

## 'My father the Nazi'

Son of Austrian SS officer discovers love for Jews-by Herta Leithgöb and Lisa Rüdiger

Given some of his earliest memories, it's hard to believe Werner Oder is a Christian pastor today, much less one who loves the Jews and Israel.

"When my father came home from prison, it seemed as if someone had turned off the light. I remember distinctly how darkness descended on the whole family with incredible and evil chaos," Oder recently recalled.

His "father" was Wilhelm Oder, a notorious Nazi SS officer who trained his comrades in the most efficient methods of executing Jews. After World War II, he managed to elude capture for a while, before finally being jailed in his hometown of Linz. It was upon his release that a young Werner got to know his father for only a brief period, an encounter that haunted him for decades.

Werner was only three years old then, but he remembers it clearly. "When he came home, he brought all his demons with him. My sister and I were totally traumatized."

It seems Werner had been born into a family infested with a dark obsession of anti-Semitism. His maternal grandfather worked for the German ambassador Hans Ludin in Bratislava who deported 22,000 Jews to the death camps. Ludin was arrested in my home town by the Americans and later hanged for war crimes.

As a young man, Wilhelm Oder joined the national socialist party in Austria, which was banned until Hitler staged the *Anschluss* (annexation) in March 1938. To destabilize the country, the Germans had been sending in agitators to commit violent acts against the government, and assassinate politicians. Wilhelm was one of the Nazi collaborators.

When Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss was assassinated in 1934, the government arrested the Nazi agitators, including Wilhelm, who was tried as a terrorist and was just about to be executed when the Wehrmacht marched in and "merged" Austria with the Third Reich. The move actually spared his life.

**PEOPLE**

## 'My father the Nazi'

The son of an Austrian SS officer discovers a deep love for Jews

By HERTA LEFKOWICZ  
in LISA KIDWELL

**G**iven some of his earliest memories, it's hard to believe Werner Oker is a Christian pastor today, teach Jews one who loves the Jews and Israel. His father was Wilhelm Oker, a notorious SS officer who trained others in the most efficient methods of executing Jews. After World War II, he managed to evade capture for a while before being jailed in his hometown of Linz, Austria. It was upon his release that a young Werner got to know his father for a brief period — an encounter that haunted him for decades.

Werner was only three, but he remembers it clearly. "When he came home, he brought all his demons with him. My voice and I were totally traumatized."

Werner had been born into a family infected with an obscure anti-Semitism. His maternal grandfather worked for the German ambassador in Bratislava and helped deport 22,000 Jews to the death camps. He was later arrested by the Americans and hanged for war crimes.

As a young man, Wilhelm Oker joined the national socialist party in Austria, which was banned until Hitler staged the Anschluss (annexation) in March 1938. To destabilize the country, the Germans had been sending agitators to commit violent acts against the government, and Wilhelm was one of their local collaborators.

When Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss was assassinated in 1934, the government arrested the Nazi agitators, including Wilhelm, who was about to be executed.



Wilhelm Oker in uniform with one of many girlfriends (Herald)

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Wilhelm then joined the Waffen-SS and was trained in the concentration camp at Dachau. Afterwards, he was sent to the Polish village of Rabka, where the Nazis turned a girls' school into a center for training the Einsatzgruppen death squads which were operating throughout Eastern Europe. They rounded up Jews and Poles and shot them in the woods behind the school. Children were used as live targets for machine gun practice.

For the duration of the war, Wilhelm stayed at the training center and became an expert in killing Jews. He developed the *Genickschuss* method of shooting a victim in the nape of the neck, which proved the most efficient means of execution other than the gas chambers.

When the Russians pushed the German army back into Poland, Wilhelm was captured and put in a prisoner of war camp. Fearing execution if his SS past was discovered, he managed to escape and make his way back into Austria, where he hid out with other Nazi fugitives. But eventually American forces identified and arrested him, with the help of Simon Wiesenthal, who had survived the nearby Mauthausen camp and immediately started his hunt for the perpetrators of the Holocaust. In his book, "The Murderers

among us,” Wiesenthal mentions that Oder was one of the first Nazis he was tracking down.

