God Jehovah, which we never forgot to do.

In 1939 Emilie Benda's father was arrested by the Gestapo and was transferred from the Morzinplatz in Vienna to the psychiatric hospital "Am Steinhof". After ten months, with the help of his elder son, he managed to escape. He was re-arrested and sentenced to eight



years imprisonment, which he had to serve in Garsten prison until the end of the war.

In 1941 the Gestapo arrested her mother and put her in the Gestapo prison on Morzinplatz. During her community-service year Emilie Benda was occasionally allowed to travel home to keep her mother supplied with clean linen.

*It was impossible to get into this building without a pass. I was searched to check whether I had anything prohibited on me. They even checked the parcel of laundry and my handbag. Only then was I allowed to go through to the men who had put my mother in prison. The first thing they asked me was: "Are you a Bible Student too?" I said: "Yes." "All right then, you can stay here too." I put the bag down and sat down. The two men went into the next room, laughing and talking. After a time they came back and said to me: "Leave the laundry here and go home." I didn't have to be told twice. In a flash I was outside and back in the street.*

Emilie Benda's elder brother was arrested at the same time as their mother. The Gestapo beat him up savagely, forced him to do labour service and finally sent him to the front line as a soldier. There he was severely traumatised and repeatedly attempted to escape. Emilie Benda's younger brother spent the war in a foster home in Styria. In October 1945, after more than six years apart, the family was reunited.

#### **The "Pflichtjahr"**

The "Pflichtjahr", or community service year, was a legal requirement that directed 18- to 25-year-old women to do labour service. Participation was a pre-requisite for future employment. The only women to be exempt from this service, which was arranged by the labour exchanges and had to be spent in agriculture or domestic service, were those who were already working in these areas.

### Persecution on the grounds of nationality

The largest group of persons to be persecuted on the grounds of their nationality were the *Carinthian Slovenes*. Immediately following the Anschluss it was mainly individual Slovenian nationalists who were persecuted, but from the start of the occupation of Yugoslavia by German troops, systematic persecution began. In 1942, 1,076 Carinthian Slovenes were transported to German camps; the confiscated farms were allocated to German settlers. There was a further wave of resettlement in 1944 as a reaction to the increasing activity of Yugoslav partisans, who were receiving a certain amount of support from the Slovenian population.

*Partisans* also have the right to claim, even if they were not interned, provided there is evidence that they joined an active resistance group.

The *children of partisans* are considered to be victims in the meaning of the Law if one parent was killed during partisan fighting. The situation of such children was often comparable to that of the general level of danger faced by “first-degree half-breeds”, especially if their parents were arrested as partisans and they were left to be brought up by relatives. In recognising them the National Fund takes account of the particular circumstances of partisans’ children, who as “bandits’ children” were exposed to particular danger and especially harsh conditions of life.

### Persecution on grounds of sexual orientation

Under National Socialist rule the persecution of homosexuality, which had already constituted a crime before, was considerably intensified. From 1941 the Reich Penal Code provided for the imposition of the death penalty for “sex offenders”.



Maria Brumnik (right) in front of the Elementary School

**As an anti-Fascist** and Carinthian Slovene, Maria Brumnik, born on 15 September 1929 in Ebriach, supported the partisans by serving as a courier. Her family on her father's side was resettled.

*At the start of the Second World War, I lived with my mother and sister in a hut in Peruč in Ebriach. In 1942 my relatives on my father's side (uncle Matthäus Pegrin, aunt Maria Pegrin, cousin Johanna Pegrin), who had been living at the Pegrin farm in Ebriach, were all resettled. Together with my mother and sister I took charge of the Pegrin farm. My cousin Johan Županc was one of the first activists*

## For a Better Future

*in the Liberation Front. In his anti-Fascist work he looked for help and support from his relatives, as well as others. So the Pegrin farm acted as a base for the liberation struggle. As part of the liberation struggle he gave me the job of carrying out messenger and courier services. I did this within the district of Ebriach and Zell-Pfarre. In June 1944 there was a major military conflict around the Pegrin and Hribernik farms in Ebriach. The partisans, who had taken up position in these two farms, were surprised by a large unit of the German Wehrmacht. In the course of the armed struggle the Hribernik farm building was burnt down. The partisans had to yield to military superiority. As there was a risk of both the farms being burnt down, and the Wehrmacht was aware that the families that lived on the farms were supporters of the partisans, I left the Pegrin farm for the next two weeks and fled to the Obir mountains with other people. After two weeks the situation calmed down a bit, so I was able to return to the Pegrin farm. I continued to support the antifascist struggle until the end of the war.*

Maria Brumnik actually wanted to be a teacher. Due to the persecution, everything turned out differently:

*During a battle between the Germans and the partisans, the school was set on fire and burnt to the ground. I had to go and work for the farmers' executive on the Peruč farm as a farmhand to keep him from re-settling my family. So my dream was shattered and I be-*

*came a farmhand instead of a teacher. After the war I had no school leaving certificate, my father was killed in the war and my mother was struggling to make ends meet on a pension of no more than 60 Austrian schillings. Later, as a mother of five children, I did everything in my power to give all my children the opportunity to go to grammar school, so that they could enjoy a better life than I've had.*



In this wooden hut where I was born there was only one room. We ate, slept and did everything in this one room.



My Uncle Matevž Pegrin. He was driven out and sent to Lublin, where he died. My Aunt Maria Pegrin (née Artač ). She was sent to Auschwitz and died there.



My grandmother Maria Pegrin. She had four children: Georg was killed in the First World War, Matevž was sent to Lublin and never came back, my father Anton was killed on the Russian front, and daughter Barbara Županc was sent to Ravensbrück, but later came home. Sad to say, my grandmother did not live to see her daughter return. She was grief-stricken and died prematurely.

The story of Barbara Županc. She had four children: Johann Županc – killed in the armed resistance, Michael Županc – beheaded in Vienna, Maria Olip (née Županc) was beheaded in Vienna, Lenart Županc – killed on the front line.

“... it was like being put in a coffin and buried alive.”



**Maria Brežjak** was born in Koprein on 31 January 1926. In August 1944 she was arrested by the Gestapo in Klagenfurt for supporting the partisans and for political unreliability. She was then transferred to Ravensbrück concentration camp and

from there was deported to Neuengamme concentration camp. In her absence her home was repeatedly searched by the police, and everything that could be moved was confiscated.

*On 18 August 1944 six men from the Gestapo arrived at our farm in Sagerberg 11 and told me and my half-sister to get dressed, pack something to eat and come with them. The Gestapo told us we would be back home again in two days. So my half-sister and I were taken to Klagenfurt by the Gestapo. After twelve days of imprisonment in Klagenfurt we were crammed into cattle trucks together with other prisoners without any food and ta-*

*ken to Ravensbrück. I was locked up in Ravensbrück concentration camp for about a month. During this time I had to dig trenches in the surrounding area. Then they took me to Neuengamme concentration camp, where I remained until the liberation on 5 May 1945. In Neuengamme I had to do forced labour in the Wandsbeck branch of the camp. We manufactured gas masks for civilians. I had to do twelve-hour night shifts and only got something to eat once a day. In March 1945, me and other prisoners had to take part in experiments in air-raid shelters. These experiments were designed to find out how long people could survive in a sealed air-raid shelter without ventilation. We almost suffocated. Some of us fainted. We shouted for help. But no-one took any notice. It was like being put in a coffin and buried alive. After liberation we were given food by the British. I couldn't go home immediately as there were no means of transport, and we were afraid of being attacked by individual Nazis. After suffering all these hardships I finally got home, with my half-sister, on 8 September 1945.*







## “... after all, I’m used to disappointments in life ...”

**Erwin Widschwenter**, born in Hall, Tirol, on 28 April 1908, a member of the Wehrmacht, was arrested on the grounds of his sexual orientation and for being “asocial” (a social misfit). He was put in a military prison and later transferred to Stein Prison, where he survived the bloody massacre of April 1945.

*My bitter experience during the Nazi period: For a trivial offence against § 175 StGB [Criminal Code] I was sentenced by the Vienna branch of the Central Military Court of Berlin Charlottenburg to five years imprisonment and dishonourable discharge from the army (effective 11 May 1944). I was sent to Stein Prison. During my imprisonment I had to endure painful humiliations, such as having my head shaved, cleaning the toilets and the like, and being called a filthy pig!*

*In prison I served my sentence until Stein’s “bloody Friday”, when I escaped certain death by the skin of my teeth thanks to the help of a prison ward who was kindly disposed towards me. In this massacre, which took place on 6 April 1945, a large number of the prisoners was shot by the SA [storm troopers].*

*The survivors, including myself, were first taken up the Danube to Stadelheim, then to Strasbourg and finally to Bernau on Lake Chiem, where I was discharged on 11 May 1946.*

*After my discharge in Bernau I went to Munich, where I worked on building sites and received ration cards. Physically, I was seriously weakened and weighed only 48 kg. In July 1946, I was repatriated and was able to return to my home territory near Wörgl and meet my dear foster mother again. My joy was more than words can express! Katharina Schiessing was kindness itself and always stood by me even in the darkest times!*

*However, I was badly hit by the social consequences of my conviction. After my release from prison I tried in vain to get re-instated in my job in the finance department, although my previous conviction had already been officially wiped from the records by the Wehrmacht amnesty. Before mobilisation I had been a tax inspector in the Gmunden Finance Office. I was dismissed without notice. I met with very little understanding. No-one could*

*help me. At that point I recalled a quotation from my Latin textbook, which read: "Donec eris felix, multos numerabis amicos; tempora si fuerint nubila, solus eris!"<sup>1</sup>*

*I finally found a job as an office worker, but the remuneration was rather modest, so I had quite a struggle to get through till my retirement. Note that after my release I didn't return to Gmunden, as I assumed that my elderly landlady was unlikely to be still alive and the room would long since have been let to someone else and that my belongings that I left behind there, like clothes, linen, books and so on, would have been cleared out. I went back to Linz and looked for a place to stay. Due to bomb damage and accommodation difficulties it was impossible to get a room; so I had to be content with a room in a camp, where I eked out a living in indescribably wretched conditions. It was only months later that I succeeded in finding a home where I could live in reasonable comfort until my retirement.*

*Despite impaired mobility due to operations on both hips and other age-related complaints,*

*I'm glad to be alive and enjoy the little pleasures that daily life brings. I'm thinking, for example, of the helpfulness of so many people I meet in the street, which make life more bearable for me. In conclusion, I should like to ask all those concerned about me, as far as possible to judge my unfortunate situation in a benevolent manner. Whatever their attitude, I shan't bear a grudge against anyone. After all, I'm used to disappointments in life.*

*Finally, I should like to thank the National Fund for the kindness they have never ceased to show and particularly for their generous and helpful financial support.*

*It will not now be long before the day comes when I shall take my leave from the world.*

*My warmest thanks for your letter of February of this year. This shows that the National Fund has not forgotten me.*

<sup>1</sup>As long as you are happy, you will count many friends; when times become dark, you will be alone. (Freely adapted from Ovid)

### Persecution on the grounds of physical or mental handicaps.

In the years from 1939 to 1945, mentally or physically handicapped persons were murdered, which was the “Euthanasia” programme. The underlying motivation was racial hygiene and eugenics and alleged social and economic interests.

From 1940 onwards, at the psychiatric hospitals “Am Spiegelgrund” and “Am Steinhof” in Vienna, children were subjected to medical experimentation and murdered for reasons of racial politics.

As part of Operation T4, in 1940 and 1941, patients in psychiatric hospitals and sanatoria, such as Hartheim Castle in Upper Austria, were murdered in the interest of “euthanasia”.

Another group of victims that had to wait a long time for recognition consisted of the children who were held at “Am Spiegelgrund” in the Nazi period.

From 1940 on the “Vienna City Welfare Institution” was set up on the grounds of the “Am Steinhof” institution. In these buildings a reformatory and an “Institution for the Reception and Observation of Mentally Abnormal Children and Young People” were located. Referral to the “Spiegelgrund” was made for a variety of reasons – often the children came from broken homes, were regarded as “difficult” or suffered from mental or physical disabilities. Many of the children in “Am Spiegelgrund” were subjected to medical experimentation and to “euthanasia”. Children and young people showing disruptive behaviour were referred for observation and assessment regarding their suitability for education. They were in constant danger of suffering a similar fate.



FOTO: DÖW

Hartheim Castle, Upper Austria

## “ ... children were taken away and never came back.”

*On 6 December 1940, at the age of ten, I was taken to the children's transfer point.*

*On 7 January 1941 I was made to stand in front of a table with other children. A man with a swastika armband decided which children's home we should be sent to. When my turn came, a man said I was a “gypsy”, because my mother's name was Cziganek. I was sent to the “Am Spiegelgrund” home.*

*In a darkened car we were taken to the “Spiegelgrund”. My first impression was very frightening: All the windows and balconies were barred, and the doors could only be opened from the outside. I was examined and measured all over my body, and I heard the word “gypsy” used repeatedly. After this I was taken to a large room with a number of beds, where many other children were accommodated. There were several nurses, who were inhuman, harsh and brutal. I remember well some of the punishments:*

*In the evening we weren't allowed to go to the toilet again, but if we wet ourselves or wet the bed we were punished by being put in a cold bath for a long time or severely beaten. We were punished by being deprived of food, made to stand for hours at a time or to sit absolutely motionless.*

*Cutting the finger-nails down to the quick was another common punishment.*

*To intimidate us even more, we were threatened with being sent to annexe 17. We all knew that no-one ever came back from this annexe.*

*Worst of all were the “injections to make you sick”.*

*On the way to school, I often saw dead children being pushed past on a cart.*

*What frightened us most of all was when Dr. Gross, Dr. Türk (a female doctor) or some ot-*



Johann Riebl as elementary school pupil (front row, sixth from left).

*her doctor came. They would give us injections in the arm and thigh and pills of various colours. Sometimes children were selected and taken away by Dr. Gross. Most of them never returned. If they did, you could see that operations had been carried out on their heads.*

*Sometimes we children had to stand in a line in front of Dr. Gross. We were counted off and every fifth one had to step forward. These children were also taken away and never came back.*

*One day I managed to escape from Spiegelgrund. In the night I hid in a railway wagon. I tried to cut open my left wrist with a bit of broken glass. A railway worker found me and handed me over to the police. They took me back to Spiegelgrund. I was put straight in the punishment block and beaten. Then Dr. Gross came with a female doctor. I was given two injections and taken down to the cellar. I suffered terrible pain and cramp and couldn't stop*

*vomiting. I had to suffer this torture on frequent occasions. They kept giving me injections and pills and gave me less and less to eat.*

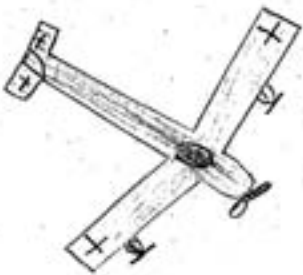
*When I became sicker and weaker they took me and another boy to the isolation section in Annexe 17. My aunt was informed that I was dying. The boy in the next bed died, and after a time I was taken back to the original block. It was clear to me now that if I wanted to survive I had to submit to every demand and be totally compliant. I gave up all thought of resistance. This was the only way I could survive.*

*On 2 March 1942 I was finally transferred to the home in Kollburggasse. I was frequently ill and constantly had to go to the hospital. My entire life since then has been accompanied by illness and operations. Worst of all, though, have been the psychological after-effects. To this day I still have disturbed sleep and nightmares about the Spiegelgrund.*



## Childhood at the “Spiegelgrund”

Karl Hamedler was born out of wedlock in 1930. He first lived at various foster homes, and then with his father. In 1942 the problems began. He got a bad reputation for truancy and running away from home and was ill-treated by his father for this. On 5 June 1942, the twelve-year-old was sent to Spiegelgrund for being a difficult child.



Drawings and a dictation done by Karl Hamedler at the “Spiegelgrund”.

Hamedler

Diktat

1/10.43.

Wir wollen nichts eringen für uns,  
sondern alles <sup>nur</sup> für Deutschland,  
...um wir sind vergänglich,  
aber Deutschland muss leben.

von Adolf-Hitler.

Die Fahne hoch: die Reihen fest geschlossen  
auf S-F. marschier mit ruhig festem  
Schritt. Handrücken, die Rotfront und  
Reaktion erschossen, Marschier'n im  
Geist in unseren Reihen mit.



### **Persecution on the grounds of "Asozialität" [failure to conform to social norms]**

The term "Asozialität" is a catch-all term that was used to provide legal official justification for the persecution of persons who, for a variety of reasons, were seen as undesirable. Such persons included those accused of being "work-shy" or social misfits. They often came from troubled family circumstances or may have had a forbidden relationship with forced labourers or prisoners of war ("race defilement"). Roma and Sinti were also often classified as "asocial" and subjected to persecution.

### **Other persons who became victims of wrongs typical of the Nazi regime.**

Also recognised as victims in the meaning of the National Fund Law are those persons who between 1938 and 1941 were re-settled from the territory known as the "Döllersheimer Ländchen", in Lower Austria, to make way for the Allentsteig military training ground.

Also victims in the meaning of the National Fund Law are *widows, widowers and the children of those who had been executed or had died in prison or in concentration camps*, and as such were exposed to often harsh social and political retribution. Also parents of children that had fallen victim to the "euthanasia" programme.

Finally, *children who were born in an initially safe third country* where their parents had sought refuge, but were subsequently subjected to Nazi persecution, were also recognised.

