

(Beginn Band 1 von 2)

Question: I would like to do this interview in a chronological way, beginning with your first childhood memories, going up to the present. I will edit your statements so that we get coherent chapters for your different biographical stations, so it is no problem when you “jump” from one timeframe to the other during your narrative.

Answer: I can't imagine that there will be much to jump to, but if you ask the questions, I will try to follow the answers.

Q: I've read in an interview you gave some time ago, that you came from a very small village in Austria near the Hungarian border...and it came through that you didn't like this small village...do you have any particular memories on this old village and your childhood there?

A: Well, the usual memories of first being sent to junior school, to elementary school. And...not particularly liking or disliking it, it was just...one went to school. I remember more domestic things. I certainly remember being beaten by my mother, because she had made some jam, and I had climbed up the shelf, and I thought that the jam needed ventilation, so I pushed a pencil into each of the covers...and of course, ruining it. And that got me a beating which I remember, and I certainly remembered the jam. Ahm, I remember deep snow, and the other children in the village...we were apart, in many ways, and we were not in any way practising Jews. There were some sort of leftovers...dietary laws, because we ate anything anybody else ate, pork and whatever, whatever was eaten by anybody else in Austria at the time. But there was no running water, the water came from the well. And the drinking water stood in a big bucket with a lid. The lid had a (???)¹, a *Löffel* with a hook on it, and if we wanted to drink water, we had to take off the lid, take the (???)² and put it into a glass. If we put the glass straight in the water, that was worth certainly several *Ohrfeigen*. Which is understandable, but we didn't see thing like that if we went to neighbour's children. It was all a little bit more unhygienic. And, we were always told, if we wanted to drink a water while at the neighbour's house, we were not allowed to have one. We had to wait until we got home, and that was not religion, it was hygiene. We were never allowed to accept food from neighbours, and again, we ate anything at home...pork...but...so it was food hygiene and not any kind of religious prohibition. Apart from that, I can't remember...I haven't any childhood reminiscences.

Q: You went to the elementary school in Zurndorf?

A: Yes, the protestant one. But I think we were not allowed to have religious instruction. I mean not allowed by the school. Our parents wouldn't have minded what instructions we had. The only religious observance was, that I think once a year, there was a walk to Gattendorf, where there was some kind of...and I suppose that would have been the...overturnment³ in English...the important Jewish festival.

Q: Was it the Jewish New Year?

A: ...it was always around September, Yom Kippur, probably...

Q: Yom Kippur, yes.

A: And that was...but I can't ever remember being inside the synagogue in Gattendorf. Why they went I don't know. There was also a *Friedhof* there in Gattendorf, but I don't know where our relations were buried...who died.

Q: Your father had two brothers, your uncles?

A: Yes. There was a uncle Willi, who had a university education...but I think rather took to drink, which is very unusual, because one doesn't normally imagine Jews getting drunk, as far as I know. And I think there was a bit of family friction...my father and Willi didn't get on. Willi was married to a Hungarian woman who could hardly speak German, *Tante Fella*. I don't even know what Willi did for a living, if

¹ Wort nicht verstanden, Anm. AP

² Wort nicht verstanden, Anm. AP

³ nicht sicher wegen Wort, Anm. AP

anything. But in Willi's house, my father had in his house...it wasn't in his house, but the house was long...he seemed to have there...kind of one story, no first draw...and a series of long rooms, at the end of which my father had a *Sodawasserfabrik*, where he made *Sodawasser* and *Kracherl*, which he supplied to the neighbourhood. And that was taken by horse and carts, to the nearby pubs and shops, presumably. But, when you call it the *Fabrik*, it was really a small room, probably less...about the size of this room. And it was machinery which were turned by hand, and the bottles were filled...and the bottles has glass pebbles...I think I got one...excuse me...

(kurze Suche nach Sodawasserflasche)

Q: So this is a *Sodawasserflasche* from your father's...

A: ...which has engraved on it "Rudolf Spiegl, Zurndorf" and on the metal head, it also says "Rudolf Spigl, Zurndorf" There is something on the back which I can't read, a stamp.

