



Informations – Lucia Heilmann

"I went – as far as I can remember – on my own to Heldenplatz. (...) And I was stood there and heard the screams and shouts and cries: Heil! Heil! Heil! I knew I didn't belong there. (...)

(Lucia Heilmann on Heldenplatz on 12th March 1938 as Hitler invaded Austria)

Lucia Heilmann survived the Nazi regime together with her mother thanks to the help of a friend of her father who hid her from the Nazis. In 1938 she was on Heldenplatz when Adolf Hitler invaded Austria. She found the atmosphere there threatening, and knew that she no longer belonged. Lucia and her mother were put into a "Sammellager" (collection camp) in Vienna by the National Socialists, from where they were due to be deported. Their rescuer, Reinhold Duschka, hid them until the end of the war. In 1991, he was declared a "Righteous Amongst Nations" by the Israeli Holocaust Memorial Yad Vashem. In 2017, Lucia Heilmann will once more stand on Heldenplatz, but this time as part of the Festival of Joy, celebrating the day of liberation from the National Socialist terror regime.

Lucia Heilmann was born on 25th July 1929 as Lucia Johanna Triester. Her father, Rudolf Kraus was not Jewish. Lucia lived with her mother in Pappenheimgasse in the 20th district. When the "Nuremberg Laws" were enacted in 1935, Lucia had just begun school in Gerhardthugasse. In 1937, Lucia and her mother moved to Berggasse, in the 9th district, where she also attended primary school. One year later, Adolf Hitler invaded Austria. Lucia was eight years old.

She was on Heldenplatz on 12th March 1938 as Hitler invaded Austria:

"I went – as far as I can remember – on my own to Heldenplatz, because I had heard that there would be an event there. (...) And I was stood there and heard the screams and shouts and cries: Heil! Heil! Heil! I knew I didn't belong there. (...) I found the hooting and the atmosphere threatening, horribly threatening."

A short time later, along with all the other Jewish children she had to leave primary school. She can still remember the feeling of humiliation. Special classes and schools were set up for Jewish children. Much of what she knew changed from one moment to the next. Playing in the local park was also no longer a possibility:

"I can remember, we went from the school in the Börsegasse to the Schlick Park, and all the benches has signs saying: "Only for Aryans". Then Jewish children were no longer allowed to even enter the park."

Her father, who at the time was working for Siemens in Iran, tried to get Lucia and her mother out of Austria. At the beginning of the war however, her father was interned and sent to Australia. Lucia watched as her grandfather was imprisoned and deported:

"I had spent my whole life together with my grandfather. He was closer to me than any other person because he was always with me. He looked after me and was my playmate. And there it was again, that sense of threat. And everyone – including me – knew that we would never, ever see him again."



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Her grandfather, Josef Triester, was murdered in Buchenwald Concentration Camp in October 1939. In 1941, transports began that brought people from the collection camps into the ghettos, concentration and annihilations camps.

Her friend, Erna Dankner, was deported with her parents, Sarah and Moshe, in 1942 to the Theresienstadt Concentration Camp and murdered in August 1942 in Auschwitz.

Lucia's mother lost her job and shortly later their apartment was requisitioned. They were then brought to the collection camp in Vienna, from where they were going to be deported. However, her father's best friend, Reinhold Duschka, saved both of their lives by hiding them until the end of the war.

"He didn't just want to stand by and watch as the child of his best friend was simply killed. My mother was happy and so lucky, that he was so brave and that he took this risk onto himself. I don't think there were many people as brave as Reinhold in Vienna. In all of Austria there were 88."

Reinhold Duschka hid them in his workshop in the Mollardgasse. He built a 2-3m² shed with space for two beds. The workshop was destroyed in the bombing raids of March 1944. Reinhold Duschka then organised an alternative location on Gumpendorferstrasse. As the new location had large display windows, Lucia and her mother had to hide in the cellar:

"For me, the period between November 1944 and April 1945 was a very, very difficult time. I was depressed and you couldn't talk to me, so much that my mother was really worried about me. This period was so hard for me that I didn't even speak anymore. The dark cellar, the cold, the lack of activities and sitting very, very quietly as other people also came into the cellar. It was almost unbearable for me."

On 13th April 1945, Reinhold Duschka got them from their hiding place as the Russian soldiers arrived in Vienna.

"When the Russians arrived and I was finally liberated, the feeling was indescribable. A terribly exhilarating feeling! I was happy, I was blessed, I could finally run, go where I wanted and I could sit on any park bench that I wanted."

Reinhold Duschka was declared "Righteous Amongst Nations" by the Israeli Holocaust memorial institution, Yad Vashem. The Republic of Austria has never recognised his efforts. He died in May 1993.



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From 2013-2014, Lucia Heilmann was in the production of “The Last Witness” at the Vienna Burgtheater. In 2017 she will once more stand on Heldenplatz, this time as part of the Festival of Joy, celebrating the day of liberation from the National Socialist regime of terror.

For more information please contact the organisers, the Austrian Mauthausen Committee (www.mkoe.at) by telephone on +43 (0)1/212 83 33 or per email at bauer@mkoe.at.