## “I wouldn’t wish a childhood like mine on anyone”

**Cölestine Ameisbichler** was born on 29 January 1937 in Villach. She, her parents and siblings lived as travellers.

*This meant being on the road. My parents had a caravan, which stood on the Kinoplatz, St. Ruprecht, in Klagenfurt. It was furnished like any home. There were bunk beds for us children. For my parents there was a bed, cupboard, kitchen cupboard, oven, table, pots and pans, bed-linen, clothing etc. In 1941 my father was arrested by the Gestapo and sent to a concentration camp. Then us children were picked up by the Youth Welfare Office and put in foster homes. In 1942 my mother was also sent to the concentration camp. I’m sorry to say that we never discovered what happened to the caravan. It probably ended up on the scrapheap.*

In 1941 the father of Cölestine Ameisbichler, Ferdinand Anderwald, was arrested by the Gestapo on a charge of so-called anti-social behaviour and was sent to the concentration camp. He was accused of being “work-shy”. On account of serious deformities on both feet he was unable to do any work:

*My father had a serious deformity on both feet. He wore special shoes, and couldn’t walk without them. Two Gestapo men took him away. My elder sister and I shouted and screamed for our father! We never saw him again.*

Soon after the arrest of their father, Cölestine Ameisbichler and her siblings were sent to foster homes. Their mother, Viktoria Anderwald was sent to a concentration camp like their father.

*My elder sister and I went to live with a farmer's family half an hour's journey away. Until I was five years old I was treated quite well. Then I had to get up very early in the morning and help clean out the cowsheds, look after the cows, help in the fields, pick up stones, pick potatoes, or fetch wood. If the cows I was looking after wandered off, or if I did anything else wrong I was beaten and was given nothing to eat. In summer and winter alike I had to sleep in an attic; it was very cold. In the autumn I had to go barefoot. When I was watching the cows I waited until a cow had done her business so that I could put my feet in it to warm them up. This went on for four years.*

*No welfare services ever bothered with me. I wasn't allowed to have any contact with my*

*sister. I cried for my sister a lot. They dragged me away from her by force, they ignored my screams. I never knew where my other two siblings were taken. In 1942 my father died in the concentration camp. In 1945 my mother returned from Auschwitz and fetched me. I was in a pitiful state, I had lice. My mother had to clean my elbows and knees with benzine. I was very undernourished, very weak and mentally and physically at the end of my tether. My mother never spoke about the past.*

Today Cölestine Ameisbichler lives in Klagenfurt. She is in a poor state of health.

*To this day I've never recovered physically. My weight is always around 41 or 42 kg. I wouldn't wish a childhood like mine on anyone.*

## “When I came back, I had no photos of my family any more”

*I was born in Vienna 6, Linke Wienzeile 100/14 and lived with my parents and my brother, who was six years younger than me. My father, Otto Fixel, was a banker and partner of the firm of Moritz Frankl in Vienna 1, Esslinggasse 2-4.*

*In the first days, following the invasion by Hitler's troops, an acting administrator turned up at my father's office and banned him from*

*entering the premises of his firm. The firm was placed under provisional management, we never received a penny more. The bank was later wound up.*

*We had relatives and friends in the USA and wanted to emigrate there. Unfortunately emigration was delayed. We had to wait for our quota number until it was our turn. There were problems with the issuing of the visa – we couldn't afford the money for the Reich Flight Tax, with the result that our passports were held back for a time. We were already living off the sale of our furniture. In 1940, we finally got our passports and the entry visa and even had our tickets for the voyage – our luggage was already in Genoa – but then the USA entered the war and our ship was never put to sea. So we were caught in a trap.*

*In August 1940 we lost our 3.5-room flat and had to move into lodgings, a small back room*

Hella Fixel's parental home in Vienna 6,  
Linke Wienzeile 100







Gemeindet		Wingebene Vormohnung	Gemeindefe Wohnung	Edgemeindet nach
von	bis			
2.8. 1940	21.10. 1941	6. Linke Wienzeile 100	6. Mariahilferstrasse 109/11	Folenaktion Litzmannstad am 23.10. 1941

in Vienna 6, Mariahilferstrasse 109 – a so-called Jews' House – where now all four of us had to live. On 18 October 1941, my father's 50th birthday, we had to make our way to the Sperlgasse assembly point. A few days later we were deported to the ghetto in Litzmannstadt-Lodz.

My parents perished miserably in the ghetto – there was cold, hunger, sickness and hard labour. My younger brother, who was then 15 years old, was deported from the ghetto in

September 1942 and probably died in the gas chambers. Until the ghetto was dissolved I "lived" in Lodz, I nearly starved, I worked and I suffered from the cold. In the summer of 1944 those who were still alive were transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Those who were still capable of working were elected and the others went straight to the gas ovens. After a time in the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp I was sent via the Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen concentration camp to a branch of this camp in Berlin-Neukölln, where I had to work for the firm Krupp company in an armaments factory. In the final days of the war we were sent to Ravensbrück, and from there we were liberated by the Russian army during a long march.

After our return from the concentration camp Austria didn't exactly welcome us with open arms – after I came home the state gave me no help whatsoever: I was given no support and had to wait 15 years for a flat of my own. To this day, I have still not received full compensation.

FOTO: WALTER REICHL



"When I came home, I had no photos of my family any more. The few I was given by my relatives mean a great deal to me."



## “My brother went home, and I went to Dachau.”

**Karl Hirsch** lived with his family in Vienna. He was 24 years old and had completed his engineering studies at the Technical University. However, after the invasion he was not allowed to receive a diploma because he was a Jew. Charles Hirsch vividly recalls the events of 11 November 1938, when he and his brother were arrested:

*In the “Reichskristallnacht” some SS men destroyed a small temple in the back yard of our house in Hollandstrasse 2. Two of the SS men came to our flat – our landlady had informed on my brother and me. They broke the door down and – it was six o’clock in the morning – they drove us all – father, mother, sister, brother and myself – into the kitchen, opened the cupboards and threw everything on the floor. When they couldn’t find anything they took my brother and me with them.*

They were taken to the police headquarters in an SS car.

*When I think about it now, it had its funny side. Here I was being driven in an elegant Mercedes along the same street that I had wal-*

*ked, skipped and ran along to school a thousand times ...*

A Vienna policeman probably saved the lives of the two of them when he refused to hand them over to the SS:

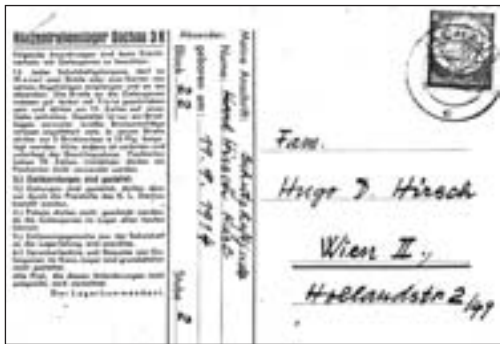
*“Into the cells!”, shouted one of the SS men. As we proceeded, I grabbed the policeman by the sleeve and whispered: “Please come with us!” then he stretched out both arms in front of the two men and said calmly – I remember every word he said: “Hold on a minute – I have to take their details down first – name, address and so on.”*

After two days in the Rossauer Kaserne the brothers were separated by a random decision made by the judge. My brother went home, and I went to Dachau.

*After a train journey in the third class compartments we had to switch to cattle trucks. Some of the older gentlemen didn’t make it. The guards hit the older people with their rifle butts if they weren’t quick enough. I asked one of the “gentlemen” if I could help; to my*

surprise he allowed me to. And so I lifted, pressed, pushed and helped a lot of older gentlemen up into the truck. It might have been silly of me, but I saw my own father in these gentlemen, early sixties, a little portly, completely confused ...

We marched through the gate: "ARBEIT MACHT FREI" ["Work makes you free"] – "Left, two, three, four" – I was to hear this command thousands of times – on the vast assembly ground. There, on a high platform, was a huge seat. After a long wait I realised what it was for: It was an instrument of torture. Over the loudspeaker the name of a "criminal" was read out. His crime: Two passports were found in his possession. Straight away it was trousers down and he was strapped to the seat and two "heroes" took it in turns to beat him till the blood spurted in all directions and he collapsed like a wet rag. "Let that be an example to you: Behave!" Then we



were registered: My confirmation watch, ring and cufflinks were taken from me, and my head was shaved.

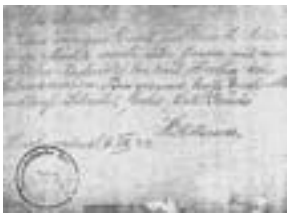
So I survived in the camp. Always marching along, my shovel over my shoulder like a rifle, singing all together: "When shall we see our home again" or "My girl must have dark-brown hair" – I can still hear it today ... I was allocated the job of fetching the meals. Together with another strong lad I had to run to the kitchen – black ersatz coffee, or a thin soup and black bread – on Sunday there were a few scraps of chicken in it – doling out a little to each man – and when we heard the siren we left everything where it was and ran back, we mustn't be the slightest bit late. We ourselves hadn't yet eaten, but on the way back we were allowed to help ourselves to anything left in the barrel.

This was how the days, the weeks and the months passed. I got a few beatings because I had my hands in my pockets, a hard kick in the behind because I was not in line – some people couldn't bear it any longer and hanged themselves in the toilets.

In the meantime Karl's brothers and sisters attempted to get their brother freed from Dachau and were able to obtain an affidavit and an entry visa to America from relatives there.

*One day my name was called out. I was afraid – but they gave me an envelope containing my Omega, my cufflinks and my ring. What a paradox: Such honesty despite everything that went on in there! But this was long before the “Final Solution” ... That was how I got back to Vienna, and after all the difficult formalities us three children emigrated.*

Karl Hirsch's parents were less fortunate:



Postcard from Karl Hirsch's mother from Theresienstadt

*Although my parents were Austrian citizens, they were in the Czech quota and couldn't get a visa. We couldn't get them out. My father Hugo suffered a serious stroke – even so, he and*

*my mother Wilhelmine were taken to Theresienstadt. He died there. My mother was moved from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz – she died in Birkenau.*

*A few years ago I visited all the camps and found – “thorough and correct” as always – all the entries, transport numbers, dates, everything ...*

*I shall never forget the picture: We three children stood by the window as the train slowly began to move. Our father on the platform – he walked and then ran with the train, he*

*talked, he shouted, he... he waved ... he stood. In the First World War he had served the old monarchy as a sergeant, had never been in any kind of trouble, had worked all his life, kept his family, he and our mother had brought up us children lovingly – and for what?*

*I am now over 90. Although as a Jew I never received my engineering diploma, I gradually worked my way up ... My wife, also a Viennese, and I live in New York. In recent years I've had health problems – or as we say in Vienna: “Mir fehlt gor nix, I hab alles!” [“There's nothing wrong with me, I've got everything”]. All the same, I'm still fit and active. One of my pleasures is to help my grandson with his homework, especially in maths.*



Charles Hirsch on a visit to Vienna “down memory lane”.



## “...a world that has known so much sorrow and suffering...”

**Ilse Riegler was born** in Vienna as one of three daughters of an old-established family that had long been involved in the transport business; her father Oskar Klein ran a taxi firm in the 16th district of Vienna. Her memories of her schooldays are happy ones until the Anschluss –

just four weeks before her school leaving examination – when she was excluded from her school and had to transfer to a Jewish school. In November 1938 the family was driven out of their municipal housing and had to move to a basement room.

In order to obtain passports for his chil-

dren to enable them to emigrate and get to a safe place, their father had to agree to surrender his taxi-driver’s licence. In 1939, after re-training in agriculture with her sisters, Ilse Riegler managed to emigrate illegally to Palestine. As a pioneer, she worked in agriculture to help in the development of the country.

Ilse Riegler’s parents Oskar and Ernestine Klein lacked the means to pay for their own emigration – they were deported to Poland in 1941 and died in a concentration camp.

Ilse Riegler lived for many years in Israel as a social worker. Her own experience has taught her the importance of working for peace and reconciliation in her new homeland and of maintaining contact with people of all religions:

*Only the love of our fellow human beings can lead a world that has known so much sorrow and suffering to a life of peace – for all.*



Message from the parents who stayed behind in Vienna to their daughters in Palestine.

A b s c h r i f t !

Inf. vom 21. Dez. 1949 mit Frau Johanna Machacek, Private, Wien, 16.,  
Arnehtg. 23/III/16.

Ich war bekannt mit dem Ehepaar Klein und habe sie sowohl in der alten wie in der neuen Wohnung (Arnehtg. 28 bzw. 31) besucht. Ich weiss, dass sie beim Ausziehen aus der alten Wohnung ein Nußspeisezimmer mit Spiegeln (2 Kredenzen, 1 Tisch u. div. Stühle) dort gelassen haben und dass der neue Mieter Rudolf Etzler, Sauerkrauthändler, der heute noch in dieser Wohnung wohnt, übernommen hat. Ob er es behalten hat und ob er etwas bezahlt hat, weiss ich nicht. Ob die Spieluhr auch zurückblieb, kann ich nicht sagen.

Das weisse Schlafzimmer und Küche habe ich noch in der Kellerwohnung gesehen. Ich habe nach 3 Stunden, bevor sie weggefahren sind, sie besucht, damals gab mir Herr Klein einen Spiegel mit geschnitztem Rahmen, oval und ich sagte, ich werde es einem der Kinder geben, wenn sie einmal ein Andenken haben wollen.

~~Die Küchenrichtung gab Frau Klein einer Nachbarin zum Geschenk. Wie sie selbst sagte, das Schlafzimmer dürfte von der Gestapo weggeführt worden sein.~~

Als sie schon ein paar Monate weg waren kam ein Herr zu mir, der sich als Bruder des Herrn Klein vorstellte und mir einen Brief des Herrn Klein aus Polen zeigte. Er sagte, ich solle ihnen Lebensmittel schicken und gab ich ihm div. Sachen, wie Reis, Teigwaren, Zucker etc., was ich entbehren konnte.

*In 1963 I returned to Vienna to collect a small carved wall-mirror. My parents had left it with a good neighbour before they were deported, asking her to pass it on to one of their daughters if they should ever come back. Today the mirror hangs next to my bed.*

## “From that time on I lived in anonymity...”

*I was born in 1927 in Vienna as the son of Jewish parents. My mother had been a Christian but she converted to the Jewish faith when she married.*

*In 1943, as part of the deportation of the Jews of Vienna to the East, I was taken with my mother to the transit camp in the school building in the Große Spertlgasse. After a few days my mother and I managed to escape from the camp.*

*From that time on I lived an anonymous, underground existence, staying with kind friends and relations. As the Red Army approached Vienna my mother and I sought shelter from the bombing. On 8 April 1945, two days before the Red Army marched into Vienna, as we ran for shelter, my mother was hit by a Russian flying bomb near the Vienna City Park and was killed.*

*In 1947 my father returned to Vienna from Shanghai, where he had fled to in 1939.*

### Gründe:

Der Prüfling wurde als ehelicher Sohn des Juden Max F i s c h e r (geboren Bartsberg 15.10.1889) und der deutschblütigen Adolphine geb. Samann (geboren Wien 29.8.1894) geboren. Er hat beim Erlaß des Reichsbürgergesetzes (b.i. am 16.9.1935) der jüdischen Religionsgemeinschaft angehört und gilt somit nach § 5(2)a) der Ersten Verordnung zum Reichsbürgergesetz als Jude.

Extract from the "Abstammungsbescheid"  
[notification of racial origin]



Benno Ruda: second row, first from right

## “Father? What’s that?”

**Benno Ruda** was born in Vienna seven months before the Anschluss and because of his Jewish origins he had to flee to France with his parents at the age of two. There he was taken into a monastery. His mother was arrested and murdered. His father managed to escape to Israel. He himself, together with a large group of children of a similar age, went to Israel. His father recognised him on a group photo in the Palestine Post and found the son he thought he had lost.

*I was born on 15 August 1937 in Vienna and was named Benno Ruda, which is still my name. In 1939/1940 my parents fled with me to France. My father Markus Ruda was driven out of the country and I had no contact with him. My mother Nina (Regina) and I remained in France. My mother handed me over to the Children’s Aid Organisation OSE to save my life. On 21 December 1942 my sister Irene was born. The Nazis arrested my mother with the baby and both were transported to the Nazi prison camp, Drancy, in France. On 18 July 1943, my mother and my sister and many other Jews were taken by train no. 57 to Auschwitz. Since then I heard nothing from my mother and sister, who was born on 21 December 1942.*

*The organisation OSE hid me in two different monasteries in France in two different locations. In 1944, all Jews who were hidden in monasteries, including myself, were taken through the snow-covered Pyrenees to Spain; some of these refugees were killed by the Nazis on the journey. On 4 November 1944 I sailed on the refugee ship “Guiné” to Israel. There, quite by chance, I was found by my father, who recognised me on a newspaper photograph. I was six and a half years old at the time. At our first meeting a “strange” man came up to me and straight away said: “I am your father.” My first question was: “Father? What’s that?” A few years ago my father died.*

Today Benno Ruda is a pensioner and lives in Dafna. He spent his childhood years from the age of three to six and a half in hiding places without his parents. He has accepted the symbolic payment from the National Fund:

*I’m glad to acknowledge that this contribution is some compensation for a small part of my lost youth and for my lack of training. The help you have now given me has arrived at the right time for my family, before my biological limits have been reached.*







## 4. Processing the Symbolic Payment

**Processing of applications –"To help in the quickest, most flexible and unbureaucratic manner possible".**

In the course of processing symbolic payments, the National Fund has to date paid the symbolic amount of ATS 70,000 / € 5,087.10 to 29,127 people for the purpose of expressing the Republic of Austria's special responsibility to these people for the injustice they suffered. 334 people received a second payment on grounds of social need, and 50 of these have received a third payment.

