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Summary

Helene Wodits, born in Schlossgasse, Lackenbach, on December 11, 1933.

While Wodits's mother worked in the fields, she needed help with childcare. Their Jewish neighbor, Mrs. Hermine Gruber, was willing to lend a hand, and, throughout the years, the two families grew very close together. The Gruber family was unique, always ready to help. Wodits' Grandfather was a schoolteacher. His closest friend of many years was his Jewish colleague.

In general, most of Wodits' teachers were pro Hitler. Although, she knows that if they had been anti-Nazi, they would've not been brave enough to say anything negative in public. School days began with the Hitler salute, followed by the singing of NS songs. Its lyrics were about the triumphant German soldiers and how Hitler managed to get the people out of misery and humiliation. Hitler was portrayed as the "savior" who deserves appreciation and love.

The hair salon, two bakeries, the tailor shop, and one jewelry store, were owned by Jewish families. At the beginning of the Nazi movement, the cruelty of the Jewish people by the local Nazi sympathizers was widely known by the town's people and silently accepted. The locals knew that the Jews were scared and that they will need to go away.

Wodits shares one particular story from around 1938. A man from across the street saw a Jewish couple, their names were Band, going for an evening stroll past the Christian cemetery. The man followed the couple. Becoming increasingly nervous, the Bands knocked on Wodits' front door exclaiming to her grandmother that someone was following them. Grandmother instructed them to go upstairs and hide under the beds. Seconds later, the man knocked on the front door exclaiming that he saw the couple walking onto her property and asked about their whereabouts. Grandmother pretended to be surprised and denied any knowledge. Eventually, the Bands Family managed to leave town. As a farewell, Wodits' mother gave them suitcases and some money. Mrs. Band went first to Israel, then to the US, and then back to Israel.

Wodits heard the blast of the synagogue. It happened on a Holiday; she believes it was on December 8. The locals hastily removed the debris. Many of the town's people looted the vacant homes and stores of their departed Jewish neighbors.

Wodits' entire family was not in favor of Hitler. The general opinion about Hitler and the Nazis was generally divided. Some towns' people were appalled that the Jews had to leave town and that he was against the catholic church. But, guided by fear, they kept quiet. Her brother, Hansel, was drafted when he was 18 years old. A half-year later, they received a letter announcing that he was killed in action.

The Romanis lived on the outskirts of town. One prevailing opinion all over town about the Romani was that they were thieves. Later, they were taken to a camp. Wodits and her aunt, Mitzi, used to take bread to the people in the camp. The guard overseeing the camp did not wear a uniform; he looked German. She was told that the Romani needed to go into the camp because Hitler didn't want them. Many Romani died during their captivity. They received a Christian funeral and were buried at the far end of the Jewish cemetery. The funerals often happened, most of several Romani at a time. The cemetery is still where it used to be; there is also a memorial for the Romani, hidden in a corner.

Wodits saw the Romani people being ordered by the Nazis to stand in a long line before being transported away. A guard stood by keeping the people at bay. She remembers some of the onlookers making fun of the deportees. To the town's people, the Romani represented less than "nothing."

POWs from Ukraine, Italy, and Poland came to live in Wodits' house; they were both helpful and possessive and took over the entire town. Local women were ordered to peel potatoes and other kinds of chores. Two POWs remained in Lackenbach, got married, and started a family.

After the war's end, many of the town's Nazis committed suicide. These men were responsible for killing many people. The name of one of those men was Schäber. His wife also committed suicide after killing her children.

Wodits believes that the reason many in town don't want to talk about the Nazi area is that they either feel embarrassed or they were affected by it; after all, they are the descendants. She asserts that there are still Nazi sympathizers in town and that it would just take someone with great promises to revitalize that movement.

Wodits ended up moving to Vienna in 1959.

During the interview, Wodits was wearing a gold necklace with a jade pendant and a golden menorah applique that she received from a Jewish woman whom she met in her church.