

Memories of Josephine “Sefi” Riss Fang

As told to Paul Riss in Boston on
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Sefi and Pauli July 1949

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1. Student in a time of turmoil 1940-1950

How Hans came to boarding school in Kalksburg and at the Theresianum

My parents decided that Hans should have a good Catholic education and at the age of 10 he was enrolled as a full boarding student at the Jesuit's boarding school Kalksburg in Vienna. I remember when we first visited him with my parents I was awed by the huge dormitories where many beds, each with a curtain enclosure, were aligned along the walls with a special area for the Prefekt in the middle who also slept there with the boys. It was the first time my brother and I were separated and he was away from home. I remember him crying and sobbing and begging my parents to take him away. I felt so sorry for him.

Shortly thereafter my father as a civil servant got a stipend for his son to attend the Theresianum in the 4th district of Vienna, a very expensive academy that gave some scholarships to children of civil servants, including one for Hans. Thus he received a completely secular education and not the Catholic education which my parents originally had in mind for him. He also was exposed to a different circle of peers from various backgrounds and countries. But he adjusted very quickly and felt at ease there. He came home every weekend and was pampered by my grandmother. I always enjoyed the stories he told about his school and his friends.

How Hans came to study medicine

Ever since he was a child Hans was interested in nature, animals and adventure. He wanted to go to Africa and he wanted to become an explorer and I his assistant. Later it was understood that he would follow his father's field and study law. But when Hitler came to Austria and Hans saw how his father was treated by the new government he decided he did not want to have a profession so completely dependent on the government. Thus he chose medicine. Furthermore, medicine was the only study possible when you were in the army at that time, and soldiers got time off to study.

How I came to study English

I graduated from high school in 1940 and then had to do civil service as an “Arbeitsmaid” as was the law under Hitler. As future students we did not have to serve a whole year, but were allowed to leave in September to enroll at the University of Vienna. I always liked pure mathematics and thought I would enroll in mathematics. But I discovered that if you take mathematics as a major you have to take physics and chemistry as minors, but those two fields were my poorest academic achievements.

I ran into my school friend from Linz Franz Hirsch who had just finished his enrollment in English. We talked and he persuaded me to take English since it opened so many vistas for the future. German was not an option for me; I was more interested in English and literature so I enrolled in English with minors in history and philosophy at the University of Vienna in October 1940. In addition we had to take “Fächer des Frauenschaffens” (women’s home economics like cooking, childcare, hygiene, etc).

How the Gestapo prevented me from taking the advanced teaching exam (ca. 1944)

I belonged to a female Catholic student group which was under the direction of Fr. Mitzka SJ from the University church. In order to disguise his name we called him among ourselves “Paula”. We had occasional discussion groups and encouraged each other in our faith. Once Fr. Mitzka arranged a brief retreat over the weekend in Pressbaum near Vienna in a private home. While we were there all of a sudden the Gestapo appeared. They took our names and personal information and thus broke up the retreat and we all returned to our homes.

Shortly thereafter I got a letter ordering me to the Gestapo headquarters. I went with great trepidation because you had no rights and never knew what would be the results of the visit. They interrogated me for a while. I tried to give as neutral answers as far as possible. They knew about my father, so that was already a black point for me. A few days later I was called to the dean’s office of the faculty of philosophy of the University of Vienna. He

was very stern and said my behaviour was unacceptable and I was not fit to teach at any high school and I would be forbidden to take the “Lehramtsprüfung” which is the usual final exam of the studies and which qualifies you for teaching at high schools (Gymnasium). Without this qualification there was practically no possibility of getting a job. Thus, I continued to study for my doctorate alone. In hindsight it turned out very good for me because later in the United States it was a big advantage for me. At the time however it was a great disappointment for me.

In addition as a half-orphan I was entitled to a 50% reduction of all fees at the university. This was denied to me as a consequence of my political orientation. Besides I now knew that the Nazis and the Gestapo had a negative report on me in their files.

Flight to Saalfelden and help from Leni Schlaeffer (Spring 1945)

After we were bombed out in Hietzing and my grandmother lay dying my mother was close to a nervous breakdown and Hans and I decided we should leave Vienna and seek shelter in Saalfelden. Telephones were not existent at that time. Hans promised to look after my grandmother who was in coma and was receiving morphine injections.

My mother and I took the train. I remember somewhere the train stopped because there was an attack from American planes. After that we continued and arrived in Saalfelden unannounced. Dear Leni was very kind and got us temporary shelter across the street in Bahnhofstrasse. Later we moved to the attic of the Hutterer family where there was a widower with a daughter. This became our home for the next several months. We had no communication with Hans and only prayed that he would survive on his own.

End of war in Saalfelden and occupation by the US army (May 1945)

The end of the war came in May 1945. I remember the German troops marching by through Saalfelden on their way from Italy to Germany, and I would provide pitchers of waters. It was a chaotic retreat. Shortly thereafter the U.S. army came, the first ones were

the paratroopers. Since I had studied English the new mayor of Saalfelden, Mr. Rohrmoser, would often call me to interpret. This was not always very easy because the situation in Saalfelden was not clear. At least nobody admitted to having been a Nazi.