Q: How did you get this bottle?

A: I think my sister must have found it in the village somewhere, or somebody must have given it to her or something

Q: This is an interesting reminiscence. Do you remember the factory from your childhood memories?

A: Ah, not really. All I remember is that there was coloured syrup for the *Kracherl*, which presumably was mixed with soda water...in bottles, which were...there was a marble, a glass ball, which the pressure forced up...and in order to drink it, you had to put your finger on the glass ball...and many dropped down and they went pffft like any kind of air rated drink.

Q: Your family was not religiously observant. Did you encounter any anti-semitism before 1938?

A: Oh yes, oh yes, that was always so. One was always aware of it, and ever as a child. But I probably remembers mostly what I heard my parents talk about rather than any kind of personal attack. The only personal attack I remember was on the day of the *Anschluss* when I was sent home from school, and I was put on a train from Eisenstadt to Zurndorf...I don't know if the station in Zurndorf is still where it used to be, if there is still a station...but it's quite a long walk to the village. Yes of course there is a station, cause we went through it on the way to Budapest from Vienna two years ago...and I didn't really know what had happened, except of when I looked out of the window, our school teacher, his name was...I've forgotten it, but I've got a photograph of the class somewhere. He was marching up and down with a little troop of Brownshirts and they were all wearing the Swastika armbands and doing various things, but...and then I was told to go home, I wasn't explained, and I thought that was lovely, because I really didn't like living at boarding school. (???)⁴ school is I think one memory, which I think one can probably date, because I was in Eisenstadt 1937-38, and people, pupils and teachers, were sitting about and there was news from England that there had been some huge fire disaster and I suspect it was the Crystal Palace fire, which burned down I think without any loss of life, but it was a...by present standards it was nothing, but by those standards it was a huge disaster, big enough for the news to get from London to Eisenstadt. And I remember one of the boys saying "Oh good, then I hope lots of Jews were burned to death" Which...I can't remember...(???)⁵ But strangely enough, it was exactly the same sentiment as was expressed by Cosima Wagner when she heard of the big theatre fire in Vienna...*Ringtheater*...where she made exactly the same remark. And I only learned that recently, but it was an interesting parallel between 1937 and 1919. There's another...according to family tradition, my grandparents, great-grandparents, whatever the correct relationship is...in the 1880s...the big *Ringtheater* fire, when lots of people were killed...but that ancestors of mine had tried to get tickets, but couldn't get any tickets and went somewhere else, and so escaped the fire. The other thing I know is that Bruckner, who had a fascination with dead bodies, did you know that, Anton Bruckner, he was...he always wanted to see dead people. If there was an accident, he wanted to be shown the *Leiche*, and when they...who was the Austrian prince who was shot in Mexico...?

⁴ Wort nicht verstanden, Anm. AP

⁵ leider nicht verstanden, Anm. AP

Q: Maximilian.

A: Maximilian. When his body was brought back, he wrote an official letter to the authorities saying that he wanted to see the body. And when it came to the theatre fire, which my ancestors might or might not have been present, he was absolutely in his element. He wanted to see all the bodies laying there on the pavement. But, the other thing was, that because the family was dispersed, a lot of people I didn't know and of whose existence I didn't know, and about 8-9 years ago, my American cousin, Fred Spiegl, who is also christened, if that's the word, Fred came over to see us. And he said I must go to Warwick, because I have a cousin living in Warwick. So my first cousin, who was the son of my father's sister, who lived in Vienna, and there was not much communication between the families, so that we were...my cousin Fred and I were born at about the same time, and each was given the name *Friedrich, Fritz*, which runs in the family, because our grandfather had that name, so you had two boy cousins born at about the same time who were both given the same name. He went to America and changed it to Fred, and he became a Colonel in the United States Air Force and worked for NASA. But when he came to England only a few years ago, he wanted to go to Warwick, to see his cousin Dr. Erich Müller, and Dr. Erich Müller, who is my second cousin, of whose existence I didn't know said that his paternal aunt was a first cousin of Gustav Mahler. A bit of interesting information, which came probably a little too late to help me in my career, it would have been quite useful to be a third cousin of Gustav Mahler, while I was playing in the orchestra, but it doesn't matter now. But I'm always wonder if there was any kind of DNA relationship...because Mahler died of *Herzklappenfehler*, and my sister Hansi says that that runs in the family, she's got the same trouble, though she didn't know about Mahler either. She didn't meet Dr. Erich Müller, our second cousin.