It has been the right decision not to set a deadline for applications for the symbolic payment, because the National Fund is still receiving new applications ten years after it was established. So far the National Fund has received 31,882 applications.

Since the majority of the surviving victims is elderly, there is a need for especially prompt processing. From the outset the Fund has thus striven to achieve unbureaucratic work procedures. It is possible to process an application very quickly if all the requisite substantiating documents are available. But in most cases documents are missing because they were destroyed as a result of the various circumstances of persecution, escape, and emigration. Speedy and unbureaucratic application processing is possible only if the Fund assumes the majority of the document procurement tasks. This results in comprehensive research activities which utilise numerous sources of information, authorities and private archives, at home and abroad, such as retirement pension insurance institutions, Victims' Services, the State Citizenship Evidence Offices, and local authorities, or the Vienna City and State Archive. Without the assistance of

these institutions and their readiness to provide the necessary information as quickly as possible, it would not have been possible to process such a large number of applications in a relatively short time.

Unusual research methods are also used if it is impossible to locate either documents or contemporary witnesses. For example, a lady whose registration details could not be found assured us that as a young girl she had lived in Vienna and until 1938 had been a member of the Vienna Ice Skating Club, where she also had a locker. Research by the National Fund proved that the lady really was registered in the Vienna Ice Skating Club's records for 1938 under her locker number. Other applicants have had in their possession documents which have provided unusual proof of their pasts, such as an old tram pass from 1938, or the pedigree for one applicant's dog, issued in 1938 by the Austrian Canine Association.

The National Fund's other essential contacts have been and are the Jewish Communities in Austria and abroad, as well as parish offices (whose records were sometimes the only available source to show that, many decades before the war, a Jewish ancestor was baptised, thereby proving his or her original Mosaic denomination), the archives of the Austrian Resistance; the archives of the Red Cross in Bad Arolsen; memorials at former concentration camps, the Vienna City School Board (the latter by providing data from old year books, for example), various victims' associations in Austria and abroad; Austrian representations such as embassies and consulates, as well as enthusiastic private individuals.

### Caring for applicants –

#### "Listening to and engaging in the fate of every individual"

When applying in person, victims are helped by the employees on the Fund's premises. For many it is especially important that they visit the Fund themselves in order to report the story of their persecution to an official Austrian department for the first time. Here they were able to express their anger, fury and rage, as well as their sorrow and impotence in the face of the murder of their parents, siblings and relatives.

In many cases dealing with the past has reopened old wounds that have never fully healed. For some the opportunity after so many years to provide detailed information to an Austrian institution about their fate has also provided a kind of release, and offered belated recognition of their fate by their homeland.

Besides processing applications, Fund employees are, and have always been, concerned with being there for these people in order to provide a friendly listening ear: listening to a hundred-year-old, former theatre playwright, for example, who now lives in Buenos Aires and who is delighted by every word of Viennese he hears because in this way he feels a link with his former home, or to a lady who reveals an old secret family recipe for Kaiserschmarren [pancakes] on the phone to one of the Fund's employees. There is one thing that many of the emigrants have in common – despite all they were forced to suffer in their homeland, for many it has remained their home even if they have been able to make a new "home" for themselves, which not everyone has succeeded in doing:

I was uprooted because overnight I had to become an adult and also because in 1938 the other members of my family were scattered to the four winds. Now I carry my roots with me wherever I go. And no matter where I am, these roots become antennae that turn towards Vienna with longing.

We must also respect the wishes of people who have not wanted to accept the Republic's gesture because of the suffering that befell them during the Nazi era, and who are also irreconciled towards modern Austria.

From the beginning the Fund has regarded itself as a bridge to ex-Austrians all over the world and numerous positive reactions have led us to assume that we have been successful in this regard. Since we were established in 1995, around 18,000 people have visited the National Fund in person. Where the Fund's employees are concerned, listening to and engaging with the fate of every individual is part of processing applications.

Since it came into being, the National Fund has sent a total of around 330,000 letters to its applicants. We try to address questions in letters that are not connected directly with the application and to reply to these in form of personal correspondence as far as possible.

The reactions of two applicants from Brazil and the USA are representative of many others where correspondence with the National Fund is concerned:



What did us the most good though was the letter that accompanied the notification and which now gives me the opportunity to again love this country and part of the people that we had to leave. Yes!

I can love my homeland again, it was so wonderful!

Besides the money, the contents of the letter was so touching, it vibrated a chord in me, long silenced.

My wonderful mother was an "Urwienerin" [Viennese, through and through] and we often wanted to visit "Wien" together. Since her death, 22 years ago, I lost interest, but now your lines woke me up again, in spite of all the terrible things we had to live with.

As part of its statutory brief, the National Fund has tried to be a point of contact and centre for thousands of people who, for various reasons, became victims of National Socialism and has tried to convey to them that there is a wholehearted desire to restore the link to their former homeland. At the same time, Fund employees are aware that there can never be "reparation" for all the pain and fear of losing one's family and home.

## Shipwreck

**Heinz Kalmar** was born on 27 July 1918 in Purkersdorf, near Vienna. In 1939 he had to leave Austria due to racism, leaving behind a fully furnished apartment, a piano, a violin, and a guitar. Until 1940 he was a sailor in the Norwegian merchant navy, as a “Messboy” on the MS Høegh Carrier. He was shipwrecked on 4 January 1940. The Høegh Carrier sank in the vicinity of Kristiansund, Norway. He signed up on the MS Pan Norway, before finally emigrating to Bolivia in 1940. In 1953 he went to Uruguay for 20 years, and since then has lived in Vienna.

*Until April 1939 I lived in Vienna, I attended the BRG II grammar school at Kleine Spergasse 2c and had my school leaving exam there in June 1936. After a year at the Federal College for the Textile Industry in Spengergasse, Vienna V, I joined the “Medical” company at Hoher Markt 3, Vienna I, as an assistant bookkeeper.*

*I lost my job at the firm “Medical” because of the race laws. I decided to emigrate to escape further persecution. The University course I had planned was out of the question now. It was only after many attempts that I succeeded in getting a job on a Norwegian ship. I worked*

*there as a mess boy (serving the officers, cleaning cabins, waiting on at meal times, washing dishes). On 4 January 1940 the ship was shipwrecked. As an Austrian with a German passport I could not remain in Norway and was transferred to another ship immediately. After Norway was invaded by German troops I couldn't stay on board the Norwegian ship either. With the help of my family, who had emigrated to La Paz, I was finally able to follow them to La Paz. Because I had no knowledge of Spanish at that time I had to take up a profession where knowledge of the language was not absolutely necessary and I became a glazer. As a novice I was, of course, on a low income.*

*Between May 1940 and March 1953 I worked in a watch and clock shop in La Paz, Bolivia. I married Miss Mia Lachs, who also lived there, on 17 September 1948. In March 1953 my wife and I moved to Montevideo, Uruguay, and from then I worked as a bookkeeper.*

*My wife and I returned to Austria in 1973, together with our two sons who were born in Montevideo. Today my wife and I live as pensioners in Vienna. In the meantime both our sons have married and established their own families.*

## "When I think back, I can't understand mankind then!"

**Kitty B. Wood** was born Kitty Blum in Vienna on 7 June 1920 and lived there until 1939, when she emigrated to London. On 8 February she and her husband, whom she had married in 1938 in the synagogue in Vienna, emigrated to the USA, where she lives today.

*It was March 1938 when the people in the office decided to go and see a play about the downfall of the house of Romanov. We really enjoyed this play. They sang the Red Flag. It all went well until the end and there was thunderous applause. We went outside and were engulfed in the worst possible nightmare. The German occupation by the Nazis had taken place without a fight; on the contrary, the Austrian citizens welcomed them with open arms. The Austrian police were wearing armbands with the swastika, and the Brown Shirts were blocking the streets and the traffic. They sang, they screamed, and were completely demented! And what they were saying was "Kill the Jews!" Finally, after my companions had made sure I was safe, I took the trolley bus home. Next morning, when I went into the office, it looked completely different. Our department manager was wearing a swastika on his lapel; he'd been a member of the Nazis for some years. A couple of months later the office closed down and so I lost my job.*

*My friends stayed away from me; I became an outsider. Except for an old friend, who kept an eye on us. When the Nazis came to fetch my grandmother to scrub the street, you had to do it on your knees with your fingernails, this friend stood in front of the door and said "Over my dead body!" There was a heated dispute, swear words flew back and forth, but he won and they left us in peace. There were new horrors every day and it became clear to us that we would have to leave the country.*

Kitty B. Wood's father, who lived in Dobersberg, lost his property leases immediately in 1938. All his property and possessions were taken away from him. Until he emigrated in 1939 he found shelter in his sister's, Bertha Schnitzer's, apartment.

*Nobody helped him. All he had left was a ticket to Vienna. All the people he thought were his friends turned their backs on him. Speechless, hurt, saddened, he returned to Vienna. He moved in with his sister. She gave him 50 groschen a day so he could buy a packet of cigarettes.*

*In 1939 he was able to leave his beloved Vienna. He emigrated, with just the clothes he wore up in, to Bolivia, where he worked as a den-*

*tist again. I didn't see him for another 22 years!*

*Even our beloved dog was forced to experience life's ironies with us. When my Papa couldn't take the dog with him to his sister's, he left him with trusted friends. Or so he thought. But the Nazis had a different idea and shot the poor animal. After all, he was just "a Jewish dog".*

Kitty B. Wood, who lived with her grandmother, brother, and cousin at Lessinggasse 8, was able to emigrate to London in 1939, where she lived with her new husband. Theirs was one of the last Jewish weddings to be celebrated in Vienna.

*My romance turned into a wedding and I was married in a registry office service on 5 November 1938 and in the synagogue on 6 November.*

In 1940 she and her husband emigrated to America. Her grandmother Cecilia Schmuckler and her brother Harry Blum were unable to leave Vienna. They were killed in concentration camps. Even before she emigrated to London she received a summons to present herself at the police station in the Ausstellungsstrasse, in the 2nd district, where she was

subjected to one of the infamous "anthropological surveys":

I had to enter a big room. Everyone here was naked and was examined by young Brown Shirts. I was asked to undress and the examination commenced. Every bone in my body, and my teeth too, were measured. A piece of my hair was cut off because they wanted to see how it curled. I had a blood sample taken because they wanted to see what colour it was and how it clotted. They took photos of me, I was still naked. Finally an SS man came up to me and said I should follow him. He took me to his billet. All he wanted was a photo of a beautiful Jewish girl. He took the photo, then he let me go.

*I'm now 84 years old and live with my past every day. When I think back on it all, I can't understand mankind then!*

*My brother Harry Blum, my grandmother Cecilia Schmuckler and my cousin with her two children were all murdered! I still feel them all around me; I loved them all so very much!*

*That's my life story!  
Vienna, Vienna, where I once was so happy, is very close to my heart...*





## 5. The National Fund's Tasks

### 5. 1. Source of information

Above and beyond processing applications, since 1999 the National Fund has successively assumed responsibility for regularly informing the circle of known victims about innovations in the field of restitution and compensation, and for recording in its database uncompensated losses of assets that it has been told about.

"The stamp collection started in 1887; my father inherited it from his father. The apartment was carpeted; we had jewellery, paintings and china porcelain."

"We had Biedermeier furniture and very valuable pictures and art treasures. I can't remember details apart from a big oil painting that hung over the piano."

"Those are exactly the same antique silver candelabra like the ones that stood on the Biedermeier cabinet in our apartment," noted one applicant when he saw almost identical pieces in an antique shop during a visit to Vienna, and also remembered the silver Chanukah candelabra, which had engraved the beginning of a Chanukah song in Hebrew letters on each of the eight branches.

What all these items have in common is that they belonged to Jews and, like hundreds of thousands of other objects, were looted in the course of the Aryanisation that took place following the invasion by the German army in March 1938. The victims who are still alive today, who at that time were almost all children or adolescents, often have nothing more than hazy memories left. What the people in question do have in common is that they have all turned to the National Fund for help in finding these looted items.

## 5. 2. Compensation for loss of apartment and small business leases

Early in 2001 the victims' details of their lost assets and the objects looted from them attained special relevance.

On 17 January 2001, the Government of the United States and the Austrian Federal Government concluded an agreement on comprehensive settlement of unanswered questions in connection with restitution for assets liquidated during the National Socialist era. On the one hand, this agreement regulates compensation for loss of apartment and small business leases, household property and personal valuables, and on the other, it provides for the establishment of a General Settlement Fund. The National Fund has been entrusted with carrying out what is known as compensation for loss of apartment and business leases as well as administrative support for the General Settlement Fund.

A total sum of USD 150 million has been set aside to compensate loss of apartment and small business leases. In order to facilitate rapid payments, compensation has been paid in the form of a one-time lump sum of USD 7,000 or € 7,630 per person. Applications were accepted up to 30 June 2004.

So far 20,196 people have received a payment within the scope of apartment and business lease compensation. As the law provides, the residual monies will be divided equally amongst all the justified recipients. The value of the subsequent payment is € 1,000 for every recipient.

~~Die Mitbewohner des Hauses lehnen es ab  
mit den Juden unter einem Dach zu wohnen.~~

"It took until 2001 ..."

## Compensation for apartment and small business leases

Maria Luise Lanzrath

As **anti-Semitism** was already a part of every day life in Austria prior to 1938, it was a logical consequence that numerous riots started against Jews immediately after the Anschluss. The liquidation of Jewish assets began right away.

Liquidation of businesses often took place in the form of "rogue Aryanisations" – for example Jewish businesses were often taken over by "Aryan" employees, who until then had been illegal National Socialists, and the Jewish proprietors were forbidden to enter their own businesses.

Jewish tenants were driven from their apartments and had to move into smaller accommodations or communal apartments, usually leaving behind all their worldly goods. Only a few managed to move back into their own houses and apartments after the war.

~~Mehrere Mieter im Hause ( Arierer ) wollen mit dem  
nichtarischen Mieter keine Hausgemeinschaft mehr  
haben.~~

For more than 50 years the restitution of confiscated rent and property rights announced in the Third Rückstellungsgesetz [Restitution Law] of 1947 never took place. Around 70,000 apartments, business premises, smallholdings and other real property were affected.

Die Mieterin ist Jüdin und wird die Wngs. über Auftrag  
Gründer NSDAP gekündigt für einen Volksgenossen der eine Familie  
gründen will und in beschränkten Verhältnissen wohnt.

ted. As early as 1948 the Chairman of the Jewish community made "a final appeal" to the Austrian Federal Government to establish legal equality more than anything in the matter of accommodation. It took until 2001 for a response to be made to this appeal:

In accordance with Section 1 of the Washington Agreement, the Federal Law on the National Fund was finally amended on 23 February 2001. As part of the new Section 2b of the National Fund Law there is provision for the final settlement of losses of

- apartment and small business leases
- household property
- and personal valuables

to victims within the terms of the National Fund Law.

Kündigungsgrund: § 19 Abs. 1 M.G. Der Mieter ist Jude und stört den sozialen Frieden und die nat. soz. Rauggemeinschaft. Die Wohnung wurde bereits einer Vg. zugewiesen lt. Mitteilung vom Wohnungreferat der Kreisleitung der NSDAP.  
§ 19 Abs. 2 Zahl 3: Den arischen Mietern wird durch die Rassenzugehörigkeit des Kündigungsgegners das Zusammenwohnen mit diesem verleidet.  
Die Wohnung liegt an einer Hauptverkehrsstrasse.

<sup>1</sup>Federal Law Gazette I No. 11/2001.



## “I was just two and a half years old...”

*...when we had to leave Austria. I never saw my beloved maternal grandparents, who practically brought me up, ever again. I can't remember details of our escape any more, but we reached our ship to Cyprus at the last minute. My childhood is characterised by fear: The war, my mother's desperate and unsuccessful attempts to get her parents out. I am certain that this has had a very powerful effect on my psyche.*

Frances Howard – then known as Franziska Waldmann – lived in Vienna I with her parents at Stadiongasse 5. Her father, Johannes Waldmann, was a successful civil engineer and architect. Furthermore, together with his wife, he ran the Café Josefstadt in the 8<sup>th</sup> district, which soon became a meeting point for artists from the nearby "Theater in der Josefstadt". There was a long tradition of coffee houses in the family – Franziska's grandparents had owned the famous Café Herrenhof since 1914. Both the Café Josefstadt and the family's apartment had been furnished and built by Johannes Waldmann to his own designs. Frances Howard remembers little of her early childhood. In 1957 her father, Johannes Waldmann, still had an impressive memory of the events following the Anschluss:

*My father, together with my uncle, had been joint owners of the Café Herrenhof, Herrengasse 10, Vienna I, which they established in 1914. It was one of the notable establishments of its kind and it can be said that it contributed its fair share to the creation of this type of coffee house, for which Vienna was renowned. Politicians, writers and men of the press made it their preferred meeting place, giving it a character of its own.*

*Upon arrival at the Café Josefstadt on 15 March 1938, I found big posters pasted to the windows, advising passers-by that the café was owned by Jews. These alone, I feel, would have stopped quite effectively most people from exposing themselves by visiting. But to make doubly sure, two men in SA uniforms were posted at the entrance. The next day the staff assembled in the otherwise empty café and one of the waiters, Karl Neubauer, informed me via a party edict that I was obliged to hand over the café, as well as all the cash in hand, to the staff. After having been told of the alternatives, namely what would happen to me and my family in case I refused, I chose to comply for the time being, thinking that the madness would soon pass and law and order would prevail. I handed over the safe keys and door keys to Mr. Neubauer.*



*During the night from 24 to 25 April 1938 all members of my family connected with the above cafés, in some cases together with their children, were rounded up and brought to the Café Herrenhof. There, a big crowd of spectators filled the street fighting for places at the windows; the curtains had been drawn for the purpose. The employees from all our cafés were there together with the storm troopers and I caught a glimpse of my relatives, who were surrounded by the SA and SS: my mother and my father, my wife, my uncles and aunts, some of their teenage daughters and sons.*

*Together with my uncle Markus Klug, I was taken near one of the big glass windows to offer the crowd outside a view and we were ordered to do gymnastic exercises to the command of an SS officer. I was still in quite fit condition and did not tire quickly. My uncle, more advanced in years, collapsed after some time. I had to carry on at a quickening pace. During this time the SA and SS who surrounded us abused and cursed us in the foulest language.*

When Johannes Waldmann's father refused to sell Café Herrenhof, the Nazis resorted to drastic pressure tactics to speed up the sale

of the coffee houses.

