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Renee Blahuta

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Leslie McCartney, interviewer

Leslie McCartney introduces the interview. Renee Blahuta talks about her personal background. She was born in Linz, Austria. It was an artistic and historic town. It was also important in transportation routes. They were on the Danube River. Her grandparents and parents grew up in Vienna. Her father and mother were born in 1904 and 1905. The First World War changed everything. Everything collapsed. There were many changes including automobiles and aspirin. Her father's family lived in Vienna. Her father's mother moved to Slovakia and had a child and returned to Vienna. She isn't sure how many siblings her father had. His sister married a British soldier. Food was not easy to find in Vienna, Austria. She understood that her father made good friends at the Lipizzaner stables and could take food home from the stables. In 1919 her father received a draft notice to go into Yugoslavia. He walked over a big mountain range to return to Austria. Her grandmother lived in Vienna in an old community. Her great-grandmother was a widow and didn't like the husband her daughter chose. Her grandfather was a builder in Vienna. They spent the summer months in Hungary growing Tokay grapes. Business in Austria collapsed and her grandfather lost everything. They couldn't maintain their lifestyle. Her grandfather had invested in a hotel in Linz. They moved to Linz and took over the management of the hotel. She described the hotel. After they settled her grandmother died.

Her father moved to Linz. He met her mother and they were married in 1927. Her sister was born in 1928. She was born in 1932. Her grandfather died right before she was born. Her parents moved into an apartment in the hotel. She described their apartment. Her father and mother worked as inn keepers. The downstairs had several restaurants. Her father had the ceiling of one of the restaurants painted. Her father knew many people in Vienna and was able to get cheap, good wine. They had three cellars where they stored the wine. At one time stagecoaches stopped at the hotel. They had a gas station in front of the hotel. The people staying at the hotel were actors, actresses and salespeople. She still has the guest book for the hotel. The building was built in 1594. It was once used as a monastery. It did have a courtyard. There were open hallways. All the rooms had double pocket doors. She said they had a wonderful childhood. They were next to the Danube River. Everyone knew them in the neighborhood and watched out for them. They were the Carmen kids. Their nanny lived behind their apartment. The nannies changed often. Her parents put in an elevator into the hotel. His father's brother moved to their town. Her father hired him to work in the hotel. Her father would take them to Vienna for visits. She always knew that her parents loved them and would do anything for them. She lived in the hotel until she was married. The Nazis started to infiltrate into Austria. They had big store in town and the Nazis put out leaflets against the business. If someone showed too much resistance they were killed. She said it was a strange period but she wasn't affected by it. Her parents never called each other by their first names it was always mister and misses. They used mama and papa. Her mother was very elegant.

She was sent to a teacher's college. She talked about her first grade teacher. They learned Greek lettering. They had a priest for Catholic education. She was several miles from her school. It was safe for her to walk to school by herself. She talked about the places she would pass on her way to school. Their classes were fairly small. Most of them were from a higher social class. When her parents went to Vienna they always brought something back for them like outfits. Things were starting to change after her first year in school. It didn't affect them. Their best patrons were the British. They always served a British breakfast. The second year she was in school she had a different teacher. She learned Latin writing. In their hotel they always had the same people come and play cards and gossip. She knew something was happening but she didn't know what. One day they started to see one tank after another coming in. They came right in front of the hotel. They went to the main square. Hitler was talking and she couldn't understand what he was saying. The whole place was filled with Nazis and the SS. After a few minutes they started saying heil. It scared her and she still does not like crowds because of it. She talked about red candles in the windows. She said on the second day one of their waiters disappeared.

Her sister was an artist and not interested in any of what was going on. One day someone came into the restaurant and was concerned that they were going to take away his child who was ill. She became concerned when she heard this and wondered if she was going to be next. There was a Mercedes coming down one road and it blew a funny horn. Her father told her not to look out the window when this vehicle passed. It went passed them and went up to a castle. They took the elderly and the handicapped who were then gassed. It was the physicians from the town who were in charge. They knew this was happening because they overheard a lot. Her mother invited business people to come. She wanted to get support. They had to have a supply of food. She talked about attending ballet school.

Her father always wanted cars. She remembers his first car and how small it was. The man who was the Mercedes dealer was ill and asked her father to take care of his widow. As soon as the man died the widow was arrested and taken off to a concentration camp. Within weeks they found a place for a concentration camp. [section is not understandable] Her father knew about the people who worked at the concentration camp. Her father was able to bribe the widow out of the concentration camp. The widow was under house arrest. She wasn't allowed food stamps or anything. They supplied her with food. Blahuta talked about going to Vienna and seeing a woman with the Star of David. She knew something was exchanged when someone bumped into her. In their hotel there was a room 13 that wasn't rented out. In their small room they kept Frau Timmel. Blahuta had a letter asking her father to take care of Frau Timmel. After one of the bomb raids she was gone. Her sister told her that one of their employees blackmailed her father. The Nazis invaded Yugoslavia. Her father was told to join the German army or be executed as a combatant. This was in the early 1940s. Her father worked for a colonel who had been with the Austrian army. The colonel was in the resistance. He and her father got along well. Her father had a motorcycle again. He went all over Austria collecting information. Her mother was very good at forging signatures. She would forge leave. Her mother was still running the hotel. Her father came around all the time. Blahuta said Hitler loved Linz. He built a new bridge and buildings there. He wanted to make a city like Budapest. The whole town was bombed. They had a lot of industry in Linz. George McGovern was one of the pilots who flew the bombing missions. This experience made McGovern a pacifist. They were bombed by the allies, Italy and Russians. McCartney asked about food

shortages. Blahuta said there was not food anywhere. Everything was rationed. Everything was black market. She had to attend a different school. She didn't like the school. The atmosphere was different. She had to learn to knit. There were also lice at the school. They were told how wonderful Hitler was. She talked about the Hitler youth. She talked about her father and his ability to get things done. He was a listener and never talked. He played an invisible role and had connections. General Patton freed the people from concentration camps in Austria. McCartney asked about the concentration camp near Linz. Blahuta said the camp was named Mauthausen. They built it at a quarry. Blahuta said there were sub-camps and underground camps. After the war her father took her to the camp. She remembers people disappearing before the concentration camps were constructed. She talked about a small shop at the main square and the things they had for sale. One day all their things were broken and they were gone. She talked about experiencing these things as a child. Her parents were always there for them. There were things that happened that no one ever wrote about such as the Austrian resistance involvement in the attempted assassination of Hitler. She remembers two officers staying at their hotel at this time. There were bombs that did not detonate. Her father got to their hotel and saw a bomb that had gone through four floors and didn't go off. Her father picked it up and threw it in the Danube. At the end of the war the Nazis were taking people from concentration camps for death marches. Her father deserted the army at the end of the war. He got civilian clothing and went to where they had cabins outside of town. In fifth grade she got ill and several of their employees were ill, too. The doctor came to take care of them. The doctor brought in another doctor to determine what was wrong with her. She had tuberculosis. She was hospitalized. Her mother brought in food every day and read to her. She needed to gain weight. Her father found some farmers with an apple orchard and built a barracks structure on it. She slept on a balcony for fresh air. Her father brought marble table tops for flooring. She survived. Her mother was pregnant with her younger sister at the time. She was 12 years older than her sister. She missed three years of schooling when she was sick. She said school was easier after the war. After the war they didn't have coal for heating and electricity for only a few hours.