Q: We will come later to your life in Liverpool. Did you have any relation to music or instruments in your childhood?

A: None whatever. It was always said that my mother had a good voice, but I don't think I ever heard her sing. And we had a radio, but as far as I remember, the radio was mostly used for commentaries, football commentaries. And my father was a fan of *Austria Wien* and he seemed to know them quite well, because he worked for the Swedish company Alfa-Lavalle⁶, and somehow he managed to organize a football match between players from Austria Wien and a Swedish team in Zurndorf. But...which ended in a great disaster, because...a car full of Austria players...on the way back, they were involved in an accident and got killed. And I have a feeling that the name *Horvath Hansl* was certainly one of the players and one of the victims. I've known him anyway because he had a finger missing, part of the finger was...because there were lots of newspaper reports of *Horvath Hansl* doing wonderful things on the football field, and I was always aware that there was a part of his finger missing. And think I still have a photograph of football in action. There was no...I remember being glued to the radio set, which was one of those old ones...and when there was football, but never when there was a broadcast of a concert, if they had concerts...did they have concerts even in the 1930s? Yes, but football...more than football...but it's the football that I can remember, I'm sorry about that. It only came when I got to England that I took an interest in music.

Q: You told me how you were expelled from school on the day of the *Anschluss*. Do you have any further memories of that day? What were your thoughts and feelings?

A: Well as I were saying, I was put on the train from Eisenstadt to Zurndorf. I got off at Zurnodrf and walked up the long road to where we lived, and some child threw a stone at me and said...I can't remember what the words were..."*Dein Vater is eingesperrt* – Your father is in prison!", which I didn't know about. It was only when I got to our house, when I realized that...I heard what happened, that he had been taken away...to prison or wherever. In fact, he'd been taken to a what seems to have been a kind of rudimentary concentration camp in a town nearby which had a big double church...Frauenkirchen. Frauenkirchen, there was a camp. And at some time after that, my mother and I, possibly my sister as well, went to see him in the concentration camp. And they were all just sitting about on park benches, it was spring I think, it would have been April or May 1938. And he wasn't allowed to come out, and that was it. But when I came home, having made my way up from the station, my mother was sitting on the doorstep of the house, and the house was completely empty. Everything had been cleared out, there was nothing there. She was clutching an ashtray, because she said...she thought she had to save, to keep something. But it had been cleared out by villagers, and the car was seen being driven along without any tyres, I was told afterwards. I think we were the only

⁶ nicht sicher wegen Namen, Anm. AP

one, or one of only two families, who had a car. My relations certainly, my father's brothers...Nathan was the butcher, Nathan was a pork butcher, which has a certain amount of assimilation...because when they slaughtered the pig, I was always allowed to hold the tail, because I was told it was important for the pig's tail to be held...but it was just something you tell children. And that was uncle Nathan the butcher. *Onkel Willi*, as I said, I don't know what he did...he must have existed on something...I could ask his son Andy, who is in America, he's now the millionaire cousin. But then, I mean there was no point in staying in an empty house. So, I remember being taken to Vienna, where my aunt *Käthe* was, who my mother's sister, had a flat, a two-room flat in the *Staudingergasse fünf*. It was either 5/5 or 5/7, because when we went there, she had been dispossessed of either *fünf* or *sieben*, but she had a two-room flat, but one of her neighbours decided that she wanted the two-room flat, so she was thrown out of the flat and made to move in a one-room flat, which was one room and a kitchen. And we all lived...and eventually, I don't know when it was, my father came...was released from *Frauenkirchen*. So he joined us, and we all five of us lived in that room... my father, mother, Hansi, me, and *Käthe*. Pretty well until it was time to emigrate, I think. I think it was called a *Bassenawohnung*, is that...because there was one (???)⁷ with a tap on top on each landing, and one lavatory. And there was no bathroom or anything in any of the...do they still have *Wohnungen* like that?

