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Eva A.

So, now this flirting is well and truly over ...

Mrs. Eva A. was born in 1924 in Vienna. In her diary she wrote about what happened to her and her family due to Nazi persecution in 1938. In 1939 she emigrated to Great Britain. Today, Mrs. A. lives in New Zealand.

In her diary, which she received in 1934 as a reward for good grades in school, she describes the direct consequences of the "Anschluss" [1] on her life: like so many other Jewish schoolchildren, she was also no longer permitted to attend school.



Vienna, 29th April 1938

We have been thrown out of school due to our race. So, here is the sequence of events:

We heard about it yesterday from the newspaper and all four of us met at a quarter past 9 to take our books back. When we were at Am Schüttel [2] we saw Kurtl!!! Juli and Boxi over on the Lände [3]. We were meshuga, suddenly we saw Katz, Beran, Fast and Baar, also carrying their books back. Lily had already met up with Juli, she spoke to him (!) and asked what was going on. He said he was going to the school in Hessgasse and we were going to the Radetzky School. Then we went upstairs, Katz fetched Lindner from the geometry room (he went bright red) and handed in the books. Heinzl Baar asked us what school we were going to, he was generally very nice, Katz was a little bit arrogant. [...] Then came Spovi, we said goodbye to him, he wished us all the best and said he was sorry to lose us, his good Latin students. Then came Prof. Walter, he saw us, spoke movingly to us, you could see that it was hard for him and I just wanted to cry. Then we went in to see Didi [4], he was also very nice and told us we would be going to a school in the 20th district, horrible!!! Then he offered us his hand, even though he doesn't even know us.

Risa and Viktor S., the parents of Mrs. A. henceforth tried desperately to get a "permit" to enable their daughter to enter England. They also requested help in this matter from acquaintances in Great Britain.

Vienna, 25th October 1938

Dear Mrs. & Mr. E[...], dear Mrs. P[...],

I was very pleased to receive your [lovely] letters, I had been eagerly awaiting them. [...] We continue to be grateful for your efforts. Eva's best friend has been adopted by a rich London family. I wrote to Mrs. B[...], her foster mother, and requested her to locate Mrs. W[...] in Woburn House in order to speed up the permit. At the same time, I wrote to her to inform you of the outcome of her discussion with Mrs. W[...] I still haven't received a response, although Mrs. B[...] went away recently and I don't know if she has returned yet.

In this mail I am again sending you a "sample of no value", ice candy made by Eva. Each piece should be wrapped, but as I want to send more sweets than paper and the weight is limited to ½ kg, I left them unwrapped. I hope you didn't have to pay anything upon their receipt? Or did you? We thank you warmly for your pictures, they gave us great pleasure.

I wanted to reply to you by return mail, but I was in such a bad mood and I didn't want to inflict it upon you in my letter. Our caretaker had told us that we will receive the eviction notice on 1st November and that is a heavy blow for us, as we have no prospects of emigrating at all. Firstly, we have invested a lot in this apartment, where we have been living for 18 years, wallpapered everything immaculately, built in furniture, installed a slow burning stove etc. Secondly, moving is expensive, as I will have to have all of the ovens set up again, and who knows where I can move to. It is extremely difficult to get a new apartment, in most cases you have to take a large apartment with other people. What a pleasure! If Eva were to be safe in your care, then nothing else would matter to me, then my greatest worry is taken care of and I would somehow manage to bear everything else. You don't know how happy you should be, dear Mrs. P[...], despite being separated from your husband. I would do any job

and accept any lot if I could pitch my tent somewhere abroad. As my husband is already 62, it is hard for us to pack up and leave, especially for as long as we draw a small pension here.

[...] In addition to her English lessons, Eva has also resumed her French lessons. She is almost perfect in the latter. She has also learned to type all by herself, she has already finished one book as practice and is now working on the second, which covers business letters etc. She is very fast considering she has not been learning for very long. [...]

Maybe this time my package is the first in a series of three! I see, dear Mrs. P[...], that you are just as superstitious as I, although in my case the superstition was always well founded. We send our warmest greetings to you all, also to the dear children and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Affectionately, Risa S[...]

Vienna, 21st November 1938

Dear Mr. E[...],

Your two letters gave us great pleasure. [...] We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your intervention at Woburn House and await the arrival of the permit with great joy. I will then get everything in motion so that Eva need not stay here a moment longer than necessary. Unfortunately, it now takes much longer to deal with the formalities than it did with Mrs. P[...].

Taking on around 20 refugees is really a noble, humane deed, were there many such people in your country or in other countries then I wouldn't be so worried about our fate. I know that everything that you do for us and for others, you do out of the goodness of your heart and despite this I hope that Eva will be able to make up for a small part of your efforts and expenses by working for you.