The fate of the so-called displaced persons from Poland or Ukraine was particularly tragic. The Americans sent them back forcibly in cattle cars by railway. Some committed suicide. It was very disturbing to me.



Saalfelden with the County Court House (right) where both Hans (1920) and Sefi (1922) were born

Sometimes also the US army asked me to interpret, and thus I got to know some personnel from the occupation. I was not familiar with American idioms, and I faithfully wrote down in my notebooks all the expressions the military used. One day my mother got sick and the doctor said it was typhoid fever. On that day I had to go to the army and they would not let me in because my mother had an infectious disease. It showed me how the Americans were very meticulous about health issues.

Trip to Salzburg and job with the military government (Summer 1945)

The American military government was set up with headquarters in Salzburg. They advertised for secretaries who knew English and German. Since in Saalfelden there was no further opportunity to earn money I went to Salzburg and was interviewed at the military government which was set up in the court house (Landesgericht). The young lieutenant interviewed me and apparently liked me and my credentials and they hired me on the spot. At that time the Austrian employees of the American forces were housed in the Hotel Goldener Loewe. Thus started my initiation into American culture and into the American way of life.

I knew both English and shorthand, and also was excellent typist. I eventually became the executive secretary of the military governor. Between 1945 and 1948 I served under 3 different military governors. It was a very interesting experience for me because I learned about the problems of the province of Salzburg and prepared the various reports for the governor. It also opened my eyes about the behaviour of military personnel when they were away from their wives and families, but of course my lips were sealed. Some were men of integrity and I was invited to the wedding of his daughter to another officer in Linz, and we went together in several jeeps from Salzburg to Linz.

Most soldiers were not really intellectuals. One I worked for had the habit of writing everything out in longhand before dictating it to me. I took it down in shorthand – I used the German shorthand I had learned and in my mind transcribed the English words. After he had left the room I took the paper with his full report in longhand from the wastepaper basket, checked it against my shorthand and thus was able to present a perfect transcription.

After graduating in Graz I returned to Salzburg and took a job as job analyst for the military government of the province of Salzburg. I had to establish job description for individual positions with the labor department of the military government.

How I finished my doctorate (1948)

After several years working I was used to earning some money and studies seemed remote. I looked at the future and did not feel like going back to university, although I had finished all my required courses and had almost finished my thesis (“Die Amerikakritik bei Sinclair Lewis”). The title of the thesis was only permitted because it was critical of America. I felt I did not need the doctorate, and wanted to go to America. Nothing was keeping me back in Austria, except my mother and my brother, and I wanted to see the land of my dreams.

I was encouraged by Americans I had met to apply for a scholarship under the Institute of International Education: I had to appear before a panel of experts at the American consulate in Vienna. They asked me many questions about American literature. I was especially interested at that time in books by Thomas Wolfe. They seemed to be very impressed, but at the end they told me to go back to the University and get my PhD. Then I should come back and reapply and would get a scholarship. I was heart broken about this delay and yet it was the best thing that happened to me. My life in the United States would have been completely different if I had not followed their advice.

My mother had always encouraged me to finish my studies. I was the embodiment of her dreams and she immediately agreed to support me financially to finish my studies. In Vienna the 2 professors were no longer around. Prof. Weber had killed himself together with his family because he was an ardent Nazi. Professor Wild was professor of literature but was temporarily retired because he had been a party member. Thus there were no English professors at the University of Vienna and I would have had to go to the Germanistik department.

I knew of a professor in Graz (Prof. Koziol) who was still active and I had a friend who finished her doctorate with him. She helped me to contact him and recommended me, and he accepted me as his student and accepted my dissertation. I had to type it in multiple copies – there was no Xerox machine or electric typewriter.

Later I got a room at the Ursuline convent and was able to finish my dissertation there. It was a terrible winter, and the nuns did not have enough fuel for heating. I shared a room with a young student from Carinthia and we dressed up for sleeping because the rooms were not heated. The convent provided also meals and I felt so bad for the nuns when I saw their frost bitten hands.

After I passed my final exams my mother came to the graduation ceremony and she said it was the happiest day of her life. She enjoyed it tremendously and we had a nice meal together with some of my friends. I left all of my English papers with a colleague who had to take her exams later. Eventually after some years in America I got the papers back. After that I returned to my job with the military government as a labor analyst and prepared for the next round of application.

Eventually I reapplied for studies in the United States, I reappeared before the panel of experts in Vienna, and this time they were impressed and I received a postgraduate scholarship to the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C. starting in December 1950. I was to take courses in sociology and American English literature.



Sefi Graduation announcement 1948

My first childbirth experience (Graz 1948)

In Graz I first stayed with my friend Paula Appelt whose husband was a medieval historian. She was expecting a child, and a few weeks after my arrival she gave birth. I took her to the hospital. This was my first experience of childbirth and seeing labor in a friend. She was holding on to a handle, her face was red with strain and her eyes turned bloodshot. Apparently the doctors did not believe in relieving the pain of a woman in labor. I told myself that it is not worth to undergo so much pain for any man. If that is what it takes to have children I probably never will have children of my own. A woman pays a high price for sex.