Q: A few, but they try to renovate them...

A: But I think people were not really aware of the danger yet, because I was sent to school. We had no house in Zurndorf anymore, and I was sent to a school somewhere, I can't remember where it was...it went a rather long walk. But I got beaten up there, so exactly opposite the house in the *Staudingergasse* was a gymnasium, which I think was (???)⁸...it was a Jewish school, and somehow they managed to get me admitted, although I didn't speak Hebrew or anything like, or couldn't read Hebrew or anything like that. So, but I managed to get into the school, which was extremely hard work, because the standard was a lot higher than the village school. But I only had to walk across the street. I think the school is still there as a school...it had *Mädchen* and *Knaben*, it had two separate entries.

Q: I think the school still exists

A: Like (???)⁹ school, I can't remember any learning...a game called *Völkerball*, which was a ball game where I think the point was to throw the football on somebody from the other team...and if you hit them, and they don't catch the ball and the ball hits the ground, then they are "dead", and they have to...they are disqualified, they have to leave the team. And so, the stronger team eventually manages to eliminate all the others from the other team. The significance of that didn't strike me at that time. But I think as far as I remember there was no other sport...

Q: I've heard about "Völkerball", it is still known.

A: It was a very exciting game, I thought, and when I went to school in England for the first time, I tried to get the other kids interested, because you could play that indoors...and we played rugby football, we were not allowed to play round-ball football, because it was a public school. But nobody wanted to know, and I thought...I still think that it's a very good game.

Q: I've read in an article that you went to England by a "Kindertransport". Do you remember how your parents could arrange that for you and your sister?

A: No, I don't remember that all, but I do remember that she made it earlier. She left a few months before us, which was good news, because now there were only four of us in the flat. And we had *Wanzen*, that was awful. And apparently, do you know a green herb called coriander, green herb, it wasn't known then, as far as I remember, well, I had a sort of aversion to the smell, I can get it, but the smell of coriander is apparently the same smell as bedbugs, as *Wanzen*. And it must have somehow got in my head...I mean, these *Wanzen*, they smell, they've got a nasty smell. I must have subconsciously associated the smell of coriander with the smell of *Wanzen*. But, I mean I think Kitty went first, I can't remember the chronology, Hansi was...no. She got a job first. We got a cousin in London called Alfred (???)¹⁰ who was the son of my mother's brother, who was always attracted to England and ac-

⁷ Wort nicht verstanden, Anm. AP

⁸ leider nicht verstanden, Anm. AP

⁹ Wort nicht verstanden, Anm. AP

¹⁰ Wort nicht verstanden, Anm. AP

tually got a job as a young journalist in London. And I think it was he who organized the possibility of my aunt Kitty, my mother's sister getting a job as a domestic servant in England. And were not *Burgenländer*, the (???)¹¹ were Viennese. But he had a lot of connections, he married into the English aristocracy. His wife's father was a lord, not then, he was then only...he was the proprietor of a big newspaper, and leader of the Liberal Party, and somehow he managed to get a space for *Käthe* or Kitty, as she then became known...because then I was taken to the Westbahnhof and put on a train with lots of children. I thought it was a wonderful adventure. And then, when we got to London...that I did write about, I would have forgotten about it, but I was asked to write about it at school.

Q: You wrote something about your...

A: In the school magazine, yes. Because the teacher said...gave me a essay to write. He obviously...I think he wanted to know what had happened, but he didn't want to ask, so he asked for a essay. And if I hadn't written it down then. I would have forgotten all about that, I didn't really know. So it must be lots of things that I have forgotten, which I should have written down at the time, but nobody asked.

