

How the Holocaust Changed by Life – Werner Stocker

WE MUST NEVER FORGET!

**I WAS BORN IN SEPTEMBER OF 1943 IN VIENNA, THEN
PART OF THE OSTMARK, A PART OF THE THIRD REICH.**

**MY BIRTH CERTIFICATE HAS A SWASTIKA ON THE
BOTTOM , A CONSTANT REMINDER HOW CLOSE I WAS
TO THE HORRORS OF THE THIRD REICH. I GREW UP WITH THE REMINDERS OF
WAR ALL AROUND ME: BOMBED OUT BUILDINGS,EMACIATED PEOPLE,
LEGLSS AND BLIND VETERANS, FRENCH, BRITISH, RUSSIAN AND AMERICAN
OCCUPATION TROOPS ALL AROUND. AS A CHILD I HAD NO IDEA WHAT HAD
HAPPENED. THIS WAS THE ONLY WORLD I KNEW AND IT ALL SEEMED
PERFECTLY NORMAL. BY THE TIME I STARTED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IT
SEEMED ODD THAT SO MANY OF MY CLASSMATES HAD NO FATHERS AND I
BEGAN TO ASK MY FIRST QUESTIONS OF MY PARENTS OF WHAT HAD GONE
ON. “WAR” I WAS TOLD , A MAD- MAN NAMED HITLER HAD TAKEN OVER THE
GOVERNMENT AND HAD LED THE PEOPLE ASTRAY. AS A CHILD I WAS
FAMILIAR WITH THE STORY OF THE PIED PIEPER OF HAMELIN. HITLER, I WAS
TOLD WAS LIKE THE PIED PIPER WHO HAD LET THE PEOPLE ASTRAY AND
BEING A CHILD I WAS SATISFIED WITH THAT ANSWER. AFTER ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL I WENT TO A LIBERAL ARTS GYMNASIUM TO PREPARE FOR THE
UNIVERSITY. THERE I WAS INTRODUCED TO MY FIRST HISTORY LESSONS.**

THE HISTORY CURRICULUM STOPPED WITH THE END OF WORLD WAR I. THERE WAS NO MENTION OF WORLD WAR II , THE NAZIS AND THE ANNEXATION OF AUSTRIA TO THE THIRD REICH. ALL MY PROFESSORS WERE WAR VETERANS, SOME PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY WOUNDED . NOBODY TALKED ABOUT THE WAR. IT SEEMED EVERYBODY HAD AMNESIA. COLLECTIVE AMNESIA!! MY FATHER HAD TALKED ABOUT IT OCCASIONALLY AND HE SPOKE ABOUT HIS BEST FRIEND KURT WHO HAD MOVED TO LONDON IN 1938 BECAUSE HE WAS JEWISH. STILL NO DETAILS!!!

WE MOVED TO THE UNITED STATES IN 1956 AND SCHOOL BEGAN AS AN 8TH GRADER IN HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT. WE LIVED IN A JEWISH NEIGHBORHOOD IN THE NORTHEAST. ALMOST ALL MY FRIENDS WERE JEWISH AND I BEGAN TO FIND OUT ABOUT CONCENTRATION CAMPS AND THE HOLOCAUST. I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT WORD WAS USED THEN. SOON I WAS IN THE PUBLIC LIBRARY AND WAS READING EVERY BOOK ABOUT WORLD WAR II I COULD GET MY HANDS ON. DOCUMENTARIES AND MOVIES BOMBARDED ME WITH IMPRESSIONS AND SENT ME REELING AND FALLING INTO AN EMOTIONAL ABYSS. MY CULTURE, THE CULTURE OF MOZART, BEETHOVEN, FREUD AND GOETHE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THESE HORRORS. I CONFRONTED MY PARENTS, ANGRY, HURT AND FRUSTRATED. "WHAT ROLE DID YOU PLAY IN ALL THIS?" THOSE WERE MY VERBAL ASSAULTS. "WE DID NOT KNOW AND IF WE DID KNOW WHAT COULD WE HAVE DONE?" I DID NOT KNOW HOW TO ANSWER AT THAT TIME. I HAD BARELY STARTED HIGH

SCHOOL AND ETHICAL QUESTIONS HAD TO WAIT FOR FUTURE HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY CLASSES AT THE UNIVERSITY. TODAY I KNOW I WAS VERY HARD ON MY PARENTS.