*They brought me to an annex of the kitchen, removed my spectacles, and pinioned my hands behind my back. Then a powerfully built young man punched me in the face with all his might, breaking my nose and some bones and dislodging it to a quite oblique position. I did not cry out, and said nothing. Then the three heroes let me go.*

The sale was finally accomplished. The Waldmann family did not see a single penny of the sale price which corresponded to only a fraction of the real value.

*In the afternoon of 25 April 1938, two Gestapo officers appeared in my flat. After having conducted a thorough search of the premises, they seized all of my and my wife's cash as well as all our savings books. Later we learned that our bank accounts had been frozen and subsequently seized. It was a large sum that represented all our savings. We had worked hard and lived modestly. They took it all, and we were called dirty swines for possessing it.*

Johannes Waldmann was arrested and brought to the Gestapo headquarters at the Hotel Metropole.

*There I was questioned for hours. I was, and always had been a law-abiding citizen. It has given me great satisfaction since, to know that all that was happening to us was unjustifiable by any human standard. It was robbery, pure and simple, a crime committed in the name of the "master race", because we were Jews. By the time the Gestapo had finished with me it was late at night. I was then taken by car to the police jail, Rossauerlände, Vienna IX.*

*I was led into a large and completely dark ward. The prisoners were Jews in a plight similar to my own. Two days passed, during which I could not eat owing to the injuries I had sustained. Fingerprints were taken of both my hands and I was photographed (front and profile). During my stay at the prison I was interrogated, insulted, abused and pushed around for hours by the Gestapo. I was forced to sign documents, constantly threatened that if I didn't do it, my wife and I would be taken to a concentration camp.*

*I was finally released on 9 June on condition that I would leave Austria with my wife and child. All that was left to us now was my flat and furniture. We managed to find purchasers who were prepared to pay a fair price. On the morning of the day, however, on which the contract of sale was supposed to be signed, a woman with*

*a big swastika on her lapel appeared and asked to see the flat. I told her that the flat was already sold. She insisted however on having a look around. She left and shortly after returned with her fiancé. A few hours after they left I received a telephone call from the estate agents who administered the building in which the flat was situated. They advised me that they had received a notification from the Nazi Party, according to which my flat had been assigned to this woman.*

*Impoverished, I left Austria with my daughter and my wife on 16 September 1938. My parents Albert and Malvine Waldmann were amongst the privileged few whom God granted to escape. They contacted me in Cyprus, on free territory. When they arrived they were completely destitute with nothing but their clothes and a few personal items in their possession, too old to start afresh in a foreign country with a foreign language.*

Johannes Waldmann had to start a new life in a strange land. He not only had to provide for his wife and two daughters, but also for his impoverished parents. Numerous members of the Waldmann family, who were there in the Café Herrenhof on the night of 24 April 1938, lost their lives in the concentration camps.





## “They can't arrest our Daddy!”



**Richard Horowitz** lived with his parents at Wurmsergasse 45, Vienna 15. The persecution started long before March 1938, in the form of anti-Semitism, insults and attacks by his classmates. After the Anschluss, seven-year-old Richard was banned from attending school and from then on had to attend a "Jews' school". Friends and relatives were arrested and sent to concentration camps.

*During this period we lived under prison-like conditions. Our building became a ghetto and three Jewish families were forced to move into our small apartment. There were continuous raids, and inspections by the Nazis. Then, in November 1938 we, as well as the other Jews, were evicted from our home and forced to move into a small apartment in another neighbourhood with our grandparents and many other family members.*

On 10 November 1939 Richard's father was arrested in the synagogue, and the temple was burnt down. Finally the family was driven out of their apartment. After many indignities Richard Horowitz was able to leave Austria with his parents on 3 February 1939.

From September 1937 to February 1939, Richard's mother Berta Horowitz kept a diary,

which expresses a mother's fears in the face of mounting anti-Semitism:

*It's September 1937 now and Dicky is getting ready for school. He's very enthusiastic about going and hopes that he will make friends in his class. On the second day I wasn't allowed to take him all the way to school, because all the other children were coming on their own. A young rascal said to him "Jew, Jew, shit in your hat!" Dicky replied "And you'll put on that hat!"*

*At the moment, his school is not our biggest concern, we know he's intelligent. Hitler took over the government in Germany four years ago, and Germany is spreading towards Austria.*



~~Kündigungsggrund: Verordnung 584/38. Die gekündigte Partei ist  
 Jude; das gegenständliche Haus hat gemeinsame Speise-,  
 Aufenthalts- und Baderäume und wird vorwiegend von  
 Ariern bewohnt. Die Wohnung steht nicht unter dem <sup>de</sup> Reichsschutz.~~

*There are constant demonstrations with shootings and of course the anti-Semitism that was always there is getting worse and worse. The Nazi Party seems to be gaining the upper hand; Daddy is away for business a lot, so Dicky and I are often left alone. How does one protect a beloved child when oneself does not know what tomorrow will bring?*

*We were not able to go on holiday this summer, because lots of hotels are not taking Jews and we would not have felt comfortable.*

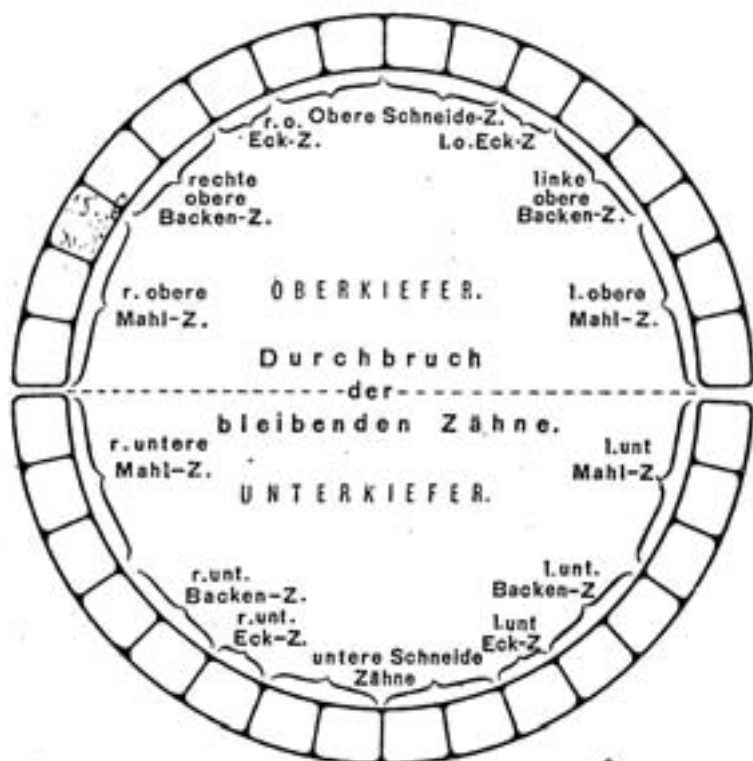
*In March 1938, after many demonstrations and much unrest, Hitler marched into Vienna. The skies were full of planes that droned over us all day. Dicky stood by the window and repeatedly asked whether we were being bombed. He calmed down when I told him that the planes were just bringing the flags – all the windows and buildings around us are decorated with flags and swastikas and pictures of Hitler.*

*We are making the greatest efforts to emigrate; all day long we write letters abroad and hope it will help. Frau Deutsch wants to send her*

*two children to England as part of an operation and when she told Dicky, he came home crying and we had to promise him that we would stay together and that he would not be sent away on his own. Dicky was seven years old in May, a sorry birthday – no party, fewer presents.*

*We still go for walks and Dicky is quite cheerful, only when he sees the Hitler Youth he can't understand why he can't wear such a nice new uniform too and march through the streets singing. He's even forbidden to draw a swastika. He drew a swastika and four flowerpots inside it and asked me whether I would permit him to draw a swastika like that. I simply try to explain the situation to him, but I don't think I'll have much success. I just hope that we can get away soon and that he will be able to forget everything!*

*All hell broke loose in Vienna on 10 November. At six in the morning we had another thorough house search. Daddy was already up and ready to go to the temple (for his father's Yizkach) and the SS left again. They came back again twice the same day. Dicky was nervous*



Inzwischen sind einige seiner Freunde  
weggefahren oder ausgezogen, die Väter  
verhaftet und nach Theresienstadt  
transportiert, u. a. Frieda's Mann - Kurt.  
Wir haben eine gründliche Hausdurch-  
suchung von der S.S. gehabt. Alle  
Kästen ausgereäumt um Waffen zu finden.  
So ist der Sommer vergangen.  
Im Herbst ist Dicky wieder in die

*and kept asking "What is it Mummy, what do they want?" We were afraid to leave the house. In the meantime the SS went into the other apartments, beat the people, and took all the men with them. We heard screaming and crying from outside. It got later and later and Daddy still wasn't home. We heard on the radio that all the Jews had been arrested. When I started to cry, Dicky comforted me so sweetly and said "They can't arrest our Daddy!" I wasn't able to contact anyone on the telephone, it was four o'clock before Steffi answered and told me that all three brothers had been arrested in the temple, the temple had been set on fire, but amazingly all three had been released again.*

*On 13 November, we finally got a good affidavit for America. God bless. On the same day we were given notice to quit the apartment. We started to sort out the things we would take with us and Dicky marked all his toys, wrote his name in his books, and put aside a pile of broken toys and books and games that he has outgrown for poor children. Of course he wants to carry the teddy, the musical box and car with him. Daddy went through a lot until all the emigration*

*papers were together. The applying, and waiting, and the unfriendly "spiteful" Nazis in the Civil Service. We were obliged to give away our nice, hand-made furniture, including an original Käthe Kollwitz painting, for which we received a total of 100 dollars. Dicky had a picture of a Meinel advertisement in his room; he took it very hard, having to leave his Moor behind. In February 1939, after 10 months of agony with the Hitler groups, we finally travelled to America via Switzerland and Paris.*

The diary entries stop on the day in 1939 when the family crossed over the border to Switzerland.

*After difficult early years of struggle, my parents and I have had a remarkably successful life in the United States. In her later years my mother often asked: Could we have had such a successful life if the Nazis had not forced us out of Austria? I believe the rigid socio-economic or "class" structure in Austria would have made it much more difficult for us.*

Richard Horowitz is now a pathologist and lives with his family in Los Angeles.

## “My memories of my home town are terror and fear.”

**Lisa Löwy grew up** in a prosperous family home at Neutorgasse 8, Vienna I, with her sister Susanne who was a year older. Her father Adolf Löwy was the proprietor of the Simon Löwy & Söhne clothing factory. After the invasion, when the girls were three and four years old, the family's life changed dramatically. The father's business was taken from him, the family had no income. After the father had been arrested, the children were sent to safety in Sweden on their own; it took several months before their parents could emigrate to be with them.

*On the day the Germans marched into Vienna I was on the street with my mother. We hid in house doorways until they had marched past.*

*Mummy took me everywhere with her. Every day we queued for hours for forms and documents. I can remember people passing out.*

*Several relatives lived with us. I can still only remember worry and tears. During this time, which was so difficult for us Jews, I often had to comfort my younger sister.*

The business premises of Simon Löwy & Söhne clothing manufacturers  
Franz Josefs-Kai 47, Vienna I: 1938-2005

FOTO: WALTER REICHL







*Our big apartment was searched several times – they were looking for valuables. Once someone drew his pistol and threatened to shoot my mother because she hadn't been quick enough to find the keys to various cupboards, which they wanted to open.*

*My memories of my home town are terror and fear.*

Susanne Ladow

*Like so many Jews in Austria, I experienced the brutality partly during several searches*

*of the house, partly on my playground at the Börsepark, which I was brutally thrown out of several times by the Hitler Youth. The Hitler Youth monitored the park to keep it "Jew free". In 1939 I came to Sweden without my parents. My father and his brothers were in preventive detention in Vienna. My completely impoverished parents Stella and Adolf Löwy were only able to follow us to Sweden six months later. At the age of 50 my father had to try to find a new job. I have been permanently damaged by these experiences. I started to stutter, a handicap that has re-*

PERSONENBESCHREIBUNG		
Beruf	<i>Kind</i>	Ehefrau
Geburtsort	<i>Hien</i>	/
Geburtstag	<i>10. V. 1933</i>	
Wohnort	<i>Hien</i>	
Gestalt	<i>Klein</i>	
Gesicht	<i>rund</i>	
Farbe der Augen	<i>d. Braun</i>	
Farbe des Haares	<i>d. Braun</i>	
Besond. Kennzeichen		
KINDER		
Name	Alter	Geschlecht

*mained with me to this day. For many years I was so afraid of uniforms that even a trip on a tram became a terrifying experience.*  
*Lisa Granér*

From a letter written by Adolf Löwy on 6 February 1946:

*Life was following its normal course until the storm broke with the Anschluss in 1938. On 11 March it turned out that one of my employees, the cutter Carl Kauba was an illegal Nazi, and on this day he demanded that the keys and the business be handed over to him*

*without further ado. On 16 March Kauba called in SA captain Otto Sattler, who appeared, accompanied by armed SA men, to arrest me. I was taken into preventive detention, without a trial or investigation, where I stayed for six months and eight days. Only then was I released on condition that I sign an undertaking to hand over my entire business, the factory, and my personal assets to the Party, with the threat that I would otherwise be sent to the concentration camp at Dachau. I had to undertake to leave the country for ever.*

## The Aryanisation of a watch and clock shop in Gumpendorf, Vienna

In 1938 Herszko Moszko Folk's watch and clock shop in Stumpergasse 36 was liquidated and his trading licence withdrawn. In 1939 Herszko Moszko Folk succeeded in escaping to Belgium with his five-year-old son Heinz. Heinz Folk survived in hiding.



FOTO: WALTER REICHL



Abchrift!

Wiener Zunft der Juweliere und Uhrmacher.  
Wien I., Schulhof 6

Wien, den 12. September 1938.

Herrn

Betr.: F o l k, Herazko Moszko  
Gewerbeschein- z. H. d. komm. Verw. Herrn Hans Sipl  
Übernahme. W i e n VI  
Stumpergasse 36

Die Wiener Zunft der Juweliere und Uhrmacher bestätigt hiermit, heute Ihren Gewerbeschein, ausgestellt am 29. Oktober 1931 vom Mag. Bez. Amt, VI. Bezirk, lautend auf  
Uhrmachergewerbe,  
Reg. Zl 7250/hv wegen Liquidierung, Arisierung Ihres Geschäftes und der darauffolgenden Löschung der Gewerbeberechtigung übernommen zu haben.

Der Sekretär:  
gez. Unterschrift

F. d.  
Siegel

Der komm. Zunftmeister  
gez. Unterschrift

### 5.3. Restitution of works of art

The Federal Law on Restitution of Works of Art from the Austrian Federal Museums and Collections has entrusted the National Fund with handling restitution of works of art. Using its comprehensive database the National Fund provides assistance in tracing the rightful owners of such items, or searching for heirs.

The subject of the Federal Law, which came into force in 1998, is the belated restitution of those works of art and cultural artefacts which came into the possession of the Austrian Federal Museums illegally and which are still in their collections. The National Fund is tasked with auctioning those items whose restitution to their former owners or their descendents is no longer possible.

This can take place only after the work of the Commission for Research on Provenances constituted for this purpose is completed. Only then will the various museums' "stray" items be transferred to the National Fund so their value can be legally realised.

The proceeds from realization are intended to benefit people originating from Austria, or who were driven from it, or who have a similar connection with Austria and who, as a consequence of National Socialist persecution directed at them have suffered impaired health, loss of freedom, loss of assets or income. Furthermore, the Law also gives the National Fund the option of supporting projects with the proceeds from realization.



#### 5.4. Project Development

In addition to its main tasks – processing symbolic payments, compensation for loss of apartment and small business leases, and caring for the victims – in accordance with its statutory brief the National Fund also supports projects. These benefit victims of National Socialism directly, facilitate scientific research on National Socialism and the fate of its victims, or are a reminder of the injustice of National Socialism and guarantee that the victims are remembered.

Since 1996 the Fund has supported around 300 projects, with the emphasis being on those that benefit surviving victims and/or their descendents.

Support for a range of artistic projects is also worth mentioning. In this case, the National Fund`s support has enabled new productions of works (theatre, cabaret, concerts) by artists who were driven out of Austria, and publication of autobiographies by Jewish emigrants.

