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Margaret Lehner in Lenzing, Austria

March 11, 1994

Diana Plotkin (D) It's her birthday. Alright Margaret, what were you telling me?

Margaret Lehner (M) This is also an historical date because on the the 11th of March in 1938 the German army, it was the day of the connection of Austria to the regime of former days, and we all know what this kind of regime and this kind of politic was able to made that horrible things would, people who were only against the regime or only because they were Jewish people.

D. Margaret, what are you doing? What is it that you are doing?

M. I am working within a group of about 20 young people and our first thing is to prevent our children, uh, the whole thing of daily life to make such mistakes as our fathers did make.

D. Your father too?

M. My father was in, stationed in France, in Paris, and he had to take care for prisoners of the Austrian resistance, but he was changed to Russia because of his helping to the prisoners in form of giving their food or only to call the date or the time from one wall to the other.

D. So, what exactly, you're saying you're helping, what exactly are you doing?

M. We are making a little bit history, we are responsible for the monument within our district. We were the initiators of this monument, and always on the first weekend of May we are making great celebrations for the people who worked there, worked for a regime, for a horrible and terrible regime, and we are making celebrations to give the idea to the people and to prevent them to do such things again.

D. What is it that's happening in Austria now?

M. I think the right wing of the party is getting stronger and stronger.

D. What is the result of this?

M. They are against people from other countries. Against people from foreign countries, and against Jewish people too. And they say it's was not possible to make that "shtink" in former days and its not possible to have the chamber of gas, and it's not possible to kill such a great number of people.

D. How strong is this movement here?

M. It's also a strong movement Voelklbruck within about ten people of the Yapo [an association

not allowed in Parliament], this is the circle, the inner circle . It longer exists because of the police.

D. Spell that.

M. This is the inner circle of the group, and within the center of this group, there's a circle, about, we estimate 100 people or so. And I think it is not so dangerous, it's not - the people are not so dangerous but the people who are leading the FPO [former Nazis; this group is allowed in Parliament, which has 15 members as of October 1994. This is up 50% from last year] the people in the background.

D. Who are the people in the background?

M. Former Nazi's, they are still alive, and this is a strong movement within a so-called former army.

D. How do you know.

M. They are getting the meetings regularly, and it, I think it, uh, a special social problem. Most of the people are without any work, and most of the people um, have no good education, and most of the people are alone like Tom. There were no parents who take cared for her, and I think this is a great social problem.

D. Is the problem better or worse in Austria than in Germany?

M. I think a little bit because

D. A little bit what?

M. A little bit better. I think it's a little bit better and within the country line it's a little bit better. But I think the problem is getting greater in the great cities. They are very good concentrated there

D. Do they have a leader?

M. Yes

D. Who is this leader?

M. They have a central leader. It is the leader of the former Democratic party, but I think,

D. What's his name?

M. It's Jorg Haidar

D. Jorg Haidar, can you spell that?

M. Dr. Jorg Haidar, and um, there is a special selection, there's a, liberal wing and the party was

selected last year. There's a strong right wing, a very strong right wing, and a left wing.

D. And they both want the same thing?

M. No I think the Democratic party is within the left wing and they were separated last year.

D. They what?

M. Separated from the left, the left wing and the right wing.

D. What about the zellwolle factory?

M. In 1938 the factory was connected to the Deutsch Reich, I think it's only the right name. It's no name in another language. I think it's a name whose telling us everything. It's because it was also a good position, a good position between Salzburg and Linz, in the middle, and they were producing good material.

D. What was the material?

M. The material was uh, viscose. This is a kind of suede.

D. A kind of what?

M. A kind of, it's like cotton, nearly like cotton.

D. What is the name of the factory?

M. The factory is now called Lenzing-AG.

D. Spell it.

M. It is called Lenzing because of the place and AG, this is for the association, the form of association. In former days the factory was called Zellwolle-AG, and after the second world war, called Chemichwolle Lenzing-AG. They were chemical products were made. And also a factory was producing paper.

D. Did the women live near the town of Lenzing?

M. About three kilometers away, and they had to go there every day, early in the morning with their wooden shoes. And the winter was very strong. And the concentration camp was in an old part of the factory, but three kilometers away. And they had to go every day with, only with their thin clothing and with their wooden shoes. And most of them didn't have any shoes, and they rolled paper around their toes and their feet. And the winter was very strong. I know the winter was very strong in 1944. And one day um, there is a local train, a small train from Atnang-Puchheim to Kammerschorsling. This is a small place, four kilometers to the Attersee. And this was a very important line because this line transported the woolen bales and the cotton bales, the so-called to the

great towns, to Linz, where things for the army were produced. Clothing, without the clothes of Lenzing, without the viscose bales of Lenzing. And one day there was a bad accident. Because the leader of the SS, woman, who were,

D. Do you know her name.

M. No, I don't know exactly the name of the person. If you have to cross the railway to the train before the train is coming, and five women didn't reach the other side, and they were killed from the train. And we, we think the parts of the bodies are taken to Mauthausen, to the crematory of Mauthausen, because they are, there are no names within the books of the date, of the people who died here. And we think with no names.