2. From Strudel to Chopsticks 1950-1951

The skiing accident in Kitzbühel, Tirol

In winter we went with a group of friends skiing in Kitzbühel (50 miles from Salzburg). One Sunday I slalomed down one of the mountains and a native skier who did not see me had jumped over a bump and hit me with the steel edges of his skis on my head. It was a sunny day. I felt the impact on my head and when I looked down I saw the bright yellow sweatshirt covered with blood. I collapsed, and Pete and his friends brought me to the local hospital where they checked the wound on my head and applied stitches. Some nurse checked me out and waited for the doctor. However the doctor did not come to the hospital until 3 or 4 hours because he had waited for more skiing accidents to happen so he could care for all of them at the same time. My American friends were quite upset by this and said that if they had known they would have taken me to Salzburg. I had to stay in the hospital overnight. The next day I called my brother Hans and described the skiing accident and the treatment at the hospital to him. My brother gave me advice which was contrary to what the hospital had told me and naturally I followed my brother's advice. To this day I tend to think that my mind had suffered a little by the accident.



Sefi and Pete, Salzburg, August 20, 1950

Arrival at Catholic University in Washington, D.C: (ca. September 1950)

In 1950 I accepted a proposal by Pete Morrison, a young man from Boston who worked for the Displaced Persons Commission in Salzburg. We were a group of friends and he was a very pleasant man and I enjoyed his company. Nevertheless, I still wanted to come to America on my own without any financial assistance from Pete and his family.

In September 1950 a group of about 40 Austrian students assembled for the trip to Bremerhaven and New York. It was an exciting experience for all of us. Another woman and I were the only PhD graduates; all others were much younger. The ship also had a number of so-called war brides, i.e., Europeans married to American soldiers. The trip from Bremerhaven to New York took about 10 days. On the last day we encountered a hurricane and the boat had to take a detour farther south. They stopped serving food, and the furniture was roped to the walls. Everybody was seasick, and the crew told us that the ship would easily split into two. I made a vow that if God grant me to set foot on *terra firma* again I would never take a boat again in my life.

I made friends with a Carinthian girl. She had somehow made contact with the Voice of America. As a consequence when we arrived in New York some people from the VOA came on board and interviewed us. In New York we were assigned to stay at the International House and were given instruction on how to travel to our different destinations.

I travelled to Washington by train. It was September and the weather was still hot and humid. The Catholic University assigned me to a dormitory – Regan Hall. I received full room and board and the Institute for International Education gave me a monthly stipend of 60 dollars which at that time was quite nice. I was also allowed to make some pocket money on my own but not more than 100 dollars. Since I was well versed in office work I signed up to be the secretary of the art department with Mrs. Prof. Fontanini. Again I learned how different things were in America. She had great trouble justifying nude models for art classes, since these were also attended by nuns who studied at CU.

Meeting Paul at Catholic University in Washington (September 1950)

I did the typing for Mrs. Fontanini. She usually left me alone in the office to do the office work. One day a young Chinese student came and asked for directions to another building. Since I was new I could not help him and he asked me where I came from. I said Vienna. When he heard that I was from Vienna he put his books down and started to talk to me about Beethoven. He was interesting and nice but I had work to do. I tried to be polite but did not encourage him to talk. Next time I came to the office he was waiting for me outside the building. In his hand he had a copy of Time magazine which described the opening of the opera house in Vienna. He came several times and asked me out for Chinese food. Of course I had never eaten Chinese food in my life. I loved Chinese food from the beginning. In 1950 American kitchen was very monotonous, especially the institutional food. I missed especially good bread.

This is how it started. I found him very interesting and well read. But I also was engaged and therefore treated him as a friend and

interesting colleague. For Thanksgiving I was invited to Boston. My first Thanksgiving in America I spent in Louisburg square on Beacon Hill with the Morrison family and everybody was very kind to me although Pete was still in Austria.

My studies at CU were very interesting and I met interesting people. For Christmas I was also invited to Boston. By that time Paul was getting more personal and I tried not to encourage him because I still considered myself engaged after all. It was never dull talking to him and I enjoyed his company. I spent Christmas in Boston and when I came back Paul became serious and I decided to break my engagement in a letter to Pete in Austria.

The future with Paul was quite uncertain. Paul only had the status of a displaced person because he could not go back to his homeland, and I was in America on a one year student visa. My mother and my brother were very upset. They wrote that they did not know this young man, that he might have a wife in China, and they tried to discourage me, but they of course were no match for the determination of Paul once he had set his mind on marrying me.

Marriage to Paul 1951

We enjoyed each other's company and had become friends. Out of that grew the desire to spend life together. Paul opened up a completely new world to me, the world of Asian Chinese culture which I found very interesting, to say nothing of the delicious Chinese cuisine with its many diverse flavours and dishes, far superior to the somehow monotonous American fare at Regan hall. Paul only had a room with a landlady and did not cook himself, working on his Ph.D. in physics, but we often went to small Chinese restaurants which were plentiful in Washington.

Since we both had no immigration status I had to sign a paper that I would stay only one year and not try to extend my stay in the United States. Paul took me one day to see Mr. Donald Bennett who was the president of the Ohio State alumni association in Washington, D.C. and Paul had received both his BS and MS from Ohio State in Columbus, Ohio. The Bennetts lived in a comfortable house in Washington, not too far from Catholic University, and

both Mr and Mrs Bennnett received us with great kindness and somehow seemed to like us.