## National Fund-Supported Projects

Building a bridge between old and young, then and now

Evelina Merhaut

**In addition to numerous disbursements** to individuals, the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism also provides support for projects that are directly related to the National Socialist era and to Austria. Financing National Fund projects comes from two different sources: on the one hand, from the "Project Development" budget item provided for in the National Fund Law (Federal Law Gazette No. 432/1995) and, on the other, from monies in accordance with the Law relating to Contributions to the International Fund for Victims of National Socialism ("Looted Gold" – Federal Law Gazette I No. 182/1998). In doing so, the National Fund strives to devote the same attention to projects big and small and to treat them even-handedly in order to guarantee all applicants equal opportunities. When selecting projects to receive assistance, the variety of themes is just as important as the wide spread of various project promoters.

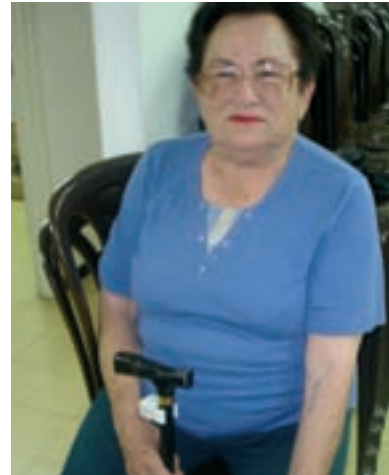
A total of around 300 projects have received assistance since 1996, with the emphasis being on those which benefit the surviving victims and/or their descendents both in Austria and abroad. The victims and their descendents must bear the consequences of the war and genocide to this day, so it is our duty to help these people, who have suffered greatly both physically and mentally, as much as possible in their old age and towards the end of their lives. The National Fund supports many socio-medical and psychotherapy projects to provide precisely this kind of help. Many survivors of persecution seek out therapeutic treatment in specialist centres.

During the National Socialist era, hundreds of thousands of survivors fled from Europe to Israel to build a new life for themselves there. There are still 300,000 people living in Israel who are Holocaust survivors. More than 40,000 of these people suffer from the aftermath of their traumatic experiences – what is known as Survivor Syndrome. The AMCHA – “National Israeli Center for Psycho-social Support of Survivors of the Holocaust and the Second Generation – Psycho-therapeutic and Psycho-social Services” provides these people with the help they need and receives regular assistance from the National Fund.

As a non-profit organisation, the AMCHA offers psycho-social help and care for survivors of the Holocaust. In addition to individual short- and long-term therapies, group and family counselling (also for the children of survivors, the so-called Second Generation), home visits for elderly and ill survivors, and those who live in remote locations, telephone services and many other relief services, AMCHA is also concerned with recording contemporary witnesses. More than 150 social workers, psychologists and therapists, as well as numerous voluntary helpers care for more than 5,000 clients in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa, Beer Sheba and other Israeli cities. Many survivors from Austria take advantage of the services provided by the AMCHA, especially at the Simon Wiesenthal Building in Tel Aviv.

A similar establishment in Vienna, the "ESRA" Association, celebrated its 10th anniversary on 16 November 2004.

In addition to a centre for psychosocial, socio-therapeutic and socio-cultural integration, the ESRA Association offers an out-patients clinic for the consequences and illnesses resulting from the Holo-



caust or migration syndromes. The out-patients department focuses on specialist psychological, general medical, nursing and psychotherapeutic provision for patients. The multilingual team, consisting of consultant psychiatrists and neurologists, a GP, psychotherapists, psychologists, social workers, specialists in geriatric care and home helps, has many years of experience in working with the most severely traumatised. The National Fund has supported the ESRA Association for years.

A very important aspect of the National Fund's work is devoted to remembering and commemorating the victims of National Socialism. The emphasis is also placed on projects that assist academic research into National Socialism and the fate of its victims. In this case it has been possible in particular to support projects which research the methods used by National Socialists to persecute Austrians victims or which are designed to take particular account of the victims' perspectives. Such projects may include commemorative references or various forms of commemorative events, or may take the form of cultural projects in the fields of theatre, documentary films, music, fine art, etc., which are suitable to ensure the victims are remembered. This is why we also support many archive-related projects. The more research is carried out and the more detailed it is, the more accurate the image we gain of the horror and devastation this era brought to Europe and the world.

Since 2003 the "Zeitgeschichte Museum und KZ-Gedenkstätte Ebensee" [Ebensee Museum of Modern History and Concentration Camp Memorial] has been working on a database project, the aim of which is to record the names of all the prisoners in the Ebensee Satellite Concentration Camp. According to the camp register, around 26,500 prisoners were interned in the camp, some 8,150 of whom did not

survive the conditions. From transport lists, original files and other sources it has, however, been possible to find evidence of greater numbers, totalling around 7,500 or more, occupying the camp. The names of the victims are being laboriously transcribed into a database from existing transport lists, lists of the deceased and camp registers, as well as grave site plans and exhumation records. Archival research in Vienna, Israel and the USA has been necessary to supplement the data.

The project is making a contribution to restoring the names of the victims who were anonymous before. At the same time the project provides a service for those survivors who need proof of imprisonment for the most varied of reasons, and for relatives who have so far not been able to find any mention of the fate that befell the members of their family. The database is accessible to visitors to the Museum of Modern History. A "Book of the Dead", a commemorative aluminium book engraved with the names of the prisoners who lost their lives, has been erected at the Ebensee Camp cemetery.

Another project supported by the National Fund, which has as its objective remembrance and commemoration of the victims of National Socialism, as well as researching this era, is "Yad Vashem – The Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance – Austrian Holocaust Documentation: Austrian Holocaust Documentation – Collection and Cataloguing".

Yad Vashem (Hand of God) is the central Israeli Holocaust commemorative and research site. It was established in 1953 by resolution of the Knesset to commemorate the six million murdered Jews and the vanished Jewish communities in Europe, and to honour the







people who rescued many of the persecuted, often risking their own lives. In addition to a vast archive and museum, the Centre has a large site where it is possible to visit an impressive memorial to the victims of Nazi genocide. Yad Vashem is visited annually by more than two million people from around the world. The archive, that collates and catalogues Holocaust documents from almost every country in the world, is used by 25,000 to 30,000 people every year.

As early as 1998, the National Fund developed a project to digitally record the "Hall of Names" – "Computerization of the Hall of Names – Holocaust Victims from Austria" at Yad Vashem, which has recorded the names of 20,000 Austrian Holocaust victims. Since 2002 Yad Vashem has been working on the "Austrian Holocaust Documentation – Collection and Cataloguing" project, during which around 68,000 as yet uncatalogued documents from Austrian archives, as well as photos, diaries and other exhibits relating to Austria, are being researched, catalogued and computerized. This major project also received funding from the National Fund in 2002 and 2004.

The "United States Holocaust Memorial Museum" in Washington is also making an important contribution to researching National Socialist injustice, and assisting with restitution in Austria, by microfiching Holocaust-related archive collections in the archives of the Jewish Community Vienna (IKG Wien) and the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem.

In January 2001, what are known as the "Wiener Bestände" [Vienna Collections] were discovered as part of an estate in the 15<sup>th</sup> district of Vienna (Herklotzgasse, 1150 Vienna). These comprise approx. 350,000 sheets with various documents and comprehensive

lists of names prepared by the IKG Wien between 1938 and 1945. These files, extremely relevant to applications for restitution and compensation by Holocaust survivors, document the systematic persecution and destruction of Jewish communities by the National Socialist regime in Austria.

To prevent further deterioration, since July 2002 the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has collaborated with the IKG Wien on microfiching these archive sources, which have suffered from years of improper storage. Furthermore, the IKG Wien's more extensive Holocaust-related collections, which were handed over to the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in the 1950s and 1960s, will be microfiched too.

The project's aim is to maintain the archive materials, which are difficult to access at present, at the project partners' three archive sites (Washington, Jerusalem, Vienna) for future generations, and to make them accessible to a wider research community. In 2004 the National Fund supported both projects.

Lead by Prof. Dr. Walter Manoschek, the "University of Vienna's Institute of Political Science and Comparative Social Science" has published a study on Austrian deserters. At the "Austrian Victims of National Socialist Military Jurisdiction – Rehabilitation and Compensation" symposium on 6 June 2003, the study's results were presented to Parliament in conjunction with the Verein Colloquium and the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Cultural Affairs. The research results represent a ground-breaking standard work on both Nazi military jurisdiction as well as the Nazi penal system. For the longest time after the war victims of Nazi military jurisdiction were not rehabilitated legally and were stigmatised socially. Deserters,

conscientious objectors and insubordinate soldiers were collectively excluded from the war generation's communal memory. It was only in July 1999 that the Austrian National Council resolved that the fates of Nazi military jurisdiction's Austrian victims should be academically reappraised and the judgements rescinded thereafter. The University of Vienna Institute of Political Science and Comparative Social Science was given a corresponding research brief.

In order to make it accessible to a wider audience, the National Fund supported the publication by the Mandelbaum Verlag of the "Austrian Victims of National Socialist Military Jurisdiction" study.

The "Österreichische Lagergemeinschaft Ravensbrück" [Austrian Camp Community Ravensbrück] dedicated its exhibition "Wege nach Ravensbrück" [Roads to Ravensbrück] to the memory of all those forgotten women who were imprisoned, terrorised and murdered in the largest National Socialist women's concentration camp. With the co-operation of the Women's Department of the Austrian University Students' Association at the University of Vienna, the exhibition was launched in the University of Vienna's assembly hall in 1999 on Anti-Violence and Anti-Racism Day. The exhibition centred on the fate and memories of the "Ravensbrückerinnen". Sample individual stories and biographies reveal the reasons for, the course and the duration of the women's imprisonment, as well as its consequences. The complementary programme, consisting of films and workshops on the theme, was designed by students of the University.

Ravensbrück women's concentration camp, around eighty kilometres to the north of Berlin, went down in the history of German Nazi concentration camps as "Women's Hell". Originally the biggest Nazi women's camp was designed for approximately 3,000 people.

In the final months of the war there were between 40,000 and 50,000 people there. During the six years of its existence over 132,000 female prisoners from more than 20 countries were allocated a camp number there. Numerically the biggest group of inmates was made up of political prisoners. Apart from "racial" persecution, the system cost the lives of many women due to forced labour, abuse, malnutrition and disastrous hygiene conditions.

Although numerous Austrian women persecuted by the Nazi regime were imprisoned there, for a long time the women's concentration camp was omitted from Austrian historical writing. After the end of the war and liberation of the camp in 1945, in contrast to other governments, the Austrian government neither implemented initiatives to fetch the Austrian women out of the concentration camp, nor were they officially welcomed by the "New Austria". Instead many of the former prisoners were forced to realise that their resistance was still being disapproved by the people around them, even after 1945.

The National Fund supported the project that made an important contribution to keeping the memory of those alive who became victims of the Nazi system and its contempt for human beings.

The "Schloss Hartheim Association" (aim: to develop Schloss Hartheim as an educational and memorial site and to conduct research for a book of remembrance) has made it its duty, given its history, to keep alive the memory of the victims of the National Socialist euthanasia programme.

From 1940 to 1944 the Renaissance-style Schloss Hartheim, in Alkoven (Upper Austria), housed a Nazi euthanasia unit. 30,000 disa-

bled and sick people – some inhabitants of the regional sanatoria and asylums, some concentration camp inmates from the Mauthausen, Gusen and Dachau camps who could no longer work, and some slave labourers – were murdered there. The Schloss Hartheim Association was established in 1995 in order to create an appropriate site in remembrance of and commemorating the victims of Schloss Hartheim and, at the same time to create a place where society can address the issues of Nazi euthanasia and eugenics. In 1997 the Upper Austrian Regional Government decided to renovate Schloss Hartheim and to erect a memorial for the 30,000 victims of Nazi euthanasia, incorporating the "Value of Life" exhibition.

One of the Association's key tasks is publishing details of the Nazi euthanasia programme victims. Of the 30,000 who were imprisoned in the castle or murdered, it has been possible to research almost 19,000 names and dates, and publish them in the memorial. The Association's other duties include work on the Hartheim Book of Remembrance, tackling the history of Nazi euthanasia crimes in Austria, and contacting relatives of Nazi euthanasia programme victims. The research results have been made available to the National Fund to help it determine those with a claim to restitution. The memorial houses an exhibition visited by many tourists and school groups.

In 2004 the National Fund supported both development of the Schloss Hartheim educational and memorial site with regard to development of teaching and educational work on the history of Nazi euthanasia, as well as research work for the Book of Remembrance.

The "Kulturverein Österreichischer Roma" [Austrian Roma Cultu-



ral Association] also makes an important contribution to researching Nazi crimes by recording the names of Roma and Sinti murdered under the National Socialist regime.

For a long time the Austrian Roma and Sinti who were murdered in the Holocaust and who lost their lives in other ways remained a group of anonymous and unidentified victims. As a result of the "Recording the names of the Roma and Sinti murdered during National Socialism" project, after 60 years Roma and Sinti Holocaust victims have been removed from oblivion.

During their persecution Austrian Roma and Sinti were recorded time and again by different authorities and government departments. The project's initial phase provided the prerequisites for recording the names of Roma and Sinti victims of Nazi genocide by finding sources that were scattered in various government archives across several European states. During the second phase the data contained in these sources was recorded and evaluated in a database. Because many Roma and Sinti families do not possess photos of their relatives, photos were collected throughout the course of the project for a separate photographic archive, and made available to the families on request. The National Fund supported this project in 2003 and 2004.

Volkshochschule Hietzing [Hietzing Adult Education Centre] (Project: "Historical viewpoint – a memorial for the demolished synagogue in Eitelberggasse") is one example of the numerous memorial projects funded by the National Fund. Volkshochschule Hietzing is involved in various projects relating to documenting Jewish life in Hietzing. With its involvement in the "NS-Verbrechen online" [Nazi Crimes Online] project and an Internet database that al-



lows searches for the addresses of Jews who lived in Hietzing, Volkshochschule Hietzing has highlighted a new aspect of the city's coming to terms and pre-occupation with its National Socialist history.

In 2004, thanks to the efforts of Volkshochschule Hietzing, the erection of a memorial for the synagogue in Eitelbergergasse/corner of Neue Weltgasse, destroyed in 1938, became a reality. The memorial is designed by the sculptor Hans Kupelwieser. A glass panel shows a photo of the synagogue that was built in 1928 by Arthur Grünberger. The synagogue frieze has been painted on the pavement on the same scale as the former building. From a certain angle the picture of the former synagogue blends with the modern building. The memorial, whose erection was also supported by the National Fund, was dedicated in November 2004.

The travelling exhibition "Visas for Life: The Righteous Diplomats" addresses for the first time a chapter of history that has long been forgotten – the assistance given to Jews during the Second World War by diplomats. The project by the "Jewish Institute for Adult Education" started in May 1994 in San Francisco. Its original purpose was to honour the Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara who, when he was consul in Kaunas, Lithuania, in 1940, issued visas to thousands of Jews, thus saving their lives. Since then the project has developed into a mobile exhibition that covers more than 25 diplomats who made it possible for around 200,000 people to escape National Socialist rule by issuing visas and letters of protection during these dark days. For the most part the diplomats acted on their own initiative, without the consent, or frequently against the instructions of their governments – thus often not only risking their own careers, but endangering their own lives and those of their families. Research has already produced 120 diplomats who, because of their

personal understanding of humanitarianism and at the risk of their own careers, sometimes even their own lives, individually performed acts of great humanity.

On the initiative of the Jewish Institute for Adult Education and with the assistance of the National Fund, the exhibition, which has already been shown in more than 80 cities, was on display in Vienna's town hall from 7 to 18 September 2003.

The variety of cultural projects supported by the National Fund in collaboration with other agencies has permitted many new performances of works by artists driven away from Austria. Forgotten music is being played again; plays and cabarets are being performed once more. A considerable number of books has been reissued.

The project "ZeitWerkStatt" – "Verfemt und verbrannt – Prominente lesen verbrannte Bücher" [Condemned and burned – celebrities read burnt books] was devoted to a very special theme ("Wehret den Anfängen") [Nip it in the bud!].

On 10 May 1933, in almost every University town in Germany, German students and the National Socialists held book burnings. 10,000 books, whose authors were ostracized for their pacifist, Socialist, democratic, Communist or liberal opinions, or their Jewish descent, went up in flames. The book burning went down in history as an act symbolic of intellectual bondage.

"ZeitWerkStatt" utilized the 71<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the National Socialist book burning as an opportunity to establish the project "Verfemt und verbrannt – Prominente lesen verbrannte Bücher". As part of this event, on 7 and 14 May 2004, Austrian celebrities from all

walks of life read passages from books prohibited during the National Socialist era. In order to make the passages more accessible to the public, the texts were placed in their historical context and then discussed. Discussions with contemporary witnesses took place between readings. As part of the event's complementary programme artists from the widest possible range of genres addressed the topic of the book burning.

With this event "ZeitWerkStatt" succeeded in reminding Austrian citizens, and making them aware, of the intellectual work of many important authors writing in the German language.

An impressive project by the "Mauthausen Komitee Österreich" [Austrian Mauthausen Committee] – the oratorio "The Song of Terezín" – is a reminder of the poems and drawings by the children of barracks L318 and L417 made during their time in the "model" Nazi concentration camp of Theresienstadt. These poems and drawings were published in the book "I never saw another butterfly". The composer Franz Waxman (1906-1967), who emigrated to America in 1934, selected eight poems from this volume and composed an oratorio around them, conducting it personally at the world première in Cincinnati shortly before his death in 1967.