Mrs. P[...] knows my modern apartment furnishings, I have to give up at least a part of them, as I will be allocated 1–2 rooms at the most. And before I sell them, I wanted to ask you if you or your friends could have any use for them, I would gladly give them to you. And as some of the things anyhow belong to Eva, I would send these to you, if the transport is not too expensive.

[...] Thank you again for everything, I know you don't like to hear it but I can't help saying it to you.

All the best to you, your dear family and Mrs. P[...], warmest greetings from my family,

Yours, Risa S[...]

In February 1939, as a 14-year-old girl without her parents and having to fend for herself, Mrs. A. finally reached Great Britain. Mr. and Mrs. H., who knew Mr. E. but had never met Eva or her family, were prepared to give her a home and she was to help look after their 3-year-old son. In England, Eva A. wrote letters to acquaintances in order to obtain entry visas for her parents. The following reprinted letter was written by Mrs. A. in English.

England, 2nd May 1939

Dear Mr. E[...],

I really don't know how to begin this letter, because I have got to beg for something again, and that isn't easy indeed.

Well, to make it short, my parents in Vienna lost their monthly pension they got from the school, and for that reason they are forced to leave the country at the earliest possible moment. They get now a little monthly sum from the assurance, but that's hardly enough for 1 person and far too little for two. So, if there is no other possibility, my mother will go alone first and is therefore looking for a domestic job now. She would of course have preferred to come over with a guarantee, but as things are now the principle thing is to get her out as quickly as possible, and the circumstances don't matter.

She is really perfect in housework and cooking [...], and she is now learning the English cooking and special dishes for ill persons. Besides, she knows dressmaking [...], knitting, and makes lovely models of leather belts and gloves, her English is quite good, and she is perfect in German shorthand and typewriting. (I think there are still some more things she knows, but I can't remember them as there are so many).

I hope it won't be very difficult to find some sort of job for her as she knows so many things, one's only got to know the right people, and that's why I write to you as you are in connection with the committees and hostels while Mr. H[...] and I are not. I do hope you don't mind my troubling you again, but you must understand, this question being so actual now I get hold of every possibility I can find to help my parents.

What my mother really wants is to get in a household, where she could, besides her work, have a certain social position, I mean, where she isn't just treated as a servant but where her abilities and intelligence and education are recognized and appreciated. (For inst. to look after children or their studies or for German lessons or conversation connected with housework of course, or to look after other servants or to sell belts or gloves etc.) But I needn't tell you that these are only wishes, and she and we all would be ever so happy to find any job which enables her to come over to England. Is it perhaps possible to find a place in the hostel for her?

I don't yet know what I am going to do about my father, I want to bring him in a home for people over 60 years, but you need a guarantee for at least 30 £ a week, and I couldn't get that till now. But my mother could come first alone, and then we both could try to help my father.

I enclose a photo of my mother, you might need it. Please could you answer me as soon as possible, for my mother is waiting for good news, and I know this terrible waiting in Germany only too well.

I am going to the Polytechnic now and attend an English course for foreigners, I really feel perfectly happy here and can't help thanking you once again, though Englishmen don't like that very much, do they?

How are you and your family? Please give my love to Mrs. E[...] and your children and don't forget Mrs. P[...].

I sincerely hope you don't mind, and I am looking forward to your letter,

Yours very thankfully, Eva

In the meantime, her parents' apartment in Vienna was confiscated, including furniture and a wonderful art collection. Viktor S., the father of Eva A., also had lost his pension as a former professor at the Business School. In Vienna, Risa S., the mother of Eva A., strove towards her emigration.