Mr. Bennett was a graduate from Ohio State and from Harvard Law School and worked as lawyer for the government. Mrs. Bennett was a tremendously interesting and articulate and artistic woman who took me under her wings and I owe much of my knowledge of American customs to her guidance. We also met their three children, son Peter, a daughter Virginia – Ginie – and the youngest Annie. I cannot describe how much we owe to the Bennett family. Without him our lives would have been completely different.

It turned out that the Austrian quota was 7 years oversubscribed because of the high number of refugees after the war. Since Paul had no national status since the Communists had taken over China in 1949 we took a tremendous risk in getting married. I remember Mr. Bennett asked me whether I would go back to China with my husband if necessary and I replied Yes but I hoped it would not be necessary. And if I had to go back to Austria I would have had to wait for 7 years to get a new visa to come back to the United States.

We took the risk. We could not get married in a church until after Lent. The first weekend after Easter was March 31. I had to go to the Austrian embassy since I had an Austrian passport and the consul there was very kind and helpful and tried to make sure that this is what I really wanted to do – to marry an unknown Chinese student.

Paul decided on his own – I would have married him anyway - to take some instruction in Catholic religion. As a child he had liked to go to the mission church of Franciscan missionaries and listened to the Gregorian chants in Lijiang. A Dominican priest from CU, Fr. Burke, agreed to talk to him and after some time announced that Paul would be ready to become a Catholic if he so wished. He said he would need godparents for the baptism. Prof. Karl Herzfeld, the head of the physics department at CU and an immigrant from Austria was a Jewish convert from Vienna and had written a classical physics textbook. He was also Paul's

dissertation adviser. Pro. Herzfeld and his wife Regina were kind enough to agree to be Paul's godparents.

A few days before our wedding Paul was baptized in the Dominican church

Fr. Burke agreed to marry us at the St. Dominic church in downtown Washington. We had a very small wedding, just some friends and my landlady – I had moved out from Regan hall in the meantime – who arranged a little gathering after church at her house. Most of the Chinese students we knew from Regan hall came, some missionary fathers from China, but no relatives were able to come. Altogether there were about 20-25 people.

I was pleased that 2 members from the Austrian embassy had come. I was not familiar with American wedding customs, so Paul and I both walked into the church together. I had a beige suite from Sak's 5th Avenue and Paul had his best suit. When we knelt in front of the altar and Fr. Burke gave his speech I was overcome with anxiety and apprehension and asked myself what I was doing here. I realized the magnitude of the vows and the unknown future and I started to cry. Fr. Burke whispered to me that this is no time to cry and that I should be happy. I was about to walk away because it was such a serious commitment for me but Fr. Burke consoled me. Luckily I had no chance to walk out.

After that we had to start with the immigration office to try to change my status. I had to apply to retain Austrian citizenship after marriage because otherwise I would have had to take the citizenship of my husband who was a displaced person. When I went to the immigration office the first question of the officer was why I did not marry an American. It would have made things so much easier.

From now on Mr. Bennett's assistance was vital. I had to report to the immigration office every month and Mr. Bennett initiated a private bill by senator Pricker from Ohio for the relief of Josephine Maria Fang. The bill died once but was resubmitted again. I can only imagine how much time and effort Mr. Bennett devoted to our cause.

My visa was only good until September 1951. In the meantime I became pregnant with Paula. At that time immigration did not deport pregnant women so even after my visa expired I got a temporary extension on a monthly basis. Paula was born on February 2, 1952. We had moved to a sublet apartment near CU. Our landlord was the Methodist minister and professor from Southern Methodist University.

3. Building a life in America 1952-1960

The birth of my first child Paula 1952

I had a gynecologist who was recommended by a friend. Paul was still working on his dissertation and we had no car. So according to the gynecologist's calculation Paula was overdue already. He told me that he would be at the hospital that night and wanted me to come, too. He ordered me to drink a glass of Castor oil mixed with orange juice which I did. I never realized the terrible consequences. I spent hours in the bathroom thinking my intestines would drop out. Then labor started and became quite brief and violent. Our landlord was so kind to drive us to the Georgetown University Hospital where my doctor was.

I had unfortunately told him that I wanted childbirth to be as natural as possible. I remember he gave me a spinal anesthesia and put a huge mirror at the end of the delivery table so that I could watch my child to be born. I must say that at that time I was not too anxious to watch anything but it was nice to see the dark head emerging.

Paula was beautifully formed and seemed a perfect little miracle. She cried right away and had tears. I had a German pediatrician Dr. Knopf who had done her training at the Mayo clinic. She came to my room and asked whether my husband was Chinese because Paula had Mongolian spots on the skin of the lower back.

David 1953

After the birth of Paula we moved to a small independent apartment. The previous apartment was no longer available because the Methodist professor sold the house and moved back to

the SMU. We found another apartment near CU where I soon became pregnant with David who was born on April 1, 1953. 2 days after the delivery I had a very unpleasant experience when I passed a big round ball which turned out to be a cotton swab which my gynecologist had forgotten in the vagina.

When I went to the immigration office the officer there knew me already and when he heard that I was pregnant he made the remark “Not again!”. My bill in Congress was still pending.