UNIVERSITY HAPPENED DURING THE TURBULENT 60'S AND AS WE AS COLLEGE STUDENTS EXAMINED THE MORAL QUESTIONS OF THE VIETNAM WAR, I DECIDED TO MAJOR IN HISTORY AND SPECIALIZE IN THE HISTORY OF WORLD WAR II WITH A SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE HOLOCAUST . I WROTE MY MASTERS THESIS ON IT. WHEN THE DRAFT REACHED FOR ME AND AFTER THE MY LAI MASSACRE, I DECIDED NOT TO BE A GOOD GERMAN AND FIGHT IN AN IMMORAL WAR LIKE MY FATHER HAD DONE.

MY FATHER DIAGREED WITH MY VIEWS AND I BEGAN TO RAISE THE SAME QUESTIONS AGAIN. WITH MORAL INDIGNATION I BEGAN TO THROW STATISTICS AND FACTS AT MY PARENTS AND RELENTLESSLY DROVE THEM INTO A CORNER. ALL THE BLAME WAS PUT ON ADOLF HITLER AND HIS CRONIES. IF ALL THESE MEN WERE INSANE CRIMINALS WHO WERE ABLE LIKE THE PIED PIPER TO LEAD THE PEOPLE ASTRAY, THEN ALL THE GERMAN PEOPLE WOULD BE LEFT OFF THE HOOK. EVEN IF THE LEADERS WERE ALL INSANE, THEIR INSANITY WOULD LEAVE THEM OFF THE HOOK AND THE PEOPLE THEY HAD LED ASTRAY WOULD BECOME VICTIMS. AUSTRIA TO THIS DAY CLAIMS VICTIMHOOD BECAUSE OF THE ANNEXATION IN 1938. NEGLECTING THE FACT THAT OVER 95% VOTED FOR ANNEXATION.

SOME OF THE WORST WAR CRIMINALS LIKE EICHMANN, GOLOBCKI, AND MANY CONCENTRATION CAMP COMMANDANTS AND ADOLF HITLER HIMSELF WERE AUSTRIANS.

IT BEGAN TO DAWN ON ME THAT GOOD PEOPLE CARRIED A LARGE PART OF THE BLAME FOR THE HORRORS OF THE THIRD REICH. IT STEMMED FROM THE INDIFFERENCE THEY DISPLAYED WHEN SMALL INJUSTICES OCCURRED RIGHT IN FRONT OF THEM AND WHEN PUBLIC MORAL INDIGNATION WOULD HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE.

AS AN EXAMPLE MY MOTHER RELATED SUCH AN INCIDENT. DURING THE SPRING OF 1938 RIGHT AFTER THE ANNEXATION SHE WAS A WITNESS AS JEWISH MEN AND WOMEN HAD TO WASH POLITICAL SLOGANS OFF THE SIDEWALKS ON THEIR HANDS AND KNEES JEERED AND HUMILIATED BY HITLER YOUTH AND ORDINARY BYSTANDERS. SHE CAME HOME AND WAS SHOCKED BY WHAT SHE SAW. SHE HAD DONE NOTHING AND OF COURSE SHE WAS AFRAID, BUT IF MILLIONS OF DECENT PEOPLE HAD NOT BEEN AFRAID AND HAD SPOKEN OUT, THE HORRORS WOULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED.

THIS QUESTION THEN HAS BOTHERED ME ALL ALONG: WHY DO DECENT PEOPLE GO ALONG WITH SUCH INJUSTICES ,WERE THEY DEAF, DUMB AND BLIND?

