

Marianne Liepman

Wartime Experience: Fled to Shanghai

I was born in Vienna in 1927 and had a carefree, happy childhood until I was almost eleven. In 1938 when Austria accepted annexation by Nazi Germany, our lives as well as the lives of the rest of the Jewish population came crashing down. In a matter of days all the changes were instituted. My beloved nanny was forced to leave us because Christians were not allowed to work for Jews, and my sister and I were expelled from school because Jews were not allowed in class. I remember shouts of Heil Hitler, Down with Jews, and worse from morning to night, but the picture of old Jewish men and women forced to scrub the streets to the accompaniment of taunts and beatings will never leave me.

A few days after the Anschluss, we were awakened with banging on the door. Two men in the Gestapo demanded to search the house; they found "suspicious" books and correspondence, and they took my parents' bankbooks, as well as my father away with them. A few days later we learned that he was being held at the Landesgericht--the court and prison taken over by the Gestapo.

In the weeks and months that followed, my mother made daily trips to the Gestapo. This was a highly dangerous thing to do, and she saw my father only once. At that time he was quite changed, and bore bruises and cuts on his face. During their brief meeting he asked her to contact some of his WWI comrades--men who like he had earned the goldene Tapferkeitsmedaille, or Golden Medal for Bravery. My mother contacted Dr. Kaltenborn, an attorney who was now a Nazi. He agreed to meet her, and after some weeks my father called to say that he would be released; he could come home on the condition that all of us left Austria within a specified, brief period of time.

From that time on my parents worked feverishly to find a country that would accept us without an affidavit, visa, or entry permit. We did not have the time to wait for these, and Shanghai alone fell into this category. In October 1938 my parents, sister, and I left Vienna; we were relieved to get out, but we were heavy-hearted too. Both sets of grandparents had been left behind. They felt they were too old to leave their homes and too old to become refugees. Like many others they did not comprehend what lay ahead, and none survived.

Among the possessions my parents took with them is the Biedermeier cabinet you see in my photograph. Most of the porcelain and Bohemian glass had belonged to my mother and to my mother's parents before that. I have taken this cabinet with me wherever I have lived, and it is full of memories. When I am gone, it will be with my children. Together with books, letters, tapes, and photographs it will continue to serve as a memory and also a reminder of the past.