Vienna, 12th May 1939

Dearest Mrs. P[...],

I haven't heard from you for so long, I've even forgotten if you or I were the last to write. But that is unimportant. How are you? Do you have a lot to do and what news do you have of your dear husband? How is the E[...] family? Please be kind enough to send them our warmest regards, maybe he will find some time to write to us again. What is your husband doing? We don't hear anything from him anymore. He is in any case very busy and also has good reason not to seek us out. I would have written to you a long time ago, but I have experienced so many unpleasant things recently that I really didn't have the patience or the time. As you know, since early April we have been living in the 1st district [...], where we share an apartment with another family, very nice, fine people. He was a doctor and is now retired. We get on splendidly, and it would all have been good had we not received a letter on the first morning in our new apartment from my husband's employer, informing us that his pension was to be stopped, effective from the following day, 1.4. You can imagine the effect that this had on us; I just stood there, surrounded by boxes and suitcases, and could hardly find the energy to organize it all. Since then, negotiations have been carried out but there is very little prospect of success, so we also have to think about packing our suitcases and seeking asylum somewhere. In addition to this, due to an error we are also obligated to pay a contribution of 1200 M. We've already filed a request for its cancellation but are still waiting for the matter to be dealt with. In the meantime the execution official came, who reserved the contents of our apartment for the time being and we at least managed that the execution of the matter would at least be delayed until we hear of the cancellation. Please don't mention this to Eva should you speak to her. I don't want to worry her unnecessarily. [...] Apart from the fact that the move consumed so much money, we now have to keep a very tight budget to be able to somehow keep our heads above water until we emigrate. Are you surprised, dear Mrs. P[...]? You wouldn't have thought that when you last visited us! You can console yourself that I wouldn't have thought it either! As, however, we are modern people, we just have to go along with it all and I hope, despite all that has happened, that I don't lose my good humor, although I'm often close to it. The only thing that gives us strength are the letters from Eva, who is doing well in school there and is praised by the teachers and who continues to be tremendously happy. She has become a brave and independent person in this short time. I also received a letter from Mr. H[...] recently, who spoke charmingly about Eva and this of course gives us strength and courage to overcome all things unpleasant. I now work for about 16 hours a day, sometimes longer. In the mornings I attend a cookery course, I am asked why as I have already mastered this art, but I would like to achieve perfection and also add a few new starters etc. to my repertoire. When this course is finished, I will start to work in arts and crafts again etc. I generally return home at about midday, then I have to first cook our lunch, do the chores, write letters, study English, sew, darn, mend. In short, the day is simply not long enough. Now and then one or two of the few friends that we still have come to visit and so I often don't even get to think about what a poor devil I have actually become. So if you have a little time, pity me, but no, I don't want that, instead please have a look around in your close and not so close surroundings to see if you can maybe find a "madam" who would like to enjoy some Austrian cooking presented in person by myself. I would also work with children – I sewed everything for Eva until she was 12 years old – or as a companion, in short, whatever suits. One month before our pension was stopped an acquaintance offered me such a good position which I refused at the time, because I would never have dreamed that we would lose the pension. When I asked her about it again recently, the job was naturally already taken. As far as I have heard, a married woman can now only accept a job as a housemaid when the husband is already abroad. Now maybe in our case an exception can be made in that my husband draws a pension here of 135 M a month which just about suffices for one person but is of course far to little for us both to survive on.

Of course, we are also looking for a guarantor for my husband who will enable him to find a place in an old age people's home or somewhere, but this will probably be far more difficult than finding a job for me. Furthermore, if I had a job I could pay for the home from my wages, but most important is, of course, how to find one? Please don't think badly of me if I exploit your energy, cleverness and prudence and request that if you can be in any way of help to please do it, maybe through committees etc. You can recommend me to anyone with a clear conscience. I will not bring shame upon you, just as Eva didn't. I can and want to work, and for my husband a noble patron will have to be found. There are so many where you are, you just have to bump into the right man! So please don't be angry, Mrs. P[...], I know you are a good sort and take it upon yourself to help all those who come to you. I wish that I could do it – it is always nicer to be able to help than to ask for help, believe me. My whole life long, the former was the case and even if it is now different, I hope that I will soon find my way back to my customary position.

Please send [...] my regards to the entire E[...] family and our warmest wishes also to you,

Yours, Risa

After Great Britain joined the war, Eva A. was torn away from the family with whom she was staying and brought to a refugee camp as an "enemy alien" [5]. This time was marked by loneliness, homesickness and terrible fear for her parents. She expressed her feelings at the time in a poem, written in English:

When I behold the babe in mother's arms
Cent'ring upon herself a wealth of care,
Or when I watch home's rich and peaceful charms
And always watch, and never have my share –
Then melancholy overcasts my mind
And pain with icecold hands my poor heart grips
Bleak misery bursts through the outer rind
That fixed the smile upon reluctant lips –
For then I feel such longing in my heart
For my home town, for father, mother dear,
My troubled soul finds no escape, no rest
From utter helplessness, benumbing fear;
Yet, louder than all, rings this one voice in me:
"Rejoice! You are in England – the land where man's still free!"

Despite their efforts, Eva A.'s parents were unable to emigrate. They were picked up by the Gestapo on 27th May 1942 and deported to Minsk, where they were murdered. Today, Mrs. A. lives in New Zealand, but she has never forgotten Vienna.

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[1] The "Anschluss" refers to the annexation of Austria and its integration into the German Reich on 13th of March 1938.

[2] 2nd municipal district of Vienna.

[3] 3rd municipal district of Vienna.

[4] Headmaster.

[5] With the outbreak of WW II, German and former Austrian, later also Italian citizens were declared "enemy aliens" and put in special internment camps.