In spring 1953 Paul received the doctorate in physics from Catholic University. He also received the formal legal status as a “Displaced Person”. Thus he could now seriously look for a job. A Hungarian professor, Pulwari, had a lab at CU and hired Paul as his assistant.

I am sure Paul was a hard worker and the professor Pulwari seemed to appreciate him. However in summer 1953 Paul accepted an offer from Philco Corporation in Pennsylvania and thus we moved to Dresher, Pennsylvania, where we found an apartment in the countryside and also bought an old car with gearshift. We needed it to move around in the countryside. We both got our drivers licence. I had one from Austria and had to renew it.

Grossmama's first visit to America and the birth of Maria 1954

We always had hoped that my mother from Austria would be able to visit us. The Austrian currency (Schilling) was not yet an internationally accepted currency, so we saved the money for her travel expenses. In 1954 she was able to take the Holland American Line in Rotterdam and arrived in New York. On her arrival in New York Ginie Bennett – who was working for Time magazine – met her and took care of her although they could not speak to each other.

I was very happy to see my mother again and it was wonderful to enjoy her Austrian cooking. She also was able to help after the birth of Maria on July 22, 1954.



Grossmama at the age of 51 years in 1946

In order to be able to extend my visa I had to continue my studies, and Library Science was a logical extension of my English studies. I enrolled in the department of Library Science at CU to get a master degree in Library Science. I was not able to finish my thesis and exams when we left for Pennsylvania but I did finish my thesis which was an index to the Jesuit periodical "Thought". Since my mother had come I was able to take a week off, go to Washington and prepare for the exams. I studied hard for one week and was able to take and pass the written exam for the master degree in Library Science. The master degree was important for me because it was the qualification to get a job.

While I was in Washington David had fallen out of his crib and broke his left hand. Paul thought that this was a sign that he would

now use his right hand – David originally had been left handed – but after the hand healed David returned to using his left hand.

Grossmama called Maria “Mitzerl”. She was an easy baby, not as active as Paula had been. Maria did acrobatics in the crib and was able to stand on her head without effort when she was just over 1 year old. She also displayed a sense of humor which was supposed to be a sign of intelligence according to my friend Alice Songe. Paula was so active that I remember the sweat pouring down my forehead just by restraining Paula who was kicking furiously when I changed her diaper. Dr. Knop had told me that the children from two races get the best from both parents. In the next generation it would depend on their partners.

In Dresher we also experienced a hurricane and found the water rising up to the kitchen steps and our car flooded with water. Paul managed to sleep through the hurricane while I watched the water rise in the basement. Everything in the basement was ruined, including the first crèche which Leni had mailed from Saalfelden. After the water receded everything was covered with mud.

As a consequence of the hurricane the insurance company Allstate cancelled our car insurance and it was difficult to get another car insurance. And we never took out another insurance from Allstate.

Dresher was nice countryside living. We managed to get Paula into pre-Kindergarten. Since my mother was here I was able to take a job in an asbestos company. My boss was from Switzerland and I had to organize the files. At that time I already noticed how many workers had lung problems because of the asbestos.

After one year Grossmama went back to Europe to be with my brother and his family again. Her English was not good but she enjoyed the children and there were German speaking friends. One was Konrad Mueller who often came to visit Grossmama.

While I was in the hospital when Maria was born President Eisenhower signed the bill which allowed me to remain in the United States as a permanent resident. Citizenship came a little bit later when we were in Washington. Fr Oliver Kapsner OSB accompanied me to the hearing where they asked questions about

American history and about the constitution and amendments.

The birth of Anna 1955 and moving back to Washington

The following year Anna was born on Christmas day December 25, 1955. For me it was the easiest delivery. Both Maria and Anna were small. My mother had already returned to Austria, and Paul had lost his job.

One day Paul had some disagreements with his boss at Philco and they fired him. Paul went to Washington and Professor Pulwari immediately offered him work again. So we moved back to Washington and rented a regular apartment with a small fenced in backyard near Catholic University. However the moving and unavoidable lifting must have hurt me because I developed an infection and had to see a doctor in Washington. He did a cystoscopy which was very unpleasant, put me on medication and ordered me to get as much rest as possible which was easier said than done.

The birth of Peter 1956

The doctor also told me not to have children for some time. However it did not work out this way. Several weeks later I had a miscarriage and the explanation of my doctor was that nature will take care and I did not need a curettage. But I got pregnant again immediately and Peter was born on December 20, 1956, less than a year after Anna's birth. In Austria doctors had always told me that it would be difficult for me to have children. It was nice to have another boy again. Paul had always felt sorry for David because he only had three sisters. Little did Paul anticipate that there would be five boys in a row before Teresa.

Peter was always inquisitive. We had a second refrigerator in the basement where he had seen me breaking eggs for baking. One day I went to the basement and found Peter had broken the eggs from a whole carton neatly but creating a terrible mess. I could not be mad at him because it was so systematical, imitating me.

Paul got an offer to work for the Bureau of Standards with a substantial raise in salary and other benefits going with

government employment and our life became more stable.

The birth of John 1958

On May 13, 1958 John was born in Providence Hospital in Washington, D.C. It was the same hospital where Peter was born. He was a wiry little boy and enjoyed exploring.