DACHAU, BUCHENWALD AND OTHERS WERE WELL KNOWN CAMPS EVEN IN THE EARLY DAYS. HITLER SHRIEKING HIS HATE ON THE RADIO WAS THERE FOR ALL TO HEAR.

PEOPLE DISAPPEARING DURING THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT WAS WHISPERED ABOUT. THE ARGUMENT WAS WE DID NOT KNOW THE DETAILS AND MAYBE WE DID NOT WANT TO KNOW, MAYBE IT WAS BEST NOT GET INVOLVED. INITIAL INDIFFERENCE WAS REPLACED BY FEAR ONCE THE POLICE STATE WAS IN PLACE. WHEN PEOPLE ARE INDIFFERENT TO JUSTICE AND TRUTH AND THE VALUE OF A SINGLE HUMAN LIFE THEY HAVE ALLOWED THE DOOR TO OPEN TO FUTURE HORRORS.

MANY TIMES WE ARE SO CAUGHT UP IN OUR OWN LIVES THAT WE DON'T NOTICE INJUSTICES OR SUBTLE FORMS OF RACISM. MANY TIMES WE DO NOT WANT TO GET INVOLVED.

I HAD SUCH AN EXPERIENCE A FEW YEARS AGO IN MASSACHUSETTS, A LIBERAL BASTION. I WAS HAVING A COKE AND A BURGER IN A SMALL DINER . SITTING AT A LUNCH COUNTER ,THER WAS A BLACK MAN AND HIS LITTLE SON NEXT TO ME. HE ORDERED TWO SANDWICHES AND TWO SOFT DRINKS. WHEN HIS ORDER CAME I NOTICED THAT HIS SOFT DRINKS WERE SERVED IN PAPER CUPS. I HAD MY COKE IN A GLASS. I'LL NEVER FORGET LOOK IN THE MAN'S FACE AND ONLY THEN REALIZED THE RACIST IMPLICATIONS.

I ASKED TO HAVE MY SECOND COKE PUT IN A PAPER CUP AS WELL AND INFORMED THE PROPRIETOR IN PLAIN ENGLISH (PLAINER THAN I CAN REPEAT HERE) OF WHAT I THOUGHT OF HIS ACTIONS. A FEW YEARS EARLIER I WOULD NOT HAVE EVEN NOTICED THAT THIS WAS A RACIST ACT. EDUCATION AND GOOD COLLEGE PROFESSORS WHO WERE NOT AFRAID TO TAKE MORAL STANDS MADE THE DIFFERENCE. MEN LIKE DR.WAYNE ROBINSON AND WOMEN LIKE DR. INGEBORG MAUKSCH HAVE HAD A GREAT IMPACT ON MY THOUGHT PROCESSES AND HAVE HELPED WITH THE MORAL BURDEN I HAVE CARRIED MOST OF MY ADULT LIFE.

I HAD CHOSEN THE TEACHING PROFESSION BECAUSE I BELIEVE EDUCATION TO BE THE MOST IMPORTANT TOOL TO COMBAT MORAL INDIFFERENCE, INJUSTICE AND RACISM AND TO KEEP THE MEMORY OF THE HOLOCAUST ALIVE. AS THE ORIGINAL EYEWITNESSES ARE LEAVING US AND THE COMPLEX FABRIC OF THE HOLOCAUST BEGINS TO FADE REVISIONIST HISTORIANS ARE TRYING TO CHANGE THE HISTORICAL RECORD BY CLAIMING THAT THE HOLOCAUST NEVER HAPPENED. WE CANNOT AFFORD A MORAL VACUUM TO EXIST IN OUR SCHOOLS AND I URGE YOU ALL TO SUPPORT ANY EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM TO MAKE THE TEACHING OF THE HOLOCAUST MORE MEANINGFUL TO STUDENTS.