The oratorio "The Song of Terezín" has already been performed several times in Austria. On the occasion of the Czech Republic's first national Holocaust Memorial Day the oratorio was performed in the Prague National Opera house on 27 January 2004 under the auspices of the Austrian Mauthausen Committee in co-operation with the Prague Jewish Community and the Prague Austrian Cultural Forum. The performance, which was sold out 10 days in advance, and was also attended by Dr. Heinz Fischer, Second President of the

Austrian National Council at the time, was a complete success. The National Fund backed both the performance of the oratorio at the Odeontheater, Vienna, and at the Prague National Opera.

Projects supported by the National Fund are supposed to reflect both the level of commemorative content and the extent to which this commemoration is manifested. In this case we are thinking in particular of projects in the fields of education, schooling, adult education – how do you teach people about the Holocaust? – and those which assist those employed in the education system as teachers or adult education officers to tackle the injustices of National Socialism in their work and to preserve the memory of the people who became the victims of this injustice. This is achieved by means of teachers' seminars, for example, around the subject of how to convey Nazi persecution to Austria's next generation, in a forward-looking-way, in conjunction with the idea of victims of National Socialism, by reappraising the injustice of National Socialism and "making the victims' voices heard".

The "Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust: Gedächtnis und Gegenwart" Association [National Socialism and Holocaust: Remembrance and Present] has been holding teachers' seminars on this topic all over the country for the last three years.

The "Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust: Gedächtnis und Gegenwart" project is an information project for teachers at Austrian schools, which looks at historical knowledge and teaching methodology on the subjects of the Holocaust and National Socialism primarily with regard to its significance for the present and the best way to convey this knowledge. This objective is to be achieved by improved teaching that addresses the pupils' needs and questions.

At the "Central Seminar", an annual conference held in Austria that lasts several days, representatives of the relevant academic subject areas are brought together with teachers to actively address the issue of Nazi era history. As part of the "Yad Vashem" network, groups of teachers are sent on training seminars at the "International School for Holocaust Studies". The participants undertake a further commitment to disseminate what they are taught. In the last 3 years more than 300 teachers and lecturers have taken part in the "Central Seminars". Austria's "Central Seminar" was supported by the National Fund in 2003 and 2004.

Because of the considerable interest shown by the third and fourth generations, both on the part of victims and perpetrators, but also because of addressing in depth our own country's most recent history, many Austrian schools conduct projects that try to come to terms with this era. Pupils at the schools try to trace the lives of pupils who attended their schools and who were driven out and lost without trace after 1938.

The "Past to Present" school project conducted by the BRG XIV at Linzerstrasse 146, is described here in greater detail and is representative of many projects by Austrian schools which receive assistance from the National Fund.

As part of the "Verschollen in Riga – Nachbarn von nebenan" [Lost without trace in Riga – neighbours from next door] school children



from Germany, the Czech Republic, Latvia and Austria have tried to trace Jews deported to Riga. The project's aim was to connect with the life stories and circumstances of the people; to put a face to a name. Five pupils from each country taking part in the project were able to present the results of their research at a conference in Riga. They then jointly continued their research in Riga and documented it.

As part of the "Kollaboration und Widerstand zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus" [Collaboration and resistance during the National Socialist era] project, pupils from eight European countries have been working on examples of collaboration and resistance during the Nazi era in their region. National Fund support has meant that both network projects have been able to create a multimedia document which edits and summarises the individual countries' project methods and research results for use as teaching material.

In January 2002, the "Anne Frank Educational Trust" from the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam launched the "Anne Frank – a History for Today" project, which ran highly successful in 24 Austrian schools up to the end of June 2004.

During the 2004/2005 school year ten Viennese schools have hosted the project, in a slightly different form, known as the "Wien Mosaik" [Viennese Mosaic]. The overall project package has a more condensed timescale and addresses themes in greater depth. The travelling exhibition "Anne Frank – a History for Today" has been com-





plemented by numerous workshops, seminars, complementary programmes for pupils and teaching material for teachers. Above all pupils are supposed to play an active role in planning and executing the project from the outset. They are not only involved in the preparatory project stages but also act as project curators during the exhibition. The idea of this active participation is to get the pupils thinking about the multiple facets to the subjects of tolerance, human rights, democracy and the situation of minorities. The intention is to increase awareness and not to instruct.

## Humanity in an inhumane time

This year Helena Th. celebrated her 101<sup>st</sup> birthday and is thus one of the oldest applicants to the National Fund. She lived in an apartment building mostly rented by Jews in the 17<sup>th</sup> district. She experienced the persecution of her Jewish neighbours at first hand:

In 1941/42, around the turn of the year, suddenly uniformed Nazis appeared, kicked in the doors to the flats, dragged out the Jewish tenants and looted the apartments. As Helen Th. discovered later, the Jewish tenants were herded together in the Judenplatz at a collecting point to await transportation from there to the concentration camps.

*My neighbours, the Rosenberg family who were friends of mine, managed to send me a secret message, which said that they had to eke out a miserable existence there, without food and in unimaginably unhygienic conditions. I succeeded in occasionally sending this family parcels with food and soap. When I wanted to send another parcel I found out that the family had been transported to Litzmannstadt in Poland.*

Despite numerous attempts by Helena Th. to find out more about this family's fate, it was just a few years ago that she learned of the sad certainty, based on published lists of victims' names, that the whole family was murdered in the extermination camps.

Helena Th. suffered the consequences of trying to help Jewish families. Her anti-Nazi at-

Helena Th. with part of her history which adorns her studio apartment. The radio was a gift for her retirement.



FOTO: WALTER REICHL

titude was noted by her employer, the firm "Eumig". The company manufactured components essential to the war effort and so the employees were watched very closely.

*In spring 1942 I was asked to go the offices of the SS where I was informed that they were aware of my anti-regime attitude. I was reproached not only for my pro-Jewish attitude but also for my traditional Socialist convictions and it was made very clear to me that I was to be regarded as an enemy of the people. I could be rehabilitated, however, by joining the NSDAP, the National Socialist Workers' Party, on the spot. I refused to sign the membership document.*

As a result Helena Th.'s situation began to worsen. She was warned by a doctor who was well disposed towards her that she was likely to be arrested by the Gestapo. She was forced to flee her flat, taking only the absolute necessities in terms of personal belongings with her. Helena Th. spent the time until the end of the war in hiding with a family in Upper Austria, who let her live with them in return for helping around the house.







### 5.5. The Hardship Fund

The "Hardship Fund" represents a special project endowed by the National Fund. It was established on 11 May 1999 by the Board of Trustees to benefit any persons who were victims of National Socialism, and whose applications to the National Fund had to be rejected because they did not quite meet the claims requirements, if rejection would represent a particular hardship. This "fund within a fund" was endowed with ATS 7 million (around € 500,000). The Committee decides the value of the award on a case by case basis. So far 75 people have received payments from this project.

### 5.6. Administration of 'Looted Gold Funds'

In addition to making individual payments and promoting projects, on 12 April 1998 the National Fund was entrusted with administering and distributing monies from the Nazi Persecutee Relief Fund. These are monies that have been released as a result of various countries waiving their residual share of what is known as looted gold. The National Fund administers the Fund that the Austrian government waived in favour of the victims of National Socialism. The amount in question is around ATS 109 million (some € 7.9 million). It takes into account those people whose applications to the National Fund had to be rejected because they do not meet the requirement for ten years' continuous residence within the terms of § 2 para.1(2b) of the Federal Law on the National Fund, but who lived in Austria for at least 4 years in succession and who did not leave Austria to escape persecution prior to 12 July 1936, and those born in Austria to such people during this period, or persons with Austrian citizenship who did not have a domicile in Austria on 13 March 1938, if they were demonstrably persecuted by the National Socialists. According to this international Fund's statutes, this measure is directed at persons who so far have not received compensation and



who now live in difficult personal or social circumstances according to the standards of their country of permanent residence.

So far individual payments have been made to 46 needy Holocaust survivors within the scope of this provision. In accordance with international guidelines, the National Fund uses the majority of the looted gold monies to promote projects that provide help and support for individual victims or communities that were particularly badly affected by Nazi persecution.

### **5.7. Administering the General Settlement Fund**

As part of the Washington Agreement, in addition to processing compensation for apartment and business leases, the National Fund has been entrusted with administering the newly established General Settlement Fund.

## The General Settlement Fund for Victims of National Socialism

- Continuing the work of the National Fund?!

Christine Schwab

### Introduction

When establishing the National Fund it was assumed that this would be a temporary institution which would be dissolved on completion of its purpose, but as the work continued and even the Historians' Commission was established, doubts about this idea began to arise. For a short time the compensation of former forced labour convicts was discussed as a possible additional task for the National Fund, but in 2000 and 2001, developments took another direction.

Following successful conclusion of the negotiations on the compensation of forced labour convicts and the creation of the Reconciliation Fund, it became evident in the course of the negotiations on the outstanding matters concerning the restitution of property to victims of National Socialism, and was recognised as a certainty in the Washington Agreement, that the National Fund should play an essential role within this agreement, and thus in the framework of compensation for stolen property, which Austria wanted to pay to victims of the Nazi regime and their heirs, who had until then been compensated insufficiently or not at all.

In addition to the compensation for the loss of apartment and small business leases given through the National Fund, provision was made in this agreement for it to give administrative support to the newly-established General Settlement Fund for Victims of National Socialism. The Settlement Fund would operate under the auspices of the National Fund and in its operation draw on the experience and "infrastructu-

re” of the National Fund and its contacts with victims and victims’ organisations.

### **The General Settlement Fund for Victims of National Socialism – An Overview**

As referred to above, the Republic of Austria, the United States of America and a number of victims’ organisations signed the Washington Agreement on 17 January 2001, which, among other things, provided for the establishment of the General Settlement Fund. The Federal Law for the establishment of the Settlement Fund (Federal Law Gazette I No. 12/2001), decided by unanimous vote by the National Council on 31 January 2001 and by the Federal Council on 15 February 2001, came into force on 28 May 2001.

The Fund has the purpose of providing a comprehensive solution to outstanding issues in connection with compensating victims of National Socialism, thereby accepting moral responsibility for losses and damage suffered by the victims of National Socialism as a consequence of or in connection with the National Socialist regime, through the voluntary making of payments. Austria thereby acknowledges existing gaps and deficiencies in earlier restitution and compensation measures.

Compensation will be given for the following categories of property:

- liquidated businesses, including licenses and other business

- assets;
- real estate property, unless in rem restitution has been granted;
- bank accounts, stocks, bonds and mortgages;
- movable property, unless such property losses are already covered by the amendments to the Federal Law on the National Fund (Federal Law Gazette I No. 11/2001);
- insurance policies;
- occupational or educational losses (only under the equity-based process) and
- other losses and damages (only under the equity-based process).

The executive functions of the Settlement Fund – and in this there is close interconnection between the two Funds – are those of the National Fund: the Board of Trustees and the General Secretary. The place of the National Fund Committee is taken by the Claims Committee. This consists of a member appointed by the Government of the United States of America and one appointed by the Austrian Federal Government, and a Chairman, being a member appointed by these two. The independent Claims Committee decides on the financial compensation in respect of claims made to the Settlement Fund.

### **Appendix: The Arbitration Panel**

An independent Arbitration Panel of the Settlement Fund has been

established to examine claims for in rem restitution of public property. It has the legal duty of examining claims for in rem restitution and, depending on the results of the examination, either making recommendations for in rem restitution to the responsible Federal Minister, or refusing the claim. Like the Claims Committee, the Arbitration Panel consists of a member appointed by the Government of the United States of America and one appointed by the Austrian Federal Government, and a Chairman appointed by these members.

The Arbitration Panel has, to an extent, to examine the same legal prerequisites as the Claims Committee, in particular relating to the eligibility of claims, legal proceedings, ownership and removal. However, proceedings before the Arbitration Panel have a quasi-adversarial character, as the Arbitration Panel will also consider, in addition to the evidence submitted by the claimant, submissions by the Federal Government of Austria (or the representative of the relevant regional body) and any relevant findings by the Austrian Historians' Commission. It is therefore characterised by very precise and extensive research and inquiries into the facts of the case.

### **World Wide Notice**

On provision in the Settlement Fund Law for world wide notice of the compensation possible under this Federal law, the advantages of the support of the National Fund became evident. In addition to the publication of the world wide notice in 18 languages, 29 coun-

tries and 138 print media publications, a mailing was sent containing information on the Settlement Fund to affected persons already known through the National Fund and who appeared in its database. The lecture tours by the General Secretary, aimed at increasing awareness of the Fund, were also based on existing contacts, as was the cooperation with victims' associations in Austria and abroad, used for information purposes. A link to the website of the General Settlement Fund was also inserted on the National Fund website.

### **The General Settlement Fund Processes**

The Settlement Fund Law based on the Washington Agreement has created a range of very complex provisions. In the proceedings of the General Settlement Fund all losses must be taken into account which have not been previously, or only insufficiently compensated. Therefore, when determining the amount to be paid by the Fund, earlier compensation measures are to be taken into consideration. In this context often difficult limitation problems arise in connection with measures under other compensation institutions.

Persons entitled to claim from the Settlement Fund are persons immediately affected by National Socialism, who were persecuted on the basis of one of the grounds set out in the Law (the claim procedure also includes associations) and their heirs, subject to reasonable application of the provisions of the Austrian General Civil Code.



Claims could be made using a specific claim form within the two-year application period to the Settlement Fund. In order to cover all categories of loss, these questionnaires had to be very comprehensive. The claim period expired on 28 May 2003.

When making a claim it was possible to claim for the losses in one of two process types provided by the Settlement Fund Law: the claims-based process or the equity-based process. The differentiation between these two processes is a decisive factor in the body of evidence to be relied on and the payment made.

The prerequisites for the claims-based process are

1. that the claimant shows, under relaxed standards of proof, the proof or convincing evidence of ownership of property in one of the categories listed above or entitlement based on insurance policies at the time of confiscation, Aryanisation or liquidation, as a result of or in connection with events having occurred on the territory of the present-day Republic of Austria during the National Socialist era and
2. that such a property claim was never previously finally decided by Austrian courts or administrative bodies or settled by agreement, or such a decision or settlement by agreement constituted an extreme injustice, or such property claim was denied by Austrian courts or administrative bodies because of failure to produce required evidence, where such evidence was inaccessible to the claimant at that time, but has since become available.

In the claims-based process an overall amount of all recognised claims by the claimant will be determined by the Claims Committee, called the allocated amount. After the expiry of the claim period and decision on all claims, the Claims Committee will, on the basis of the claims amounts determined and according to the amount made available for the claims-based process, award the claimants with a reasonably capped award (pro rata), known as the allocated amount. This allocated amount may not exceed USD 2 million per claim. If the Claims Committee turns down the claimed amount, a claim for a renewed decision may be made.

In the equity-based process, applications may be submitted for awarding payments for losses or damages if the claimant is not able, under the standards of proof of the claims-based process, to document specific claims or make them credible. No appeals can be made against decisions in this process.

If the claimant claims for losses under the equity-based process, the independent Claims Committee will decide on the loss in accordance with the considerations of equity. Equity-based payments will be made per historical household. This comprises those persons who lived together in one dwelling on the territory of today's Republic of Austria between 12 March 1938 and 9 May 1945. The place of deceased members of the household is taken by their heirs.

Payments under the Settlement Fund Law may only be made once

decisions have been reached on all claims and legal closure has been reached. However this will only be the case once all claims in the United States pending as of 30 June 2001 against the Republic of Austria or Austrian companies arising out of or related to the National Socialist era or World War II have been dismissed. (At the time of writing, two such claims were pending). The endowment of the Fund with the intended USD 210 million is also dependent on legal closure. This amount will then be used, half for payments under the claims-based process and half for claims under the equity-based process, with an amount of USD 25 million fixed for payments for insurance policies.

### **The Processing of Claims in General**

The starting point for all considerations on the processing of claims was the large number of individual claims submitted and therefore requiring processing. This is because every claimant can claim both for their own losses and also for those of all persons, from which they are entitled to inherit. In addition these losses may fall under all the categories of property specified by the Law. According to projections, between 150,000 and 240,000 individual claims have been made.

Furthermore, of course account had to be taken of the fact that more than 60 years have elapsed since the losses were incurred. This means on the one hand that the persons immediately affected who are still living are elderly. It also means that knowledge of the pre-

cise circumstances of the loss, and any relevant documents, is only available in very rudimentary scope. In order to administer the Law as effectively as possible under these circumstances, it was sought to standardise the processing of the claims as much as possible – in particular within the scope of investigations and legal processing of claims. In this way an efficient procedure could be implemented while ensuring unity in processing subject to application of the relaxed standards of proof provided for in the Law, and ensuring that all claimants were treated equally.

As between 60 and 70 per cent of Settlement Fund claimants had already made a claim under the National Fund, reference could be made to the work of the National Fund when checking claims, not only in an administrative context, but also in terms of “content”. It became apparent that many victims, when making a claim to the Settlement Fund (i.e. starting in 2001) gave few or very vague details. In their claims to the Settlement Fund they often referred to earlier claims to the National Fund. When making claims under the National Fund they often gave detailed descriptions of all that their families had experienced and suffered, because this was often the first time to grasp this opportunity. Therefore, many assumed when making their claims under the Settlement Fund that their details were already “archived in an Austrian department”.

In addition to the details of relevant losses suffered by the claimants, the National Fund claims files also contained documents which had

previously been submitted and results of the National Fund investigations. Therefore it was clear that when processing Settlement Fund claims, account should be taken of these documents, mainly relating to evidence of persecution. In addition, subject to precise prerequisites specified by the Claims Committee, there is the possibility of expanding a Settlement Fund claim to include such losses which are not explicitly set out here, and thus the possibility of taking into account details of losses given by the claimant when applying under the National Fund.

