

## INTRODUCTION

In March 1938, the ambitious and politically astute Austrian Kurt Reiner and his bride to be, Hennie Goldmark, had everything to look forward to. Abruptly, not unlike the appearance of a flame following the striking of a match, turmoil entered the lives of the 25-year-old Jewish engineering student and the 19-year old multi-lingual high school graduate. Initially, the consequence of the early Spring invasion of the German Army into Austria resulted in Kurt's dismissal from Vienna's Technical College. Months later, Kurt was arrested on November 10, 1938, by the German *Gestapo* (Secret Police) in what became known as *Kristallnacht*, or the "Night of Broken Glass." Across Germany and Austria, tens of thousands of Jews and other "undesirables" were arrested without warning and sent to concentration camps. Kurt ended up in Dachau, the first concentration camp opened in Germany by the Nazis, and one of the most brutal.

Thus began a point of flight, trail of hardship, and terror that subjected the young couple to several months at a Nazi monitored farm labor camp, a hurried exit out of Italy and an illegal, vexing boat ride into France. As if their emigration plight was not difficult enough, it was stalled again when Kurt was arrested as an Austrian/German "foreign enemy" only days after they reach Marseille and France declares war on Germany.

Accepting his responsibility to convey witness to the Holocaust, Kurt Reiner started putting his story to paper in 1972. It is a detailed account of a spirited couple that refused to yield to the Nazi reign of terror, fulfilling everything in their power to escape Austria and find their way to America. Overall, the memoir delivers an accurate version of how Viennese Jews were physically and emotionally impacted in the aftermath of the March 12, 1938, Nazi invasion of Austria (the Anschluss). It also dramatically conveys the difficulty Jews confronted in attempting to emigrate to America and elsewhere with little or no financial resources, blocked borders, and multiple incarcerations.

The memoir's narrative integrates an introspective view of the socio-economic, political, psychological, and theological factors that affected Viennese Jews forced to flee Europe due to the Nazi incursion of their homeland. The result is that the incomprehensible is transformed into the undeniable and most importantly, the unacceptable. If anything is to be learned by studying the Holocaust, the interrelated, dynamic forces that played out during its occurrence must be conveyed and understood. *Counting on America* projects an overall perspective of the evolution of the Holocaust in Vienna, and permits the reader to establish an emotional relationship with not only Vienna's Jewish refugees but also refugees of all ethnicities from around the world.

Remarkably, there is a thread of irony that parallels the story line and gives pause for reflection as it takes shape over the course of the book. As the story unfolds, it is apparent that Kurt and Hennie inadvertently met up with more than a half dozen strangers that became renowned world villains or

heroes following the war. For example, villains include Odilio Globočnik, the SS Leader given the mandate to carry out the extermination of European Jewry. Heroes include Ho Feng-Shan, China's mission chief in Nazi-occupied Vienna, honored in 2000 by *Yad Vashem* with the award, "*Righteous Among the Nations*;" and Hiram Bingham IV, U.S. diplomat (Marseille), honored in 2011 by the Simon Wiesenthal Center at their annual dinner with the "Courageous Valor" award. Whether these chance meetings were a matter of happenstance or due to divine intervention is for the reader to decide.

This true story is the outcome of a decades-long collaborative labor of love between Kurt Reiner, and his son, Gary. The original draft, derived from Kurt's autobiographical notes, was concluded in September 1985. The specific nature of events and dialogue were captured from Gary's personal conversations with his father and his written memoranda. To the degree the dialogue may be embellished is the end result of the absence of absolute recall as relates to the memories of the co-authors. The identities of persons are accurate with the exception of those in which the last name appears as a single initial (followed by asterisks\*\*\*). This is due to the inability to confirm the spellings of these names. Context applicable to the period was added by correlating Kurt Reiner's intellectual reflections and emotional perceptions with established historical data in addition to original source materials he carried from Europe to America. Additionally, the story is copiously illustrated with scarce documents, photographs, footnotes and public domain pictures that appear concurrently with the reported event. Some documents that relate to specific incidents appear in the Appendix and are sequentially labeled as Artifact I, Artifact II, etc. . . .

The memoir is designed for use in classrooms and other educational settings to help students and historians deepen their understanding of this harrowing chapter in human history. The events of this story belong to Kurt and Hennie. The lessons of their story belong to the entire world. Its general essence pays homage to all the brave men and women who left their homeland for America in pursuit of a better life free of religious intolerance.

Justin Sachs, Publisher, Motivational Press

## PREFACE



Growing up Jewish in Austria in the 1930s, I lived a simple but comfortable life and was on track to become an engineer until I was branded a criminal just for being a Jew.

The Nazi bastards rolled into Vienna in March 1938, removed me from university, and later sent me to Dachau. I was recently engaged, and this trajectory was not what my fiancée and I had envisioned.

How I got out of Dachau in a short few months (before the Second World War started) was a clever deception. How Hennie and I got to France was through luck and chutzpah, and how we got to America was through divine intervention. The fact that we survived was due to twists and turns, nothing short of amazing, but it was most of all due to mutual and unconditional commitment and love.

