

As I delve into my memories of those years, I begin with pleasant recollections of an apartment I lived in for a decade. As it turned out, the building I moved into with my first husband and our children had been owned by a Jewish businessman who lived there with his family until the Nazis arrested him, shortly after the "Night of Broken Glass." This background information came up soon after we moved in during a conversation with the man's son, Niki Widlitz, from whom we bought the apartment. My daughter was an infant at the time, and Niki Widlitz admired her in her baby carriage.

"What's her name?" he asked politely.

I answered him with her full name, "Miriam Rebecca."

Niki Widlitz's entire expression changed. He beamed and replied, with his hand on his heart, "That's a beautiful Jewish name, and this used to be a Jewish house!"

"Mr. Widlitz," I ventured, "I'm Jewish."

Then he told me the story of his family. The beautiful Art Nouveau building in which my apartment was located was built in 1911 and had been the property of Niki Widlitz's father, Alfred, and his Catholic wife, Elsa. Niki's grandfather, Viktor Widlitz, was an architect and a successful builder who owned many other buildings in the immediate neighborhood as well. He had also built the popular public swimming pool around the corner, commissioning it to be designed by a prominent Jewish architect. Viktor Widlitz also built the ceremonial hall in Graz's Jewish cemetery, which was razed to the ground during the "Night of Broken Glass" in 1938. He died before the Nazis came to power. Following in his father's footsteps, Alfred Widlitz ran the construction company and managed the buildings he inherited, including the public pool, until they were aryanized in 1938. After being financially ruined, he was exposed to further brutality due to his Jewish extraction, was arrested, and sent to Dachau. His wife, who came from a conservative, nationalistic family and was socially well-connected, managed to effect his release. However, he was arrested a second time shortly thereafter, resulting in his deportation to an extermination camp in what is today Croatia. Elsa Widlitz pulled every political string she could, but this time unsuccessfully. Alfred Widlitz was murdered in Jasenovac when his son was still a young boy. Elsa, and her son, Niki, who had been christened and raised a Catholic, were spared Alfred's fate and survived the Third Reich.

Once Bernd and I settled into our new apartment, and Mimi was beginning to crawl, I invited Elsa Widlitz up for coffee and home-made apple strudel. She lived alone in an apartment on the

ground floor, cared for by a housekeeper who dropped in several times a day. Elsa was nearly blind, so I accompanied her up the stairs to our apartment on the third floor. Entering the living room, she squinted behind her thick glasses as she searched the walls and remarked dolefully that she hadn't been in this place for a long time. I hesitated before asking what she meant. Then she told me that she and her husband had lived in this very apartment, the most coveted one in the building, until her husband was arrested and murdered in Jasenovac. She was distressed that she was not able to save either him or his mother, who was deported to Ravensbrück and executed. Alfred Widlitz was not an observant Jew, as the rest of his family of origin had been. Elsa and her husband had always celebrated the Christian holidays. She couldn't understand why the Nazis would murder someone who, like the other well-to-do Jews in their social circles, never practiced Judaism. It was heart breaking to watch her scan the rooms that were once her home as a young wife and mother. Elsa further explained that a year after the war she filed restitution claims for the Art Nouveau building and the public pool, and they were restored to her. She and Niki moved back in. Niki Widlitz had refrained from telling me that I was moving into the apartment of his childhood, so his mother's comments made me feel the reverberations of their family history within my own walls. Knowing that another family had suffered such fatal anti-Semitism put a damper on enjoying our new apartment. When my thoughts drifted to the possibility of history repeating itself, I struggled to dismiss them as figments of my imagination.

Elsa Widlitz lived a quiet, withdrawn life, yet her lifestyle provoked our concierge who unburdened herself to me after being chastised by the elderly lady. The concierge accused Elsa of being lazy and arrogant, claiming that she had never dressed by herself in her whole life; it wasn't just lately because of her poor eyesight. As a newcomer to the building, I had a lot to digest.