Taking care of the children was always an adventure and full of unexpected surprises and did not leave me any time for reflection. At that time we lived in a duplex house which was getting a bit small for all of us. The backyards were facing each other, and between the backwards there was an alley where they picked up trash. It was a nice community and we talked with neighbors. One of the neighbors was a family where the husband worked for the FBI. They had boys, and once when one of the boys did something wrong the father got angry and punished him by taking off his belt and hitting him with the belt. I was shocked and found this degrading for the child.

I was a bit overwhelmed by taking care of the children and the housework. A neighbour recommended a cleaning woman. At that time only black women would do menial work. I got a cleaning woman. She was very thin and gaunt looking, and I had a gut feeling that something was wrong with her. She did the job alright but things disappeared, and one day she just disappeared. Some time later we got a call from the health department that I should bring the children for testing because the woman had tuberculosis. They gave us the skin test. David's test was positive but he did not develop tuberculosis. After that I did not dare to hire another unknown person.

Occasionally we needed a babysitter. Another neighbor recommended a very nice woman, Mrs. Katherine Hessler. But she was over 70 and I thought how could she handle these lively 6 little children. Eventually I took her, and Ms. Hessler turned out to be a god-send. She was a widow, tall, slender, capable, quiet, and the children were in awe of her. Later Joe told me that she would use a wooden spoon if he misbehaved. The children liked her. She also was a wonderful cook and sometimes surprised me with a

good dinner she had prepared before I came home. A couple of years ago one of her daughters sent me a biography of her mother where she talked a lot about the Fang children.

4. A year in Europe 1960-1961

The birth of Joe 1959

On September 7, 1959 Joe was born, again in Providence Hospital. He was a very easy, happy and content baby. At that time Paul got an assignment from the Bureau of Standards in Grenoble, France, to work at the Institut Fourier and the C.E.N.G. (Centre des Etudes Nucleaires Grenoble) We made preparations to move. It was quite a challenge to move the whole family and spend a year away. We had to clear the house and rented it out to another physicist and his family, and Paul arranged with a colleague who had a Morris Minor to use in France and we left our old car in Washington. We planned to leave in May 1960. I was looking forward to seeing Austria and my family again. The plan was to go with the children to Austria and spend the summer there. Paul would go directly to Grenoble, start working and look for a place for us to stay before coming to Austria to meet up with us. The government shipped some of our household belongings directly to France. We were supposed to travel with government passes. Since we had so many children we grouped some of the children on passports together because they would not all fit on one passport. We were flying with Sabena airlines to Brussels. From Brussels I was going to Munich and Vienna with all 7 children. I was already expecting Francis.

At that time there were no SUVs and we always had to take two cars. By mistake I was still in my underskirt and had packed the skirt in a suitcase which was already in the other car. I rushed to the window and yelled at the other car to come back with my skirt. The drivers missed the exit to the airport and had to make a U turn. The airplane had to wait for us. On the plane some of the children got sick and I had to hold several sickness bags for them. They had put the baby in a net overhead.

Finally we arrived in Brussels. It was late and we rushed to the

transfer counter because I had to get my connection to Munich. Paul and I separated and he went alone to Geneva and Grenoble. I was now alone with the children, and when we arrived in Munich they helped me to the waiting area. Then Alitalia discovered that Paul and I had mixed our passports. Alitalia was adamant that they could not transport me from Munich to Vienna because we did not have proper documentation. I begged them to take us, explaining that I did not have enough diapers and that my family was waiting for me in Vienna to help me. I had to sign a special paper releasing Alitalia of any responsibility and reluctantly they agreed to fly me to Vienna. We had to take a bus from the terminal to the airplane. When I counted my children on the bus I noticed that Anna was missing. I yelled stop and the driver went around and went back to the terminal. I envisioned poor Anna alone and crying, but when we came she was happily playing in a corner and apparently had not even noticed that we had left. We picked her up and went to the plane.

When we arrived in Austria I already saw my brother and Lisl and the Wögebauers who had come to meet us. But the Kriminalpolizei took me aside to a small room for interrogation. They explained to me that they often have cases of women divorcing and taking their children with them. I told them I was pregnant and was travelling on government passports and asked them to call the embassy. The Austrians were so inflexible and I was at the end of my nerves – that was the last straw for me and I burst into tears. That was the best weapon a woman can have. They immediately consoled me and just wanted to get rid of me. Customs did not bother to ask me to open any of the many suitcases.

We all stayed with Onkel Hans and Tante Lisl in their apartment in Schmelzgasse. Tante Lisl rose to the occasion and organized everything with Edith helping her. But the adventures did not stop. In Vienna many friends visited and tried to help. One day Onkel Fredi's stepdaughter Christl and a friend took the children to the Stadtpark for a walk. While in the park they discovered that Maria was missing and could not find her. They were very upset; Maria of course spoke no German but was picked up by other people who took her to the police where Christl found her.

We went to Attersee and I was in the car with Onkel Hans who drove quite aggressively on the country roads, and I was afraid that I would have a premature birth. In Attersee we spent several beautiful days. Anna always liked to carry a little handbag with her and she liked to pick up things to put into her handbag. Sometimes they were toys which belonged to Johannes. He was concerned and ran after her to check in her handbag. We had nice weather and sunshine.