For the next few years, a probe was conducted and he was finally put on trial in Linz. War crimes trials in Austria often tended to be ‘kangaroo courts’ that mocked the accusers and relied on questionable ‘character witnesses’ to hand down acquittals or easy sentences. The court archives in Linz show that the witnesses against Wilhelm Oder were neutralized by positive testimonials, resulting in a relatively light sentence of six years hard labor. Within a few short months, he was free and living as a hero near his home town, known as an early breeding ground for Hitler’s Nazi movement. Wilhelm was a womanizer and was still imprisoned when he fathered Werner. Now three years old, the lad was soon to dread the sight of his father.

“At first my family lived in a beautiful country estate, but was forced to moved to a slum after the release of my father who was incredibly violent, had five women at the time, and sired many children,” says Werner. “When he came home from prison, he brought all his demons with him which affected me badly.”

“I became insane, intensely violent, aggressive, and developed a blind hatred towards the Jews. This is not something which just happens, it is a learned behaviour. I started to develop nightmares as a child. I was screaming every night out of fear, because I saw demonic beings in our home that I thought had came to kill me. I tried to explain this to people, but no one believed or cared enough to help.”

These nightmares lasted for six years, every night the same nightmare, the same screaming. “I was a very sick child which spent most of his time curled up in bed like a terrified animal. I knew sooner or later I was going to die.”

Finally at the age of 9, he cried out to God for the first time in his life: “I do not want to die, I want to live!” “That was my first prayer, although there was no God in our home, and I knew nothing about who He was, or where He was.”

Sadly, his situation only got worse, but unbeknown to Werner, God had heard his prayer.

**PEOPLE**

when the Wehrmacht marched in and "merged" Austria with the Third Reich. Wilhelms then joined the Waffen-SS and was posted in Eastern concentration camps. Afterwards, he was sent to the Polish village of Rabbin, where the Nazis turned a girls' school into a center for training the Kampfbundgen death squads operating throughout Eastern Europe. They rounded up Jews and Poles and shot them in the woods behind the school. Children were used as live targets for machine-gun practice.

For the duration of the war, Wilhelms stayed at the training center and became an expert in killing Jews. In fact, he developed the German-based method of shooting victims in the nape of the neck – considered the most efficient means of execution other than the gas chambers.

When the Russians pushed the German army back into Poland, Wilhelms was captured and put in a prisoner-of-war camp. Fearing execution if his SS past was discovered, he managed to escape and make his way back to Austria, where he hid out near Linz with other Nazi fugitives. But eventually American forces arrested him with the help of Stefan Wisniewski, who had survived the nearby Mauthausen camp and immediately turned him over for the perpetrators of the Holocaust. In his book, *The Murderers Among Us*, Wisniewski mentions that Ocker was one of the few Nazis he sought to track down.

For the next five years, a probe was conducted and he was finally put on trial in Linz. The court archives show that the witnesses against Wilhelms Ocker were neutralized by positive testimonials, resulting in a relatively light sentence of six years hard labor. Within a few short months, he was free and living as a hero in his home town, known as an early heading ground for Hitler's Nazi movement.

Wilhelms was a womanizer, and was still imprisoned when he fathered Werner. Now, three years old, the lad was soon to shed the very sight of his father.

"My family lived first in a beautiful country estate, but he was incredibly violent, had five women at the time, and six children," says Werner. "When he came home from prison, I became violent, intensely violent, aggressive, and developed a blind hatred toward the Jews. This is not something which just happens; it is a learned behavior. I started to develop nightmares. I was screaming every night because I saw things in our home that I thought had come to kill us."

These nightmares lasted six years, every night the same. "I became very sick and frightened, was out of my mind, and I knew sooner or later I was going to die."

Finally at the age of nine, he cried out to God for the first time in his life. "I do not want to die, I want to live!"

"Although there was no God in our house, and I knew nothing about who He was or where He was, that was my first prayer."

Sadly, his situation only got worse, but unbeknownst to Werner, God had heard his prayer. It took seven more



A subsidiary of the Nazi SS-*Einsatzgruppen* using the "most efficient" execution method developed by Wilhelms Ocker. [www.foxnews.com](http://www.foxnews.com)

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It took seven more years until he met Peter Wiegand, a young German Christian that had been called to be an evangelist in Austria at the same time as Werner's desperate prayer. Peter was the first person who told Werner about the love of God.

"This was an incredible concept for me, that somebody who is called God loves me! I could not believe what I heard," recalls Werner. "From the moment I decided to trust in Jesus the torment and nightmares stopped, the demons left and my sanity was restored to me. I was changed. Not just forgiven, I was set free!"