Q: Do you remember the atmosphere in your family shortly before you left in the Kindertransport? Did your parents talk about these kind of things?

A: No, the only thing I remember was going to...nobody remembers when someone said something important. I remember standing at the back enclosure of a *Strassenbahn*, which was open, and I think we were going to this big *Friedhof*...the *Zentralfriedhof*. Is that somewhere in *Simmering*? Yes, that's where we were going. We were going there for some reason. Obviously, there must have been a family grave or something, and I heard my mother say, because there was talk of the possibility of getting to Holland, and my mother said "Nowhere in Europe is safe". How would have she said that in German?

Q: Nirgends in Europa ist es sicher?

A: Must have been, yes. Which I suppose, for 1938, would have been quite far thinking. And the other thing I mostly remember I queuing for visas, because there were always queues of people trying to get...you got visas for some countries and permits for others. It was a permit for Palestine, I think, you needed it, and a visa for everywhere else. And in the end, there was nothing but...after we...my sister had gone, my aunt had gone, and I had gone, my parents than managed to get a visa for Bolivia, by getting someone to sign a declaration, I wonder who that would have been, a declaration say that they were farmers, because Bolivia admitted farmers. And then there's some photographs of them, some portraits...but I mean, I had got to England, and I...

Q: You arrived in England via Holland. Can you tell us something about the first weeks there?

A: I only remember my father saying "Jetzt wird's Ernst", and that must have been just before...but, I mean kids are not aware, and I thought it was a great adventure. And then I got to England, and for some reason we were in a boxing ring, the children were in a boxing ring, and there was my cousin *Alfred Gairinger*¹², and he collected me and put me on the train to the people I lived with the first couple of years. They were a family called Margeson, and he was at that time a prominent conservative politician, and he was one of the who became to know as one of the "Guilty Men of Munich". And guilty in that they appeased Hitler was Chamberlain. He was one of the allies of Neville Chamberlain, who made "peace" with Hitler and came back with the famous piece of paper saying that Hitler has no intentions against us, so when the war did start, and I remember that absolutely exactly, the perso who owned the house we lived in...family who lived there...Margeson became Chamberlain's War Minister. And, then...we didn't see him...we saw his house...his wife was American, who had decided to take three refugee children. One of whom was a boy called *Stephan Willheim*, and...who's older than me, and a little girl called *Ruth Spitz*, whose mother or aunt was a friend of *Alfred Gairinger*, so that's how she joined us. So, he must have organised the same escape route, as it were. And the same house, too, to live in. And so the big house, the manor house belonged to the Margeson family. And this was a little book they published for the millennium about the village, so that was our arrival at Buddington.¹³, and so then I was sent to school in a public school, which in England means a private school,

¹¹ Wort nicht verstanden, Anm. AP

¹² nicht sicher wegen Namen, Anm. AP

¹³ nicht sicher wegen Namen, Anm. AP

as you know. A “public school” in England means a private school...to get a public school education...a public school education is what the aristocracy gets, and the state school education is what the rest of us get.

(Telefon läutet, kurze Unterbrechung)

A: ...but because I lived with the family they sent me...to the same school as the aristocracy

Q: This is not...?

A: It amused me that they call it a public school when it is anything but public. A school for anybody except the general public.

Q: Did you speak English when you arrived?

A: No.

Q: So you learned English with your host family?

