

## Lucia Heilman 1997 Interview Transcript

### Reinhold Duschka and Life in Hiding

**Lucia** My father was a mountaineer and he had a really lovely friend, a climbing buddy, who my mother also knew well. They were young people, who met up, did tours together, with a backpack and all that, of course not during Hitler's time, that all happened before. Back then this friend, he was called Reinhold Duschka, offered that when the transports to the camps were going to start, we should not let ourselves be abducted, but he would hide us. And I am doing this entire interview to honour him. He made this offer to my mother. This was a unique deed: in this era of the severe Nazi-regime to hide a mother and a young child was more than endangering one's own life. He was an artisan craftsman and had a workshop in the Mollatgasse in the 6<sup>th</sup> Viennese district. It was an entire building full of workshops, no apartments, one workshop next to the other, smaller rooms, with no employees...

**Interviewer** In other words there was only one person running one of these workshops...

**Lucia** Yes. There were different kind of workshops, one for metal, one for wood. There was a violin maker. He had his workshop on the fourth floor, which he ran on his own. In this workshop he produced beautiful metal objects. Artistically crafted objects like ashtrays, vases and bowls. And he suggested to my mother to hide us there. I remember that we went there several times, by tram, as Jews were allowed to stand on the deck, and we took large bags, not a suitcase, but bags in order not to be noticed, and took our personal things there. We got on wearing the Star of David, and when we got off, we hid the Star, so nobody would know that Jews were coming. And that way we took our personal effects there several time.

**Interviewer** Did your mother tell you what was going to happen? Can you remember that?

**Lucia** Yes. She said that we were going to hide there. And that nobody should know that we were Jews. And Reinhold, the owner of the workshop, in the meantime built a hutch, made from wood, almost invisible for somebody coming into the workshop. Flush with the entrance door, so you would get the impression there was nothing really there [behind it] and in there was our real hiding place. And Reinhold had a flat elsewhere, he only worked there. He arrived in the morning, like any owner of a

workshop, he arrived early, opened the workshop and started work. And we crawled out of our hutch and helped in the workshop. That way I learned how to produce these metal objects. And because we increased production, he could make more money and could buy more on the black market – everything was so expensive. This is how we sustained ourselves materially...

**Interviewer** You had the feeling you were contributing something to what he had to spend in order to keep you alive.

**Lucia** He wouldn't have been able to do that completely alone. And this way I learned how to create these objects, to weld metal. Reinhold taught me everything, I was a child, his apprentice so to speak. How to make these objects, I also learned to type on the typewriter, to do fractions, using just one finger, but I enjoyed it.

**Interviewer** That passed the days, didn't it?

**Lucia** Yes, that filled them up. What was nasty was the Sunday. We had to be completely quiet. Because there was nobody at...

### Liberation and New Beginning

**Lucia** One day there was silence. And then came gunshots. Hours and hours of gunshots. Then those stopped as well. Reinhold opened the door and there were Russian soldiers in the street. We had been liberated.

**Interviewer** And when was that?

**Lucia** April 1945.

**Interviewer** When he came you already knew ...

**Lucia** I could see it in his face... Liberation is here!

**Interviewer** Could you say a little bit more? What do you remember of that day?

**Lucia** I can remember... my mother could speak Polish and so she spoke Polish with the Russian soldiers, one really young one I can remember, with one of these fur caps, he was standing outside the door and my mother in floods of tears spoke Polish with him. He understood very little but nevertheless enough. But this was still war. There were dead soldiers in the streets. And bodies of civilians. The street itself was

destroyed. And through this destroyed street tanks rolled, and armoured vehicles and many Russian soldiers marched along the street, all of them with these fur caps on their heads. For us this was liberation, the unfathomable joy to have survived to see this day.

**Interviewer** maybe like being born again ...

**Lucia** Yeah...

**Interviewer** you were 16 years old at that time, right?

**Lucia** Yeah...

**Interviewer** and what happened then?

**Lucia** My mother enquired whether there was a “Kommandatura” somewhere. Russian officers took over the administration of Vienna and my mother enquired where this [HQ] was located and went there with me. It was located in a school. She said she wanted to talk to somebody in charge. She introduced herself and said that we were Jews and had survived the time in hiding here. She started to say all this in Polish, and he responded in Yiddish – he was Jewish, as well. Of course, that was much easier to speak then. He was of course surprised that there were any Jews left here. And the first thing he said was ‘you need a flat’. And we went with another soldier to a flat, which Nazis had vacated, and we were given that flat. I remember the feeling of being in a flat for the first time after so many years, there was a table, chairs, a wardrobe, it was a real flat with curtains, that feeling was amazing ... for me it was an amazing sensation to be in a flat again.

**Interviewer** Maybe also not having to be quiet all the time...?

**Lucia** Not so much that, no, the feeling to be in a flat again impressed me. The other thing... well that was something completely different. I had lived in a workshop, in a factory room for such a long time that I had forgotten what a flat looked like.

### Honour for Reinhold Duschka

**Lucia** I tried very hard to get an official recognition for Reinhold’s heroic deed. In Israel there is a special place called Yad Yashem. I sent a letter there, which said that he had hidden us all these years and what he had done for us. I received a reply, saying that he had been chosen for a ceremony, a very beautiful ceremony in Vienna, where the ambassador of Israel handed him a certificate and a medal and organised a reception. There were people from the embassy there but also the Minister of State for Education and other members of the Austrian government. They honoured Reinhold as a Member of the Righteous and wrote into the official Book of the Righteous so people would know that there were people who were willing to sacrifice their lives, their livelihood to save others. It is something unbelievable in this day in age, but back then every move you made was connected with danger, coming from the porter or neighbours or informers and other nasty people hell bent on harming others.