Nevertheless, giving his life to Jesus was not a quick fix for Werner. "I had to allow God time and space to work on me. My moral and psychological life had been such a mess." For the next seven years, he was taught Christian principles at a Christian youth center in Austria. Slowly, his life got back on track, and he made another big discovery – Jesus was Jew. An inexplicable love for the chosen people of God started to grow in his heart. Werner began to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. "I went back to my family, who were still committed Nazis and anti-Semites, and I said: 'What did you do to the Jews, do you know that Jesus is a Jew?' It was like throwing a hand grenade. All hell broke loose. I was accused of things; I was shot at. I still have the scar where a bullet grazed the back

of my head. I was harassed. The police picked me up for no reason. It was really bad.”

In the midst of the turmoil God provided a way out for Werner. In 1972, he called him to the north of England to attend Bible school in Capernwray. A few years later Werner, with his wife Avril, a native of Yorkshire, returned to Linz, where they lived a normal middle-class life for a few years. Then again, Werner felt God call him back to England for more Bible college training and eventually he became the pastor of Tuckton Christian Fellowship in Bournemouth. [[www.tucktonchristiancentre.co.uk](http://www.tucktonchristiancentre.co.uk)]

Werner has now visited Israel several times and developed very warm relations with the Jewish community in England. “Because of my love for Israel, which has grown over the years, God gave me a lot of opportunities to speak at Holocaust memorial days, where I’ve met a lot of Jews. Once I shared my testimony in London, in the presence of almost 1000 people, many of them Jewish business men. I am well received by them. People know I love them, they are friendly and they respect me for my belief in Jesus as the Messiah.”

In Austria, everyone he spoke to pretended not to know anything about the anti-Semitic past of the country. “There is a conspiracy of silence which strangles the Austrian people”, he explains. “The first generation died without repentance and the second and third generation has therefore still inherited the curse as a consequence. Austria could be a free country in so many ways, if that would be resolved.”

Nevertheless, Werner has hope and a deep love for his homeland. He feels a stirring in his heart to share his testimony in Linz, where Eichmann lived and Hitler went to school.

“Whenever I share my testimony, God does amazing things. I’d like to take it to Linz. I believe the Lord can create an amazing bridge to Israel from there.”



**WERNER ZIMMER**, the pastor who broke of Israel: "This was an incredible message for me, that somebody called God Jews and I could not believe what I heard. And then he made another big discovery — Jesus was a Jew!"

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"This was an incredible concept for me, that somebody called God Jews and I could not believe what I heard," recalls Werner. "From that moment, the burdens and repressions left and I changed. I was not just forgiven, I was set free!"

Nevertheless, giving his life to Jesus was not a quick fix. "I had to allow God time and space to work on me. My mind and psychological life had been such a mess." For the next seven years, he stayed at a Christian youth center in Austria. Slowly, his life got back on track, and then he made another big discovery — Jesus was a Jew! An incredible love for the Chosen People started to grow in his heart. Werner began to pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

"I went back to my family, who were still leading Nazis, and I said, 'Do you know that Jesus is a Jew, and what you did to the Jews?' It was like throwing a hand grenade. All hell broke loose. I was accused of things; I was shot at. I still have the wound where a bullet grazed the back of my head. The police picked me up for no reason. It was really bad."

In the name of the natural, God provided a way out. In 1972, he called Werner to the north of England to attend Bible school in Caperswick. A few years later Werner, with his wife Anni (a native of Yugoslavia), returned to Lintz, where they lived a normal middle-class life for a few years. Then Werner felt drawn back to England for more Bible college, and eventually became the pastor of Truro's Christian Fellowship in Rosneath, (www.trurochristianitycentre.co.uk).

Werner has now visited Israel several times and developed warm relations with the Jewish community in England. "Because of my love for Israel, which has grown over the years, God gave me a lot of opportunities to speak at Holocaust memorial days, where I've met a lot of Jews. Once I shared my testimony in London, in the presence of almost 1,000 people, many of them Jewish businessmen. People are friendly, and they respect me for my belief in Jesus as the Messiah."

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Nevertheless, Werner has a deep love for his homeland. He feels a strong tie to his heart to share his testimony in Lintz, where Elizabeth was born and Hitler went to school.

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