After Attersee we went to Saalfelden. First we stayed with Peter Faistauer in one of the Blattl houses, then we moved to Mrs. Salzmann's house on Obsmarktstrasse where Grossmama had organized additional rooms for us. We have a picture of the baker with a basket delivering a whole basket of fresh rolls and Kipferl. Fortunately the house was next to the public swimming pool. It was the same swimming pool where I had learned to swim as a child.

Finally it was time to go to our new home in France and get settled there. We hired Marianne Kendlbacher, a woman from Saalfelden to help us. She travelled with us, along with Grossmama and Tante Lisl. We took the train from Saalfelden to Grenoble. Paul had rented the ground floor of an old villa called Villa Richemond in La Tronche, a suburb of Grenoble. I was so glad to have all the help we could for settling there. The first concern was to have enough beds for everybody. The stove in the kitchen did not work so we could not bake anything, but otherwise it was a nice location with a large garden where we could have our lunches outside. Unfortunately it was not a garden like in America. There were well tended flower beds with pebbled paths in between. It also turned out that we had an unbelievably difficult landlady, Mme.X who could only speak French. The first inkling was when I put the playpen for Joe outside on the grass so he would not pick up the pebbles. Madame appeared shortly thereafter complaining that I would ruin her grass by putting a playpen outside. This was just one of her frequent complaints.

The children could walk to the school nearby. They all wore the prescribed smocks. Of course somebody walked with them, and

they also came home for lunch. Mostly we had soup and some baguette with butter and cheese and some fruits.

La Tronche had a communist administration. They tried to do things for the working mothers and therefore offered after school programs. The children could stay in school supervised until 5 or 6 o'clock in the evening when we would pick them up again. It also helped them to learn French faster. The only one who was somewhat familiar with French was Paula who attended the Ursuline academy in Bethesda, Maryland, where they had a daily oral French class with a French teacher. Paula was enrolled in the third grade. Another French custom was that the children got a report card every month which came as a big folded paper. However the French liked to go on strike, and several times the report card was not filled out because of "greve". Another custom was that the seating of the children was according to their grades with the best students sitting in the front and the weak students in the back. Paula was seated in the last row and she progressed during the year – she was always ambitious and a good student – she moved up gradually and when she finished the school year in La Tronche she was seated in the first row and even received a book in recognition of her achievements.

David did not know any French and thus in the beginning there was very little in his report card. In December the teacher wrote: now that David knows French he has become a "bavard" (too talkative).

Overall I liked the French school system although often a child which would need more support does not get the help he needs. Luckily my children were all capable and sort of flourished under the system. Peter and Anna were in a so called Ecole Maternelle. In France kindergarten starts very early – 3 or 4 years – again a concession to working mothers. Little Johnny was only 2 ½ years old so he was too young for the public schools. However there were private nursery schools, usually Catholic, that would take him. The only prerequisite was that he had to be toilet trained. He still did have a few accidents but he always had extra underwear with him. One time I was a little late to pick him up and lo and

behold was shocked to see him walk all by himself on the sidewalk towards home, but he had a guardian angel.

Another adventure was with Peter, He was always very headstrong and enterprising and liked to run around. One day he was running around the house and ran smack into the wall of the house. His forehead was bleeding terribly. I called Paul and we rushed Peter to the hospital. Fortunately Ms. Kendelbacher was with us and looked after the children. In the hospital Peter was crying, and they would not let Paul and me stay with him. It was painful to hear Peter through the door screaming while he got the stitches.

The birth of Francis 1960

On October 14, 1960 Francis was born. Paul took me to the hospital in La Tronche, and I remember the nurses addressing me in French and encouraging me with repeated exhortations “Poussez, Madame!”. Francis weighed 7 pounds and was my biggest baby. I spent a week in the hospital. I was anxious to get back home and the nurses did not understand why I was in such a hurry. It was nice that the children were allowed to visit which would not have been the case in America. Paul brought them every morning before they went to school. I also had a bottle of red wine next to my bed. However the hygienic conditions were not quite to my standards and that was one of the reasons I tried to get home earlier. When they brought the babies to my room it worried me to see the baby being piled up on the cart.

After one week I came home and life with a new baby started again. I should mention that when we came first to Grenoble we had thought of putting Paula into a boarding school run by nuns so she would learn the language easier and get more attention. We visited the school on a mountain but the sleeping quarters were rather stern and spartan. Paula did not like it and begged us not to separate her from the family. She would have been very lonesome there.

Overall the year in France was a very interesting experience for all of us. We made trips farther south on the so called Route Napoleon in the little Morris Minor. The car was not big enough for all of us

and we sometimes had to go twice. Tante Lisl stayed with us for a few weeks until we got settled and then had to go back to her family. Marianne Kendlbacher unfortunately got an infection on one of her fingers. The French doctors were unable to help her so we had to send her back to Saalfelden. There part of her finger had to be amputated.

In summer Paul had an appointment in Holland at a laboratory in Leiden so we went to Holland to Echmond an Zee. Paul went by car, and I took the train to Paris where I had to transfer from one train station to the Gare du Nord. With taxis and children and all the luggage we just made it. Porters helped us to get on the train. The train started to move but the porters refused to hand over all suitcases because I had not yet paid. I was in the train with the children and the luggage was still sitting on the platform. They had to ship it to Holland later.