D. Can you tell me anything else about this factory in Lenzing or the women here?

M. About their status now or in former days?

D. Both.

M. Both. It was possible to give the factory back on, in May 1945 to the U.S. army without any defense because there were about ten men within the factory who had a special resistance. And they were concentrated within the factory, and the population around the factory were helping. And they are, some points of resistance within a circle. And they were given the plans of the factory to the British army because the one soldier...

D. You mean plans of the factory?

M. Yes, the plans of the factory to keep it, it was the plan of the SS to push the factory away with a bomb. And it was possible to give the factory to the U.S. army without any defense. And, but, one or two men were killed from - there were a special group of the SS within the factory, and they killed two men of the resistance people.

D. The Austrian resistance.

M. Yes

D. And today, how do the people feel, do they believe it?

M. I think this is, uh, a very, a very leading factory with great social investigations for the people, and they are doing good things for the air and for the water to help clean up all of these things.

D. Tell me more about your activities. You're a young woman, how old are you today?

M. Thirty-nine.

D. The interesting sheet of paper made in 1966 from the Association of Former Prisoners of the Concentration Camp Mauthausen, and this is an asking to the Lenzing AG, Zellwolle Lenzing. Within

or during the second world war there were, there had also been produced a sausage made of bacteria [produced at the Lenzing factory; given to both prisoners and local population].

D. Made of what?

M. Bacteria, and this is a special kind of chemical based on bacteria

D. You mean batteries?

M. Yes, yes

D. Batteries

M. No, bacterian

D. Oh, bacteria

M. Yes, yes. Based on bacteria, and this sausage was given to the prisoners. And many prisoners uh, were getting ill then, within the stomach and so. And this was, and then it was also given to the concentration, to the main concentration camp

D. At Mauthausen?

M. At Mauthausen and given to prisoners to give them food. This is a kind of food. This will be much more cheaper than everything because it is made of the end product of the viscose.

D. Which was what?

M. It's - and I've asked some people in Lenzing, "Do you remember about, or do you know something about this kind of sausage?" And some of the old workers told me, "Yes, we produced such sausages. It looked like sausage, and it smelled like sausage, but it was pure chemicals."

D. Chemicals?

M. Chemical products, yes. It was a pure chemical product, a chemical process based on the bacteria.

D. How did the people feel about it?

M. Yes, they had, it happened, oh, two or three people died.

D. How did the people who produced it feel about it?

M. They didn't know.

D. Do you believe that?

M. No, no. I think they are, maybe they were, they had been ordered to do this. And they couldn't - they also ate them, ate this kind of sausage because there were no food within this district because all of the things had been given away to the war and to the soldiers. And it was cheap and it smelled like sausage. But the bacteria, um, had grown within the stomach.

D. Within the stomach. And so it produced what, dysentery?

M. Yes, and this is, uh, sheet of paper where, where these are some names of, this is one woman who was the leader of the SS women in Lenzing, this is...

D. What was her name?

M. This is, Elizabeth Sturm, born on 30th of June in 1895, and she had been getting free after the war.

D. She was free after the war?

M. Yes, yes, she was living in the Attersee, and nobody knew where she had gone after the war. But she was a free woman. And this is a sheet and I will make some copies. I think it's very interesting for you.

D. Tell me, there is a stone right outside your house here, about how many kilometers from the factory?

M. About three kilometers away from the factory. And the women had to go there every early morning within the winter days, and the winter was very strong then. And they had no good shoes, only shoes made of wood or of paper or red clothes, and they only had thin clothes. And there was resistance within the population. And these kind of people were hiding foods under the grass and the new

D. You mean hiding food?

M. Yes, for the prisoners. And, some red ... and potatoes

D. So, they destroyed the barracks, that were here, but the factory still exists, three kilometers...

M. Yes, and also, I think it's good to take a photo of this building [across the street]. This is the last building of the factory, and on this area [across the street], there was the subconcentration camp of Mauthausen. This is the last building. This is now, it's station for transforming.

D. So, now, tell me,

M. The story of making the monument in Lenzing. It was a strong, a hard way. It was not easy to get the stone here.

D. Why did they do it finally?

M. The mayor, the former mayor, told me it's not possible to make history in our generation. And the next generation is allowed to forget. And the next generation is free of such thinking, and Lenzing is a nice town too.

D. So why are you working on this? You were telling me about your father

M. Yes, um, Father told me to take care, only to take care. It's very, it's very important to make the history still alive.

D. Why did he feel that way?

M. He was a soldier of the German army in France, in Paris, within a prison where Austrian people of resistance were prisoned. And then he was taken to Russia because he - there was a little bit cooperation with the prisoners. They cried the date or the daytime from wall to wall, or have given food, extra food, and he was always a silent man, and he never told about his special history.

D. So you were...

M. Yes, I feel a little bit responsible.

D. Do you think you are being successful?

M. I think I'm too alone to. I think it's good to have a group behind. It's not good to fight such a great fight alone.

D. Do you think you're being successful?

M. Yes.

D. Do you have a group?

M. Yes, we have a group with twenty or twenty-five people, and we are in contact with former prisoners of Mauthausen. We are going to schools and teaching the children about history. We are showing film materials of Mauthausen to make history alive, still alive.