### **The Investigations**

The investigations in connection with the Settlement Fund are essentially based on the following principles: On the one hand, the specifications of the Law should be complied with, subject to applying equal standards to each claimant and at the same time having regard to the basic differences between the different groups of victims of persecution. On the other hand, the claimants should be given assistance by means of concretisation of their claims. The Law provides that the claimants must give evidence of ownership and of confiscation, and that these events took place in the territory of today's Republic of Austria. Considering the fact that most claimants at the time of their flight were still children or young people, and considering the persecution situation at the time, it is understandable that only a very few claimants have evidence.

Considering the final settlement, important to both sides, in respect of losses still outstanding, a procedure has been developed from prac-

tical experience in processing claims, in cooperation with the Claims Committee, which takes account of both the interests of the claimant and the intentions of the legislator. In this context the vast majority of the investigations relate to earlier measures. These have to be made by the Fund administration, as of course the claimant is unable to provide proof that restitution or compensation has not been made. As the Fund is supplied by the endowment of the sum specified in the Law, the checking of payments already made in the case of each claim will also prevent other claimants from being disadvantaged by duplicate compensation being given, and the objective of the fairest possible distribution of the Funds available will be achieved.

### **The Legal Processing of Claims**

Within the scope of the legal processing of claims, investigations are carried out into the inheritance rights of the claimant from the originally injured party, the persecution of this person, their ownership of the property in respect of which the claim is made, the confiscation of this property and the existence of any earlier compensation measures. This is undertaken on the basis of the documents produced by the claimant and the results of the investigations undertaken by the Fund. Where there is lack of evidence a written request for additional information or documents will be sent to the claimant.

Every case of loss will be examined according to the process selected by the claimant. If a claimant has selected the claims-based process,



but in the case of the loss in question the evidence standards are not met, the loss will be dealt with under the equity-based process. There is also the possibility within the equity-based process to transfer losses for which there is sufficient evidence to the claims-based process. In such cases the claimant will be informed of this and can object to it being dealt with in the claims-based process.

With the support of the “Standardised Process”, software developed by the Fund itself, the legal employees prepare a decision proposal for the Claims Committee. So that this can be examined by the Claims Committee, reasons must be given for the acceptance or rejection of every aspect of the facts of the case.

Every individual claim must be evaluated before the amount of the claim can be determined. Claimants have the option of giving an estimated historical value of a claim. In all cases in which a claim can be evaluated individually, this must be undertaken in accordance with the guidelines of the Claims Committee. As various exchange rates have to be taken into account when converting to current values, and earlier compensation payments have to be offset, this can be very time-consuming. As in many cases the historical value of an actual claim is not known and cannot be determined, average values have to be used for evaluation purposes.

### **Claimant Support**

An essential element of the work of the Settlement Fund was and

is the personal support of the claimants. The Settlement Fund staff has also sought to continue the tradition of the National Fund and great value was and is placed on this by the international membership of the Claims Committee. During the two-year claim period the victims were supported by the staff in the completion of the questionnaire, which was much more complex when compared to the claims forms of the National Fund. This happened both by means of personal contact between the parties and in the form of telephone and written contact. As the completion of a claim form with a claimant could take a considerable amount of time, appointments were made with Settlement Fund staff. House visits were also made by Settlement Fund staff to claimants who were not in a position to visit the offices, as had previously been the case with the National Fund.

The extremely complicated legal basis of the Settlement Fund was at times very difficult for claimants to understand. Unlike the National Fund, it was also not possible to accelerate payments on the basis of old age of a claimant or on the grounds of financial or health difficulties. Like the National Fund at the beginning, the Claims Committee of the Settlement Fund very soon decided on the processing of claims in line with the date of birth, even if the processing and decision of the last claim, the decisions on the last appeal and, following these, the final calculation which would then give rise to the pro rata capped award amounts, had not been undertaken, and therefore the claimant would not benefit financially from this provision. But they would at least receive information on the basic decision of the Claims Committee on the determined claim amount.

The special structure of the Settlement Fund and its procedures also means that it is not possible to tell the claimants, due to the difficulty in predicting the length of time required for processing and the still uncertain legal situation, when they can expect to receive

payment and how high payments will be. For this reason employees are sometimes confronted with the reproach “once again Austria is drawing everything out”. Sometimes the impression is given that any bridges which the National Fund had attempted to rebuild were being destroyed, or were at least beginning to show cracks, and that many people who had been placated were now beginning to view their former homeland once again with embitterment.

Therefore it is all the more important to meet the wishes of the victims as much as possible, and above all to explain the objectives of the Settlement Fund – a comprehensive and definitive measure, by means of which the existing gaps and deficits in the previous compensation and restitution legislation of Austria are to be closed. It is frequently necessary to outline and explain the individual processing and, above all, investigation stages by means of which many individual claims are dealt with.

To summarise, it can therefore be noted that the historical-legal processing of claims by the employees of the Settlement Fund forms the basis for ensuring that the victims of National Socialism or their heirs receive a decision on the claims they have made to the Settlement Fund and thus belated satisfaction in the form of the “official” determination of their losses, which have until now not been compensated, or only insufficiently so. This “pure” claims processing can therefore be viewed as the main task of the Settlement Fund. In order to ensure that the objective of the Fund, namely acknowledgement of the moral responsibility of the Republic of Austria for these losses, can be achieved, in respect of the victims and in general, in addition to actual payments from the Fund, the attention given by the Settlement Fund is also on the support given to claimants and the sympathy for the fate of every individual. Only in the future will it be possible to evaluate whether this objective has been achieved.

## Home Visits

"It's good that you're here... even if you're 60 years late!"

Walter Amtmann

**From the start**, the National Fund employees wanted to offer fast, unbureaucratic help with the claims procedure; therefore particular attention was paid above all to the area of personal support. This comprehensive claimant support in connection with the National Fund, and later the General Settlement Fund, also included the possibility of having employees visit the homes of claimants following a telephone appointment, in order to give on-the-spot knowledgeable guidance in filling out the form.

This service was targeted above all at persons who were not able, due to age or illness, to leave their homes, but was limited to Vienna and the surrounding area. A total of around 60 persons took up the offer of having the formal claims procedure explained to them and receiving help in completing a claim in their own homes.

These home visits frequently resulted in deeply moving and emotional encounters, as some claimants opened up in these familiar and secure surroundings. Mental damage and traumas were exposed, we came across people who, due to their history of persecution, now refused to use artificial lighting in order not to be "discovered"; people who asked us not to knock on their doors, but to tell them by phone that we were outside the house in order not to evoke bad memories by banging on the front door.

Often the discussions went far beyond the subject-matter of the claim; often survivors of the Nazi regime were speaking for the first time of the events which had changed their lives and those of their families in such a terrible way. In such situations the actual purpose of the visit was pushed to the background – employees felt that it was a matter of listening and granting these people and their life stories the attention and recognition which had been denied to them by the Republic for decades.



FOTO: WALTER REICHL

National Fund employees on a home visit

In addition to the individual visits by employees of the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund, occasional more wide-ranging visits were arranged, such as the two-day consultation in the Maimonides Centre in Vienna to which around 40 people came to be advised and supported in making their applications on site by ten employees of the National Fund/General Settlement Fund.

Among all the good and cordial experiences of the home-visit team, we should not ignore the fact that, of course, they were often confronted with justified criticism, above all in relation to the long delays in making the compensation payments. It's good that you're here... even if you're 60 years late! This aptly summarises the most frequent grounds for criticism. But the feeling usually prevailed that even if a late gesture might not make everything right, it could certainly make some things a little better.







## 6. Summary and Perspectives

**During the ten years** of its existence, the National Fund has developed from an institution with only a few employees and limited field of activity to a contact and coordination point with a broad range of functions concerning many aspects of the effects of National Socialism. Its original task – the making of symbolic payments by way of recognition of victims – is largely completed. However, there are still people in remote places who are hearing of the National Fund for the first time. For this reason, and as this is an essential symbolic gesture, there is no time limit for applications, unlike with all other settlement measures referred to.

In future, the promotion of projects will be emphasised. On the one hand, because the majority of individual payments has been completed. On the other, because the experiences and memories of those directly affected can best be preserved for the next generation by the National Fund in the form of project-based support.

In the context of recollections and memories in the area of education politics, reference should be made to Austria's membership with the "Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research". Since 2001 Austria has been an active member of this international working association founded in 1998 on the initiative of Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson. The aim of the Task Force is to internationally provide information on activities in the spheres of holocaust education, remembrance and research. In addition to this, countries which still have not developed a holocaust education programme are supported in doing so in cooperation with experts and NGOs. The Task Force currently consists of representatives of the governments of France, Germany, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, the UK, the USA and Austria. The National Fund is the coordination centre for Austria.

One of the additional and particularly rewarding tasks which the National Fund has undertaken in addition to its legal mandate of making symbolic payments and the personal support of victims, and continues to undertake on behalf of those asking from all over the world, is to provide assistance in finding and reuniting relatives and friends who were separated by National Socialist persecution and the War. In around fifty cases, the search and reunion have been successful, resulting in people finding one another after more than sixty years, who have then remained in touch, by letter or in person, ever since.

## "What has become of you?"

Reuniting Families and Friends

Helmut Wartlik, Martin Niklas

The National Fund holds data on more than 30,000 applicants. Some people see this as the final chance in an attempt to make contact with people they had lost touch with due to persecution and emigration. And so, since the establishment of the National Fund in 1995, numerous claimants from all corners of the globe have turned to us.

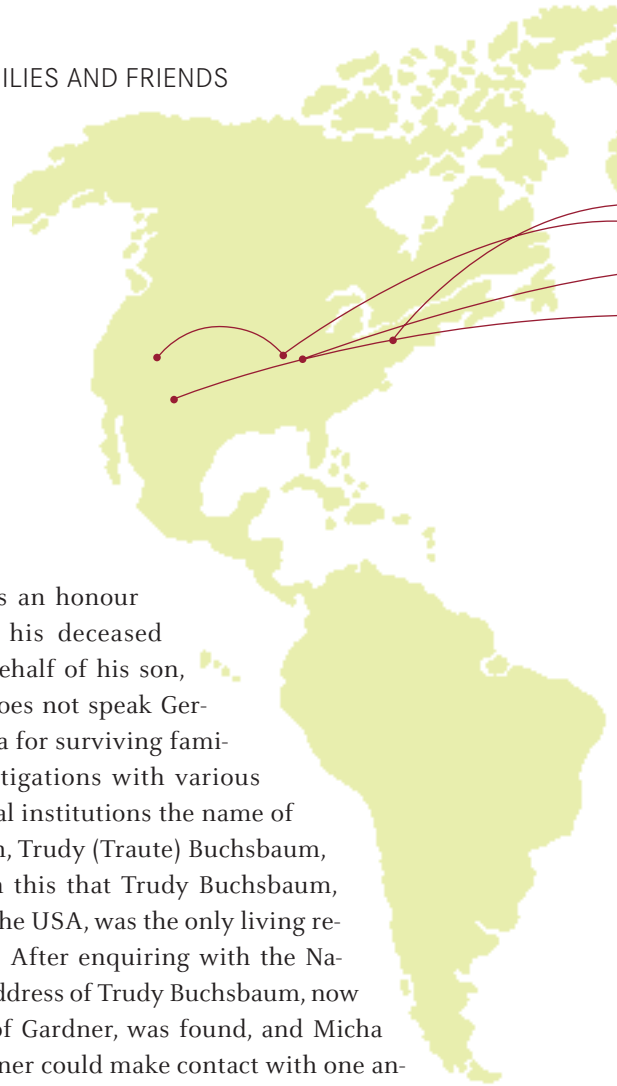
In the case of such requests – usually received in writing – the National Fund first attempts to find the persons sought-after in its database. However, for reasons of data protection, the Fund cannot pass on personal details. For this reason, if investigations are positive, a letter is sent to the person making the request asking for their agreement to forward their address to the person being sought-after. Then a letter is sent to the latter, informing them of the search and asking them to contact directly the person who initiated the search. Often the person making the search will also have given us a personal letter, which we also pass on. In the course of the last ten years we have assisted more than a hundred people in this way, for-





mer schoolmates, missing relatives or old childhood friends. The reunited people, often scattered throughout the whole world, write letters to one another, speak on the telephone or arrange to meet. To these people this assistance from the National Fund often means more than the financial payments; in numerous letters and telephone conversations they give a strong impression of how happy they are to be back in contact after so many years with a person who was once important or very close to them.

In the summer of 2003 Shlomo Shaked approached us, asking us to help in the search for relatives of a friend of his who had died. This friend, Avi Hans Altmann, born in Vienna, fled from the National Socialists to Israel. He was killed there in the 1948 War of Independence. His son, Micha Altmann, was six months old at the time.



Shlomo Shaked saw it as an honour and obligation towards his deceased friend to undertake on behalf of his son, who lives in Israel and does not speak German, the search in Austria for surviving family members. After investigations with various Austrian and international institutions the name of a cousin of Hans Altmann, Trudy (Traute) Buchsbaum, was found. It arose from this that Trudy Buchsbaum, who had fled Vienna for the USA, was the only living relative of Micha Altmann. After enquiring with the National Fund, the current address of Trudy Buchsbaum, now with the married name of Gardner, was found, and Micha Altmann and Trudy Gardner could make contact with one another.

Shlomo Shaked wrote us the following letter:

*The most decisive factor was the human willingness and readiness to help in the search for missing relatives, and perhaps also making a contribution to enabling the rest of a surviving family to be reunited.*

*These are most certainly moments of joy, and each one of the people referred to above can be proud that they have played a part in*





*this. For me it represents the successful conclusion to my task, and for the Altmann and Buchsbaum families it is, I hope, the start of renewed family relations.*

*I am convinced that contact would never have been made without your help, and all that would have remained would have been a list of relatives, most of whom were killed in the Shoa [Holocaust], and a branch in the USA who lives somewhere, but who remains unknown to Dr. Micha and his family.*

Since then, Micha Altmann and his wife have met the relatives he has retrieved in the USA, where Trudy Gardner lives.

In the course of her application to the General Settlement Fund in 2004, Tanja Eckstein of Vienna discovered that a relative of hers, of whom she had known nothing to date, was still living and had also made a claim to the Settlement Fund. On discovering this she wrote a letter, which we passed to her great cousin William French (formerly Walter Freund). William French, who had fled Vienna for the UK, made contact shortly thereafter with Tanja Eckstein and regular telephone contact developed between them. William French had already decided to come to Vienna, to visit Tanja Eckstein and the city of his birth, of which he had so many childhood memories. But a few hours after the last telephone conversation, William French died completely unexpectedly.

But Tanja Eckstein, who was deeply affected by the death of her relative discovered just two months previously, was still able to make contact via William French with the daughter of his brother and with one of his cousins, who told her that around twenty other more distant relatives of hers still lived in the UK. Since then a close friendship has developed between Tanja Eckstein and the cousin of William French.

The jazz poet, performance artist and film-maker Ruth Weiss, who lives in the USA, was looking for a friend from her youth, Susi Rosner, and through the Literaturhaus [Literature Centre], which she visited during a trip to Europe, made contact with the National Fund. Ruth Weiss had previously been in contact for a brief period

in 1948 with Susi Rosner, who had emigrated to Israel, but by 1950 the two women had again lost contact. Susi Rosner – by then with the married name of Hillel – was found in the database and a letter was sent. Contact was resumed in 2000.

We received these words from Ruth Weiss:

*I hear the voice of my closest friend (from 1933 to 1938 in Vienna) --- Susi Rosner ---. We speak in English --- my second and her third language. Our voices bridge time and geography from Jerusalem to northern California. More than 60 years have passed. How much has happened to us and in the world in all those decades. The heart contracts and expands with all those stories.*

*What a miracle! We are alive. We are living full lives. Her name is Tmima Hillel. Mine is, as always, Ruth Weiss.*

In June 2004, Judith Ladenstein approached the National Fund. Judith Ladenstein and her daughter came into contact with Felice Mathur in the course of a school project, “A Letter To The Stars”, and a good friendship resulted. Felice Mathur, an exiled Austrian Jew, who now lives in India, had visited Judith Ladenstein in Austria. Judith Ladenstein now wanted to visit Felice Mathur in India and surprise her with the current addresses of former schoolfriends with whom she had had no further contact since the War. Judith Ladenstein was able to trace six names of former schoolfriends of Felice Mathur from the Realgymnasium school in the Rahlgasse. On inquiry with the National Fund, four women were traced and letters were sent. Three of them (Ingeborg Tiger née Blühdorn, Ilse Roth-

blat née Paschkusz and Jehudith Hübner née Jessy Winkler) made contact and agreed for us to pass their data to Judith Ladenstein on behalf of Felice Mathur.

However, Felice Mathur, née Spiegel, could not remember her school days:

*I would just like to say now, that in fact I did not have any school friends. Therefore I have not missed any of the named schoolfriends, nor can I remember any of the fellow pupils you have traced.*

In a letter Felice Mathurs expresses an ambivalent attitude both towards her schooldays and towards Austria. She doubts that it makes sense ...

