

Chava Guez

Back then, in the beautiful city Vienna

Chava Guez was born Eva Friedländer on 1st August 1936 in Vienna. Josef Friedländer, Chava Guez's father, was arrested during the November pogroms 1938 and incarcerated in the concentration camp Dachau until April 1939.

From November 1939 to February 1940, the whole family was detained in a transit camp in Vienna. In September 1940, the Friedländer family managed to flee by sea to Palestine. However, the British mandatory government prohibited the immigration to Palestine and detained them in a camp in Athlit on the Palestinian coast until December 1940. They were then deported to Mauritius where they were detained in a camp until the war was over. Today, Chava Guez lives in Israel. She describes her memories of her last days in Vienna in a fictional diary. This text was already published in a similar form in the weekly paper "Die Furche" on 15th April 1988 (year 44/no. 15).



I can't simply write a "diary" about my childhood, you know? But I can describe individual days from a period of time, which used to seem to me like a whole, long lifetime. I can also hardly write in German anymore, although German was supposed to have been my native tongue.

Day one

It is nearly sunset and in the room where I lie in my cot (on the floor?), the last rays of sunlight shine in. I can clearly see my parents in front of me, they are arguing about something.

Day two

In Vienna, it is raining and water is collecting between the cobblestones. I have beautiful trousers with gaiters on. They get sprayed with mud because I am splashing around in the water. Am scolded. Is all very funny, we laugh. My parents on my left and on my right.

Day three

Snack time. My little friend Peter and I crawl under the heavy embroidered table cloth. We are bored so we get some scissors and cut almonds out of the table cloth. Get strict punishments. Peter, where are you? Do you still remember me?

Day four

Am to make a curtsy in front of a friend of Mama. But I refuse and am sent into the dark corridor. Won't apologize at all costs.

Day five

Day trip. Go carefully down the steps to go bathing in the Danube with Mama and Papa. A day among nature. Pebbles hurt.

Day six

Great excitement. An apparently very important speech on the radio. All terribly excited. Lots of coming and going. Lots of new faces. Questions without answers.

Day seven

Even more excitement. Fight. Papa only leaves the house late at night. Wake often during the night. Dark curtains are hung. Papa disappears and Mama stays out for hours. Stay with Grandma and Hermine. House very quiet.

Day eight

Begin kindergarten. Nervousness. Many, many unknown children. Cry pitifully. Educational measure: am put in the "parrots' cage". Terror. Stop crying. Children dance around the cage. Have learned my lesson. The kindergarten is in a dilapidated house. Memory of compulsory afternoon nap still vivid today. Not very heartening. Narrow beds. Little sleepers everywhere. Then bliss: wandering home in the evening and fresh chestnuts. Fall in Vienna. Very, very chilly.

Day nine

Aunt Mitzi. Says the child has to go to the Prater one last time. Aunt Mitzi in soft and cuddly fur coat. Suddenly a policeman. Am not afraid. We are both standing in front of a show booth, two knights in armor ride towards each other. Tournament. Policeman says, child must unfortunately go to the police station because Jewish. Detailed memory of police station, as from the raised ground floor barbed wire up the whole house maybe all the way up to the sky. Fall asleep. Wake up when the sun is setting. Go home. Happy again.

Day ten

Invited to play. Am brought home quickly because said something naughty. Don't know what anymore, but later hear I had said "Dr. H. should kick the bucket".

Nighttime

Heavy boots kicking against the front door. "Quickly! Open up!" Go flying on to the floor as I am pulled out of bed. Everything is higgledy-piggledy. They are searching for Papa.

Day eleven

Lonely. House empty. Very quiet. Grandma motionless. Door bell. Grandma at the door. "What do you want?" and me (oh bliss) "Papa, where is your hair?" Papa is back (Dachau) and now everything will be OK again.

Day twelve

Grandma is no more. Dark curtains covering big mirrors. House empties quickly. Furniture, bed linen, paintings, everything.

Day thirteen

The Danube. The ship. At the quay, big, booted men search our paltry luggage. Am not at all scared. Notice everything. Uncle Ludwig, a salami in his hand, runs very quickly so as not to miss us. How will I remember Uncle Ludwig?

Always and forever

A piece of Vienna remains in my heart. Thirty years and one day later. I walk through the streets of Vienna and everything is so foreign to me. Or is it: Vienna, Vienna, only you will stay the city of my dreams?

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In addition to the fictional diary Chava Guez also wrote a detailed story about the escape of her family from Austria to Palestine, which is only available in English language.