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Renee Blahuta

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Fairbanks, Alaska

Leslie McCartney, interviewer

Leslie McCartney asked Renee Blahuta for the names of family. Her mother's name was Maria Keck. Her father's name was Johanne Korman. Her sister's names were Ruth and Sylvia.

Blahuta talked about her father leasing an apple orchard and building a barracks to live in while she had tuberculosis. It was three rooms and a veranda. It was the belief that fresh air was a cure for tuberculosis. She had to stay out of the sun. She lived in the apple orchard for three years. They had chickens, rabbits and pigeons. The chicken coop had a marble floor. This was towards the end of the war. Her father was still in the military and traveled all over collecting information. During the war a dud bomb fell onto their hotel. It went through three floors. Her father picked up the bomb and threw it in the Danube. There were constant air raids and the hotel was empty. They could see that their hotel was still standing. She talked about feeling the repercussions from the bombs. She said there were survey flights from Italy and the Russians were also flying. They flew very low. If there was a group of people outside then they were shot. She was told to lay down flat in a ditch. There was a plane she thought was an American plane and it was so close she could see the pilot's face. It was scary for her. The bombing was happening during the day. They were more bombed out than any other place because it was Hitler's favorite place. She said you do get used to it. She thought kids were much more flexible. There were warning sirens when they were in town. In the castle above town there was a shelter. Once she was separated from her parents and was carried with the crowd. They were in a huge space with tunnels. There was fighting inside the shelter. After another siren they could leave the shelter. She was usually out of town most of the time.

There were a lot of houses around their place which were hit. It took years to clean it all up. When she was living in the orchard her mother stayed with her. Her mother was a smoker. Her mother learned to smoke in Hungary. Her mother rolled her own cigarettes. One time she went into the forest to get her mother oak leaves to smoke. Blahuta decided she would never become addicted to anything. McCartney asked her if there was a definite day when the war ended. Blahuta talked about General Patton. He entered Austria and opened the gates to the Mauthausen concentration camp. One night when they were shooting off so many flares they had to go outside. Their town was liberated by Patton, but they couldn't hold onto it. The SS were rounded up and put into a fenced area. They didn't feed them because of the way they had treated people in the concentration camps. Her father had some of the prisoners come and because they were fed. They were guarded by soldiers with machine guns. Her father found building materials to repair their hotel. At the same time they had a column of wagons come down through town. They had beautiful horses which were smaller than regular horses. Once they got to Linz the International Red Cross helped them. The Red Cross gave out passports to the people.

The horses were killed once they reached Austria. The horse meat was fed to the prisoners. Russia, America and Britain decided how to divide up Austria into zones. The left side of the Danube was going to be Russian and the right side was American. One day they were told to leave their barracks house because the Russians were coming. They left and came to the American zone. Patton and the Russian commander shook hands. Patton was killed shortly after this. Her father's house was the first house in Linz to put out the Austrian flag as soon as the Americans came. Their house became the headquarters for the core of counter intelligence. It was composed of young men who were second generation Americans who still spoke the language. She had a school friend who was allowed to come and play with her. Her friend had a coat with pockets inside and stole from the American camps. Blahuta didn't see her after that.

McCartney asked her about being tutored after she had been sick and couldn't attend school. Her parents got several tutors for her. There was a history tutor who came to the house to teach her Austrian history. The tutor didn't know much more than Austrian history. One day the tutor showed her a pink nightgown that came from an American care package. Blahuta also had a math tutor who she liked very much. In fourth grade they were tested to enter gymnasium. She passed the test. She liked painting but her sister was the artist. Blahuta had to be take tests in history. She had a Jesuit teacher who liked to drink wine. He taught her Latin. She had to learn English as well. She attended a school that was run by a Russian. All of her tutors had been Nazis. They couldn't get a job unless they were Nazis. Her school no longer exists. There was a lot of testing in her school. Her ballet training ended with the war.

McCartney asked how the end of the war changed things for her family and country. Blahuta said there were intelligence people living in their place. Electricity was still not available all the time. It was cold. Their hotel always felt cool inside. The coal had been cut off. She and her sister used blankets to keep warm. Her mother got big tin cans of crackers, butter and sugar and fed them with that. There just wasn't food available. You had to live off of the black market. Her father found them enough food. Now she can't throw anything away. You used a bottle over and over again. People learned to cope. When the tanks came into town they were very happy to see them. They were told that they would be searched. A G.I. kicked in the door and came in with a machine gun. The counter intelligence people helped bring food to people in camps. There were diseases in the camps.

Blahuta talked about the black market. McCartney asked about her father after the war. Blahuta said he deserted the German army. He returned from Vienna. He got out of his uniform and put on a suit. McCartney asked about the counter intelligence. Blahuta said it was because of her father. She said the counter intelligence filled up the whole hotel. She talked about Henry Kissinger. Blahuta said her father took the counter intelligence around to the concentration camps. One time they returned with a jeep filled with art and the jeep was stolen from the front of their hotel. The art had been taken from people who had been placed in concentration camps. Blahuta said the counter intelligence was what is now known as military intelligence.

After the war she was being tutored. She wanted to attend university in Vienna. Her aunt in Vienna had vineyards on the outskirts of the town. When the Russians came her aunt was taken from her home. Her

aunt sold fresh wine once a year. She described what her aunt's house looked like. After the war her aunt adopted her maid and she inherited everything. Blahuta said she never had the opportunity to attend university in Vienna. Her parents didn't think she was strong enough. For a short while she wanted to attend a technical college, but she couldn't see anything written on a blackboard. She worked in bookkeeping. She loved their hotel and loved bringing the hotel back to the way it was before the war. After the war they had unions which required a union foreman with more than fifteen people. Her father didn't want this.

Blahuta said her mother died in 1950. The hotel was in her name. It was divided between her father and the children. Blahuta married and left. Her father had power of attorney for their share of the hotel. Years later she and her sister received a letter that stating they had refused their inheritance. Eventually her sister's girlfriend did the bookkeeping at the hotel and said Blahuta's father couldn't manage it anymore. In Austria the same attorney could represent the seller as well as the buyer. Blahuta and her sister went over to Austria. Her father moved out of town after he retired. She didn't think public health was very good when you got older. Her father died in 1983. Their hotel was used as a hotel for a long time. They hotel was flooded a few years ago. The hotel was eventually sold.