*... to make new contact with any of these old ladies, who probably do not remember me nor have the slightest interest in making contact with another 84-year-old – after all, what do we have in common?*

*For sure, only the infirmities of age!*

*I have lived in India for 54 years now and feel happy in this country, my schooldays are far too distant and have totally gone from my memory. Ultimately, any normal person would have other things to concern them than recalling this period.*

*Unfortunately one thing I can not forget is this: In 1950 – after eleven years in England, I came to India with a British passport (having married an Indian there). In 1965 I wanted to travel to Euro-*

*pe and applied for a new British passport. As India had become independent from the UK in the intervening period, I was not entitled to one, therefore my application was refused. And I was told that I did not obtain citizenship by marrying an Indian citizen, that I was still an Austrian citizen. So I wrote to the Austrian Embassy in Delhi – and my application for an Austrian passport was refused! I travelled on a passport which said I was “stateless”. Therefore I requested an Indian passport in 1966, and obtained one.*

*I lived in Vienna from 1920 to 1939 – and still even have the certificate of nationality.*

*And I’m supposed to forget that?*

However contact was made in this case, between Ilse Rothblat and Ingeborg Tiger, who had been good friends during their schooldays at the Rahlgasse and who now both live in the USA.

Ilse Rothblat wrote as follows:

*I thank you and, in particular, Mrs. Judith Ladenstein through whose help I have found again my old friend Inge Tiger (née Blühdorn). I speak to Inge on the telephone very frequently and e-mail Judith almost every day.*

Ingeborg Tiger also sent us her thanks, saying in her letter:

*With your help and through Judith Ladenstein I was indeed able to reconnect with Ilse Rothblat who was my good friend Ilse Pasch-*

*kusz in high school and whom I remembered well.*

*As to all of us, it is sad that we were separated, but good to know that we all survived the Holocaust, though, of course, many of our family members didn't.*

*I much appreciate your work trying to bring us together. Judith Ladenstein's first contact with me by phone was so unexpected, such a great surprise. She has been wonderful in her interest and empathy. Ilse and I correspond and telephone with each other and hope to meet in the future.*

Gert Z. Braun also had to flee Vienna after the Anschluss and today lives in the Netherlands. After the end of the War he tried to make contact with old friends, and with some he succeeded. He was able to find two a short time ago with the help of the National Fund:

*A few years ago it occurred to me that the National Fund must have many addresses of emigrants in its files. To my great delight they were ready and willing to help me.*

*And so I began to correspond with George Rainer. During the Hitler period I visited his house often. They had a beautiful villa in the immediate vicinity of the Türkenschanzpark. As Jews we were not allowed to enter. Once, when we were sitting in Rainer's garden, some Nazi lads threw dirt at us over the fence and swore at us. He lives not far from New York and seems to be doing well. Unfortunately I have not been able to fly to New York to date, as I was seriously ill. Now I'm somewhat better and perhaps I will soon be in a position to fly to New*



*York to visit him. It's an easy flight from Holland and costs little more than a holiday in Austria (I've been there twice in the past with my family) and my sons would certainly like to fly out there again.*

*But the greatest success story was the search for Heinz Herschmann, for whom I was searching under the wrong name of Hirschmann. At the National Fund they found the right name and put us in touch with each other. At that time he was living round the corner on the Weimarerstrasse. His father was taken in by the Nazis once and kicked hard in the kidneys, as a result of which he lost a kidney. I stayed with him for a few days in London and a while ago he spent a few days with us. It is now the middle of January 2005 and he has just visited again for a few days. We had a lot to tell one another. We still understand each other very well, as do our wives. It's wonderful. We have lived completely different lives. He became an artist and I was a scientist, and later Faculty Director of the Medical Faculty of a Dutch university. When the two of us are together, we speak German, when our wives or sons are with us it is English.*

In the autumn of the year 2000 Karoline Forst approached the National Fund with a special request, the like of which we had not before come across. Since the death of her mother she had been the keeper of a touching "treasure", the ring of a mother, who had given it – on transportation to a concentration camp – to Karoline Forst's mother, asking her to pass it on to her son, who was already abroad, by way of a kind of final greeting.

Despite a search which by then had lasted for 55 years, neither mother nor daughter, who had now turned to us for help, had had any

luck in their search for the son of the woman who had subsequently been murdered. We were therefore particularly delighted to discover that the details given to us by Karoline Forst corresponded to someone shown in our files as Yeshayahou Ben Porat, who had previously been called Otto Weiner. We were able to pass on the request of the lady and give him her address and telephone number. Shortly thereafter the two of them made contact by telephone and letter.



An excerpt from the letter which Karoline Forst asked us to forward to Yeshayahou Ben Porat:

*Dear Otti Weiner,*

*I'm sure that no-one will have called you that for many years. Please don't feel embittered and stop reading if I ask you, if I have to take you back to our youth in the Bachgasse. I remember your grandparents, your parents and your sister. I still remember how proud your dear mother was and also horrified when Baron Rothschild replied to you, an eleven-year-old lad, in response to your petition. Why am I writing all this to you? I have a mission to fulfil. I promised my mother, who died in 1966 and who has been looking for you since 1945, that I would continue to look for you. After 55 years (!) I have finally traced you. When your family and relations were taken away from the Bachgasse, your mother slipped her engagement ring from her finger and gave it to my mother with the request that she give you the ring as a last greeting from her. After 55 years I am now able to pass this memento on to you. I am delighted that I am still able to do this before my own life comes to an end. For *dat*a protection reasons they are not allowed to give me your present*



Caroline Forst and Yeshayahou Ben Porat at the Cobenzi in Vienna

*name and address, so I can only make contact with you by a round-about route. Please decide how you want to receive your memento, I will accept anything. What has become of you? Have you married, do you have a family, have you found peace after your troubled childhood? I already eagerly await your reply, please don't just leave the ring with me after my 55-year search. It belongs to you; I have kept it all these years. Sincere greetings down the decades ...*

From the reply from Yeshayahou Ben Porat to Karoline Forst:

*My dear Karoline,*

*Yes, that's me: formerly Otto Weiner from the Bachgasse. There is so much I'd like to tell you and so much to ask. And above all to thank you with all my heart that you and your mother have looked for me for so many years. But: I read and understand German very well, but I hardly ever write German, so you must excuse my many mistakes and must also try and read between my lines and sense that which I cannot express properly in this language. Every time I have visited Vienna I have gone to the Bachgasse and tried to remember all that was there and how it looked then. Unfortunately I don't foresee any opportunity to come to Vienna in the near future. Like you I am 73 years of age and travel infrequently. But if I do come to Europe in the near future, I will certainly make my way to Vienna and meet you. How have I survived everything? A long story. What do you know about my family's last days in the Bachgasse that I don't know? Please, please write to me and once again many, many thanks ...*

Thank you letter from Yeshayahou Ben-Porat to the National Fund:

*Dear Mrs. Hannah Lessing,  
It is hard for me to express how deeply moved and grateful I am to you for your letter relating to Mrs. Karoline Forst, who has searched for me for so long, and finally found me through the National Fund. I am already in contact with the lady and will soon receive my mother's ring from her. Will never forget what you have done for me. Once again my deepest gratitude,  
Yours, Y. Ben Porat  
(formerly Otto Weiner)*

In December 2000 the engagement ring was sent by courier to the Austrian Embassy in Israel, where it was handed over to Yeshayahou Ben Porat.

Schools, institutions or individuals who need information on holocaust survivors for projects or scientific research, or who are looking for witnesses from the period also frequently approach us. We are also willing to help in these cases, in the knowledge that the events which took place in Austria over sixty years ago need to be talked about again and again, in particular by those who were actually affected at the time, to preserve the past and ensure that they are not forgotten.

**In the course of** the political discussion on the establishment of the National Fund a phrase was spoken which succinctly characterises the National Fund, both retrospectively and also with regard to its future. It is ...

... not a fund to end discussion, but a fund to open discussion.<sup>7</sup>

It is important to see this as a purpose both in connection with those affected and their descendants, but also for future generations in Austria and Europe.

I would like to close this overview of the decade of activity of the National Fund from the point of view and in the words of a claimant whose father was murdered in Dachau, and add my own personal comment, that it has been and still is one of the most rewarding jobs, to come into contact with all these people and to learn from them how they lived and survived under the most adverse conditions, how they bore their fate and that of their families and how they have so many good words and thanks after so many years for Austria and the symbolic recognition of what they have been through:

During a stay in Vienna a few weeks ago I convinced myself that there is now a new Austria, which no longer denies the past, and that now many Austrians – I hope most of them – share the thoughts which you express in your letter.

And so for me the creation and actions of the National Fund are more than a gesture.

<sup>7</sup>Shorthand records, National Council, XIX. legislative period, 40th sitting, 1 June 1995, p. 70.

*This money will also enable me to travel to my former homeland, so that I can give a proper farewell before the curtain falls, and at the same time enjoy the most delicious Kaiserschmarren [pancake] that there is in the whole of Austria. (UK)*

*... and express my heartfelt gratitude for the great gift, especially after so many years, that it came and I could then celebrate my 90th birthday. (Switzerland)*

*It was a real birthday surprise, as it came on that very day I turned 91. (Australia)*

*I am using the money to pay for extra courses for my grandchildren in democracy and tolerance at their universities. (Germany)*

*Vienna and my childhood years will always take first place in my heart. Many thanks once again! (USA)*

*For me and my fellow sufferers as “Mischlinge” [“half-breeds”] and therefore outcasts this is a great sense and feeling, as during and even after the National Socialist era it was felt that absolutely no-one cared ... (Austria)*

*This gesture was very much appreciated and makes me believe that justice still exists, but it has also brought back memories, which I tried to forget for all those many years. (Australia)*

*The positive attitude of the Austrian government, showing that people still think of us, is warming and means such a lot! (Sweden)*

*It has moved me deeply to see that the new Austria has a soul. (Canada)*



*Although this generation bears no blame for the Nazi crimes, we see it as evidence that the Austrian government represents a true democracy. (USA)*

*We value Austria's efforts to make it known to us that we are not forgotten, and so we have also not forgotten our homeland. (USA)*

*With joy and gratitude I have come to realise that in our country, even 55 years after the end of the National Socialist rule, people are still making the effort not to sweep past crimes under the carpet, but to remain alert to the awareness of their fellow citizens. (Austria)*

*Money alone does not bring happiness, but the knowledge that this payment represents a matter of conscience compensates for much of the past. (USA)*

*This payment will really help her (my mother) as she lives in an old people's home and has many expenses. (USA)*

*It was a particular joy that my husband could have the pleasure of receiving the money a year before his death. (Austria)*

*You are making the dawn of my life a pleasant one. If my husband were still alive he would sing you a wonderful song of thanks. (Austria)*

*My mother, of whom I do not know when, where or how she died, brought me up to say thank you since I was a small child, and I am very grateful to you. (Israel)*

*It is certainly no replacement for my father nor can it compensate for the deprivations and pain of my childhood. Nevertheless, I am very pleased with this acknowledgement in the form of the payment. (Austria)*

*It will make my last years easier, although it will never be possible to get back my youth and life in Vienna, which was stolen from me. (UK)*

*As I am already 84 and am very ill, I can benefit greatly from this support and accept it with gratitude.  
(Venezuela)*

*You can not imagine how happy I was when I received the cheque. I can now buy more food and medicine, which I really need. (USA)*

*This payment makes things a bit easier in my daily life. I appreciate the goodwill, but what happened can never be erased. (Israel)*

*I am not rich, but I am in the happy position that I can use the money I have received from Austria to make donations which will help people who have a greater need than I have. So one good deed gives rise to another. I have to beg your pardon that this letter is written in such poor German, but it is such a long time since I wrote anything in German, I hope that my broken German amuses you. (Australia)*

*I received the amount of ATS 70,000.00 from you. I cannot voice thanks to you. It would be absurd. This amount (after 50 years of compound interest) corresponds to just the amount that my mother paid to an Austrian solicitor when she tried in despair to have my father freed from the Dachau concentration camp. (Sweden)*

ABGB	Allgemeines Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch [Austrian General Civil Code]
Abs. [para.]	Absatz [paragraph]
ATS	currency code for the Austrian Schilling
BGBL.	Bundesgesetzblatt [Federal Law Gazette]
BRG	Bundesrealgymnasium [grammar school]
bzw.	beziehungsweise [and/or]
d.B.	der Beilagen [of the appendices]
d.h. [i.e.]	das heißt [that is, id est]
DÖW	Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes [Austrian Resistance Archives]
EntschädigungsfondsG	Entschädigungsfondsgesetz [Settlement Fund Law]
etc.	et cetera (and so on)
GP	Gesetzgebungsperiode [legislative period]
ICHEIC	International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims
i.R.	im Ruhestand [retired]
iSd	im Sinne des [according to]
iVm	in Verbindung mit [in conjunction with]
KPÖ	Kommunistische Partei Österreichs [Austrian Communist Party]
KZ	Konzentrationslager [concentration camp]
lit.	litera (Buchstabe) [item]
Mio.	Millionen [millions]
MS	Motorschiff [motor ship]
NGO	non-governmental organization
NÖ	Niederösterreich [Lower Austria]
NR	Nationalrat [National Council]
NS	Nationalsozialismus/nationalsozialistisch [National Socialism/National Socialist]
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei [National Socialist German Workers' Party]
OÖ	Oberösterreich [Upper Austria]
OSE	Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants (jüdisches Kinderhilfswerk) [Children's Aid Society; Jewish Society for Children's Welfare]
ÖVP	Österreichische Volkspartei [Austrian People's Party]
RAD	Reichsarbeitsdienst [Reich Labour Service]
SA	Sturmabteilung [Nazi storm troopers]
SPÖ	Sozialistische (seit 1991 Sozialdemokratische) Partei Österreichs [Austrian Socialist Party, since 1991: Austrian Social Democratic Party]
SS	Schutzstaffel [Nazi bodyguard unit]
StGB	Strafgesetzbuch [Criminal Code]
StGBL.	Staatsgesetzblatt [National Law Gazette]
u.a.	unter anderem [inter alia, among other things]
USA	United States of America
USD	currency code for the US dollar
Z	Ziffer [number, subsection]
z.B. [e.g.]	zum Beispiel [for example]
ZK	Zentralkomitee [Central Committee]

**Renate Stefanie Meissner**, born 1959 in Vienna, ethnologist and Judaist, has been Deputy Secretary General of the National Fund since 1995 and was one of the first employees.

**Christine Schwab**, lawyer, born 1968 in Vienna, employee of the National Fund since 1995, Deputy Secretary General of the General Settlement Fund since 2001.

**Maria Luise Lanzrath**, lawyer, born 1967 in Krems, has worked for the National Fund since 2001.

**Nina Bjalek**, lawyer, born 1974 in St. Pölten, has worked for the National Fund since 2001.

**Evelina Merhaut**, historian, born 1962 in Vilnius, has worked for the National Fund since 2001 (project management).

**Helmut Wartlik**, born 1970 in Linz, studies of History and Political Science, has worked for the National Fund since 1995.

**Martin Niklas**, born 1975 in Wieselburg, studies of History and German Philology, has worked for the National Fund since 2001 and for the Arbitration Panel of the General Settlement Fund since 2003.

**Walter Amtmann**, born 1975 in Klagenfurt, studies of History and Political Science, has worked for the General Settlement Fund since 2001.

## Acknowledgements

Special thanks are expressed to all those who have made their life stories and personal memories, photographs and documents available for this publication.

Thanks also go to the Austrian Resistance Archives for the permission to use historical pictures.

We thank the following for their broad-ranging support in the preparation of this publication:  
Theresa Beranek, Katrin Bieberle, Gabriele Dötzl, Annette Eisenberg, Carina Fürst,  
Konstanze Knittler, Florian Markl, Susanne Sehorz

## Imprint

### Publisher:

Nationalfonds der Republik Österreich für Opfer des Nationalsozialismus  
[National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism]  
Parliament, 1017 Vienna

### Editor:

Renate S. Meissner on behalf of the National Fund

### Idea and concept:

Renate S. Meissner, Maria Luise Lanzrath

### Text:

Renate S. Meissner, Christine Schwab, Maria Luise Lanzrath,  
Nina Bjalek, Evelina Merhaut, Helmut Wartlik, Martin Niklas, Walter Amtmann

### Translation:

from the german original text by Multi Lingua, Hardtgasse 5/2, A-1190 Vienna

### Editorial office:

Daniel Hruschka, Adrian Ortner, Karin Tertinegg

### Photos:

Walter Reichl  
[www.wrfilm.com](http://www.wrfilm.com)

### Art Director:

Bernhard Rothkappel

### Printer:

Rötzer Druck Ges.m.b.H., A-7000 Eisenstadt  
Printed in Austria

Published in Vienna

Copyright © 2005

Nationalfonds der Republik Österreich für Opfer des Nationalsozialismus  
[National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism]

All rights reserved, including reprints of extracts or the reproduction of illustrations.



### 10th Anniversary of the National Fund

Figures. Dates. Facts.

1<sup>st</sup> edition 2005, 180 pp.

Publication after ten years of existence of the National Fund.

Report on the activities of the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund.



### In die Tiefe geblickt

Lebensgeschichten

[Looking into the Abyss – Life Stories]

3<sup>rd</sup> edition 2003, 80 pp.

Publication after five years of existence of the National Fund.

Report on the activities of the National Fund; life stories.

## National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism

**Postal address:** Parliament, Dr. Karl-Renner-Ring 3, 1017 Vienna

**Phone:** (+43 1) 408 12 63; **Fax:** (+43 1) 408 03 89

**E-mail:** sekretariat@nationalfonds.org

**Internet:** <http://www.nationalfonds.org>

## General Settlement Fund for Victims of National Socialism

**Postal address:** Parliament, Dr. Karl-Renner-Ring 3, 1017 Vienna

**Phone:** (+43 1) 408 12 63; **Fax:** (+43 1) 310 00 88

**E-mail:** gsf-sekretariat@nationalfonds.org

**Internet:** <http://www.nationalfonds.org>