I WAS FORTUNATE TO MEET 1986 NOBELPRIZE WINNER AND AUSCHWITZ SURVIVOR ELIE WIESEL WHO PRESENTED ME WITH A SIGNED AND

DEDICATED COPY OF HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY. HE LEFT ME WITH THESE WORDS THAT SHALL FOREVER GUIDE MY LIFE “THE OPPOSITE OF LOVE IS NOT HATE BUT INDIFFERENCE”

REPEAT!!

I HAVE A FEW ADDENDUMS BECAUSE WE ARE LIVING THROUGH A PERIOD IN OUR HISTORY WHERE MANY ARE CONCERNED FOR THE FUTURE OF THE OUR COUNTRY AND THE WORLD. THE WORD FASCISM CREEPS INTO OUR CONVERSATIONS. FIRST THERE WERE MANY FORMS OF FASCISM . IN ITALY, MUSSOLINI BASED HIS FORM ON THE RESTORATION OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE, NO CAMPS, VERY LITTLE ANTI-SEMITISM IN SPAIN, FRANCO BASED HIS FORM ON THE VERY CONSERVATIVE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH. IN GERMANY, HITLER BASED HIS ON ROMANTICISM AND VIOLENCE . MOST OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES HAD FASCIST PARTIES AND EVEN HERE IN THE US. WE HAD JOHN PELLEY AND THE SILVER SHIRTS , FATHER COUGHLIN THE DETROIT RADIO PRIEST. “AMERICA FIRST” SUPPORTED BY CHARLES LINDBERG. THE AMERICAN FORM TODAY WOULD TAKE ON THE FORM OF CELEBRITY TELEVISION AND THE CASINO -GREETERS COME ON. WHAT ALL FORMS OF FACISM HAVE IN COMMON ARE SUPER NATIONALISM AND VIOLENCE PROMISED TO ENEMIES AT HOME AND ABROAD. USUALLY THREATS FROM IMAGINED ENEMIES, THE WORSHIP OF POWER ,THE CONTEMPT FOR THE RULE OF LAW AND FOR REASON. AN EXAGGERATED FORM OF MILITARISM. LYING AS A RHETORICAL STRATEGY AND VENGEANCE

FOR THOSE WHO FEEL DISEMPOWERED AND AN ATTACK ON THE FREE AND INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

I PERSONALLY HOPE THAT OUR SYSTEM OF CHECKS AND BALANCES CAN WITHSTAND THE ASSAULT FROM THE FAR RIGHT , BUT THE RAPID COLLAPSE OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY TO THE WILL OF ONE MAN IS NOT AN ENCOURAGING REHEARSAL.

MY CONCERNS ALSO ENCOMPASS THE WORLD BECAUSE SUPER NATIONALISM IS ON THE RISE IN RUSSIA,FRANCE AND ALL OVER EUROPE. I HAVE NOTICED IT IN MY NATIVE AUSTRIA WHERE SUSAN AND I SPEND THREE MONTHS EVERY YEAR. NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO BE A BYSTANDER BUT AN ACTIVIST. OUR INSTITUTIONS ARE MOSTLY INTACT BUT ONCE THE POLICE STATE IS ESTABLISHED IT WILL BE TOO LATE. IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA IT IS INFINITELY EASIER TO TAKE CONTROL THAN IT WAS IN THE 1930'S. TWITTER IS A MUCH MORE POWERFUL WEAPON THAN THE STORM TROOPERS EVER WERE. JUST ASK MEGYN KELLY OF FOX NEWS WHO HAD TO HIRE ARMED PROTECTION AFTER HER LIFE WAS THREATENED BY INTERNET TROLLS, AND THIS DESPITE THE FACT THAT SHE IS A CONSERVATIVE REPUBLICAN WHO HAD THE AUDACITY TO ASK HARD QUESTIONS OF A REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE.

**REMEMBER ELIE WIESEL,S WORDS : “THE OPPOSITE OF HATE IS NOT LOVE
BUT INDIFFERENCE”**