Pause in tape

M. And when the stone was put there ..

D. April 1st, 1992?

M. He visited this small town, and this was a speech to the people. I will translate it for you. I think it's ...

D. Okay, what does it...

M. Because he was one of the men who freed the concentration camp and take the women away from the camp to another camp of former SS in Seewalchan, a small town near Lenzing on the Attersee.

D. What is your book?

M. Our book is the documentation about the subcamps of the main camp Mauthausen. Within our district there have been three concentration camps. Mauthausen was the main camp, and there were many subcamps within

D. Oh, sub camps

M. Yes,

D. What are the subcamps?

M. Yes, these were Lenzing Pettighoffen, Redel-Sips Schlier, and Voeklabruck, and...

D. I need the spelling of those, how do you spell it?

M. I will write, I think it's better to write, I will write the names on a sheet of paper.

D. Okay, what else are you going to do? You are going to write about the camps and the sub camps

M. Yes, and in Lenzing the women have been working for Zellwolle AG. This was top secret camp because there have been produced weapons for, especially a special bomb, the so called super bomb of the German army. But there has also been working Werner from France, and they are taking concentration camps from Northern Germany to here because the British army had bombed the northern camps of northern Germany. And the camps were taken away and to this scenery because there was a beer brewery in Tsip, and the weapons were produced under earth. And so it was not possible to see from the air the factory because it was under the earth. And there were also many accidents because of the gas, and one day there was a great explosion and forty people died. But this happened - people, especially women from the working, they had been working under the SS. Women, studying women engineers who were coming from Northern Germany to work here, and they had - and their graves are still in Voeklebruck, graves without no name or, there are not dead people under the crosses because there was, the explosion was so great. People told me they have heard the explosion fifteen kilometers away. And the SS told this was a habitage of the prisoners, and four prisoners were hanged and one prisoner has been cooked in a water pot.

D. These were women or men?

M. Men, only men, engineers and the French doctor had also been in Tsip, and when the US Army had been coming from West, the concentration camp had been freed, but the prisoners had been

taken to Ebensee. And this was a long march, and many prisoners died. And two engineers or doctors, for two engineers, it was able to settle free within a wood. And this two doctors have also found the women from Lenzing. They had a bicycle, they organized a bicycle from a farmer, and one man said, "There are women. They are not able to get away from the camp because they are so sick they cannot get out of the factory." And the woman had been alone there. There was no SS there and there - and so he prevented the women from dying.

D. What was his name?

M. He was in contact with the US Army, and they gave to the women vitamin tablets and organized beds from a youth camp, a former Hitler Jugend.

D. What was this doctor's name?

M. This is the first association, first association where the soldiers of the German army had been educated. And children from ten years, upwards from 10 to 16 had been educated within this school.

D. Where was the school?

M. It was on, uh, only four kilometers away from here.

D. What was this doctor's name?

M. It, the doctor's name is Dr. Paul Lecour in Douville, France.

D. Is he still alive?

M. Yes, he's still alive. He is coming here every year.

D. Do you have his address?

M. Yes, you can also have it. I am collecting everything.

D. Who was this Dr. Paul Lecour, who was he? Dr. Lecour lived in the area or how did he know?

M. Um, a friend of him has taken away a bicycle from a farmer and he, he has been driving around the mountain scenery, and within the scenery him were looking at rubber gloves and help them

D. Was there a doctor in the area here who came in to take care of

M. He was a medicine student who was, has been in the French resistance.

Pause in tape

M. On the left side [of the street] is the historical part, and on the right side is the part of the women.

D. So the stone is on the wrong side of the street?

M. Yes, it is on the right side of the street. The concentration camp was on the left side of the street. The barracks were on this area, [where there is a private garden; there was no paved road, as in the picture] and so it was only possible to put the stone here. And there is written on the stone:

On this area there was from 1st of November, 1944 till 4th of May 1945, the subcamp Pettighofen of the concentration camp Mauthausen, with 565 women prisoners. To remember to their pain and the living of all of the others, *Gemacht gemeinde Lenzing*, the community of Lenzing in 1992.

D. Pettighofen. What are we looking at now?

M. Now we are looking on the area of the factory of the Lenzing-AG, who is still producing paper and viscose fabrics [a woolen-tweed-like fabric made from chemicals, using the same process as in former days. And still they are producing clothes, and they are exporting all over the world.

D. This is the zellwolle factory that they women worked in.

M. Yes, the former called Zellwolle-AG in Lenzing.

D. What is this? what are you showing me? [roadway]

M. This is the way that the women are coming here every day from four or three kilometers away to their working place from the camp. And in January 1945 a bad accident was here on this place where the women were crossing the line, the railroad tracks. And because the SS leader told them to cross the tracks before the train is coming. And 4 or 5 women were killed from the train because they couldn't reach the other side of the tracks.

D. The path we just took, the picture of the path.

M. This is the way where the people, the women are coming from the camp. This is the same way like 50 years before.