In Echmond an Zee Paul had rented part of a house. The luggage luckily came a day later. The apartment was still a bit damp and moist, but the air was very good and the house was near the ocean. He rented a small cabin so we could spend time on the beach and the children could play in the sand. Once



Echmond-an-zee

Johnny got lost in the dunes. I had tied baby Joseph to the cabin with a rope but Johnny one day walked away. There were many dunes and you could not see very far. The police fortunately found him and handed him over to me.

Paul had an appointment in Sweden and wanted to meet Prof. Aurivilius. For this reason we asked Inge Niedermöller – our cousin far removed – whether she would be willing to stay with the younger children. David and Paula were supposed to go with us to Sweden. Inge came and was delightful and cheerful and we started with the Morris Minor our trip north. We went to Denmark and our

car broke down. We got it repaired and then continued. I was impressed by the speed and greed with which the German travellers devoured the food on the ferry.

We passed Hamlet's castle in Helsingor and saw the thatched houses. Paula And David enjoyed the food and the scenery in Sweden. I remember the police in Stockholm being very friendly and helpful.

We went back to Holland, picked up our children and went to Bremerhaven for the trip back to the US: I was looking forward to a week of relaxation on the boat. It was not to be. President Kennedy declared that all government employees had to travel on American boats. So we had to change the reservation and had to travel on the SS America. However, since it was already so late we could not get accommodations in adjacent cabins. We also had brought with us our first au pair, Waldi Schilling, whom we had met at the famous language school for foreigners in Grenoble. She came from Germany and had worked with a French family and was eager to come to America. So I made a deal with her: if she helps me to get back to work she could come with us as an au pair. Waldi was a very strong and energetic young woman.

When we got to Bremerhaven we met by chance my old friend from Vienna, Herta Bauer, who also was there to see off her brother. When we had settled in on the ship it turned out that David developed a fever and a sore throat, and Waldi got terribly seasick. Paul also was very seasick, while I was queasy but could not afford getting seasick. Since both Waldi and Paul could not do anything I was trying take care of the children. But lo and behold in the evening when there was dancing and music Waldi recovered miraculously and was able to attend the festivities.

Since Maria's birthday was during the crossing they arranged a very nice birthday party for her.

5. Back in the USA 1961

Evicted from Apartment

After our arrival in New York we took a train to Washington. For

the children it was the first time on an American train. It was not so easy to settle in after a year abroad and the long trip. The house was in good shape but to get organised took us a while. Because of the noise created by the children our neighbours apparently complained to the landlord who called us and gave us notice because we had too many people living in the house.

Now we frantically looked for another place. Our dear friend Jane Wu helped us with the down payment on a large house on Lawrence Street which was available. We were able to move there soon and enjoyed our new home with a big backyard in which we placed a swing for the children. Waldi proved to be a very valuable help in all this. Paul took an appointment at NASA and worked in Greenbelt, Maryland at the Goddard Space Flight Center. The Catholic University had a grade school run by the sisters of Notre Dame and we put Maria into St. Anthony's grade school. The nuns there were so inflexible and objected to the fact that Maria could write very nice script which she had learned in France whereas in the school they still had to use only block letters. As a consequence I took Maria out and also put her into the campus school. Paula was two grades ahead of David although she was only one year older.

The birth of Christopher 1962 and Teresa 1964

I got a job as an editor of the Guide to Catholic Literature and worked from a small office with Joe Plazek, Anna's godfather. On June 28, 1962, Christopher was born, also in Providence Hospital. Now we had five boys in a row. Christopher was a sweet and easy baby. When he was 2 years old to our great surprise and delight we had another girl, Teresa, on May 25, 1964. Since Chris and Teresa were the youngest, and more than 2 years apart from Francis, they were very close together. When we had a Chinese au pair from Taiwan, Lucy Chee, she taught them to sing "Lemon Tree" by Peter, Paul and Mary and also some Chinese songs. Lucy was also a gifted painter and excellent cook. She later married Dan McHale, a manager for Hilton hotels, and we all attended her wedding in Washington with Paul giving her away. By that time we had moved to Belmont and came to Washington for the wedding,

staying in the Hilton hotel, and Teresa was the flower girl.

During her first year in the U.S. Waldi met a very nice young man, John Crawford, who worked for the State Department and whom she eventually married, and stayed in the country. At the wedding Maria was the flower girl. When John was her fiancé he came to our house dressed as Saint Nikolaus on December 6, but Joe recognized him. As of this writing (2007) Waldi is a widow and lives in Alexandria, Virginia. She has 3 grandchildren.

In 1968 Paul accepted an appointment at the NASA research facility in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and I accepted a position as head of the acquisition department of Boston College libraries and we all moved to a big house in Belmont. A year later, in 1969, I became associate professor of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Simmons College.

„Ich habe immer nicht so sehr in der Gegenwart gelebt sondern habe immer in die Zukunft geschaut. Ich war immer einen Schritt voraus.“

(“I have always lived not so much in the present but have always looked towards the future. I always was one step ahead.”)



Sefi 1939