A: The three children were taken in by this philanthropic and beautiful American woman, who was married to the War Minister, she also had the imagination to...so she didn't actually have to look after us...of getting a young Austrian couple with a baby, who also came out...who also were a friend of my cousin Alfred...and his name was *Walter Neurath*, she was *Marianne Neurath*, and they had a newborn baby called Constance, who was still born in Vienna, but came out with them, by a separate route, I didn't. When we arrived at the village of Buddington¹⁴, the *Neuraths* were already living there. So, we had a new family found...of whom the couple and their baby knew each other, but the three children, but the three children didn't know each other and didn't know the young couple. And certainly the first thing we decided was not to speak German. Everything was in English, they were obviously learning too, but being young university graduates, they obviously knew more English than we did as children. And he became quite a famous publisher, he started a firm called Thames & Hudson. The son, young Frank Margeson, who is now the present Lord Margeson, went to America. He was in the Navy in the war, and he went to America after the war. And he and Walter's mistress called *Eva Feuchtwang*...she was a daughter-in-law, she was married to *Feuchtwang's* son, but she was the mistress of the young university graduate *Walter Neurath*. And I certainly sensed that at that time, I realized it at the time...even though (???)¹⁵...and rather as an excuse to meet each other, Walter and Eva founded the firm, a publishing firm, which Frank Margeson, who by then was in America, looked after it in New York. And that is why it is called Thames & Hudson, have you heard of that firm? They were art publishers, they still exist. “Thames” because of London, and “Hudson” because of the Hudson River. So, that was the sort of connection. They later parted, and Frank Margeson, who is quite a bit older than I am...I saw him a couple of years ago in London...his sister, there were three girls, the Margesons, his sister became engaged to a young British officer who went away in the war, he was a great war hero, and then when he came back, he became private secretary to the queen. So, he died a couple of years ago, too. So, there was this sort of near connection with the English aristocracy, completely unlikely than anything that had happened to us in Zurndorf, or indeed in Vienna. But it was wartime, and so it was all very low key. This book tells you quite a lot of life in Boddington, including a woman called Marjorie Streechy¹⁶, who was the sister of a writer called Lyton Streechy, very famous English writer, part of the Bloomsbury set. And she taught me English. She was the private tutor to these children, to the Margeson children, so that I benefited from that.

Q: So you started to learn English only in England?

A: In England, yes.

Q: You grew up in a aristocratic family.?

A: I don't think that would be quite right, because although we played together...first of all, they were older, and we went riding together, we went foxhunting together, and...but apart from that, we lived in

¹⁴ nicht sicher wegen Namen, Anm. AP

¹⁵ leider nicht verstanden, Anm. AP

¹⁶ nicht sicher wegen Namen, Anm. AP

a little house opposite, and they lived in the big house, to which the cottage belonged. So, it wasn't sort of...they lived in the big house. But the atmosphere was...and then the whole thing collapsed anyway. We never saw the Minister for War, which his son told me recently, he preferred to stay in London, because he was sleeping with another minister's wife, but he wouldn't tell us who it was, I shall find out one day. So, he was rather neglecting our hostess in Boddington, and then the war got really hot and difficult...and they parted and she went back to America in a conveyance, which was a very dangerous thing to do, obviously...in order to be with her American lover, it's always like this "Sex drives everything"

Q: How did you experience the war and the German Air Raids? Were you in Liverpool or in Boddington somewhere near it?

A: No, Boddington is in the middle of the country, in fact, it is quite near Warwick, where my unknown cousin Erich Müller lived. No, the progress after that was different, because with the wife having gone off to America, and he was a minister in London who we never saw...I think the house was closed. Yes, because the son was also married...he was an officer, and the son went into the Navy, so...those...because the *Neuraths*, who had their baby, moved to London to start their publishing firm with Eva, whom he married after his wife died in 1950 or so. So, Eva Neurath is quite heavily involved in this BBC programme, apparently...she will be here Tuesday. Whenever I stayed with the *Neuraths* in London, I used to sleep under a painting by Kokoschka, who was a family friend of theirs. When the household was dissolved, there was nothing left. I was sent to a boarding school in Leeds, which was a technical boarding school. I was to get an engineering training, but it didn't really take me to very much. And having left that school, I went to London, where again my cousin *Fredl* arranged for me to stay...I was old enough to get a job. I think I was fifteen or so, and I got a job in an advertising agency as an artist, so called, because I went to art school evening classes. But it was really typography, I worked as a really office boy. And then, at that time, I started to learn to play the flute. And...

Q: How do you explain your sudden interest in music?

(Ende Band 1 von 2)