



Interview mit

Micha Shagrir

InterviewerIn: Lisa Schulz-Yatsiv

Weitere anwesende Personen: -

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Verwendete Kürzel: LSY Lisa Schulz-Yatsiv
MS Micha Shagrir

Teil 1

LSY: Interview on 19th March, 2014, with Micha Shagrir, interviewed by Lisa Schulz-Yatsiv. Can you tell me a little bit about your family in Linz, about how they were living there?

MS: As much as I know, the family of my father's side, someone named Israel Schwager, came to Linz from Bohemia or from somewhere, already at the beginning of the eighteenth century – one of ten families that got the permission to settle there, after 700 years that no Jews were in Linz. And the family grew up and even spread into other parts. And my grandfather was born already in Bischofstraße, Linz, and through the years, my father was born there and I was born there. My grandfather was both the president of the small community in Linz and had kind of a candy factory – sweets –, which was very known all over, the Schwagers...*Zuckerl-Schwager*.

My father was born in 1895, joined the Austrian army, exactly 100 years ago today, March 1914. And he was already, as much as I know, both a very active Socialist or even Communist, but also a Zionist. He joined the *Blau-Weiß* there, but that was only the beginning. When he came out of the army, came back, he went to Vienna to study, but went deeper and deeper into Socialist and mostly Zionist activities. I just...I do not know how much I have to tell the details, but just to say that my father had a brother, Wilhelm Schwager, who became, later, after the Second World War, the president of the...and two sisters – one went to Argentina, and one came already in 1936, or even [193]5, to Palestine. So anyhow, I say this already regarding her, because my father came to Palestine around 1921, and joined a kibbutz named Heftziba, established already a year or two years before [Anmerkung der Redaktion: der Kibbutz wurde 1922 gegründet] by a group of young people from *Blau-Weiß*, mainly from Czechoslovakia, Austria and Germany. So naturally, he joined them. And there, around 1924, he – as we say – entered the tent of my mother, who had already a one-year-old baby from her husband, Georg Grünwald, from Berlin, and he passed away – malaria or something. From then, they were together. I do not even know when they married formally. And he of course adopted – even not officially – my brother, Chaim Grünwald.

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And in 1933 or [19]32, he took my mother and my brother back to Linz. I know a little bit...I do not know deeply, I cannot give evidence to a judge, but there were complex reasons. First of all, my mother began, slowly but surely, to become blind. The economic conditions in the kibbutz were very hard, and naturally, when you begin with hopes, excitement, as young people in the kibbutz had, the more and more they had to work – you cannot dance all night. So, some personal tensions, and I think and I really hope that one of...we talked about it...the reasons were his commitment to save what then was only the beginning of the spread of Nazism.

LSY: He wanted to come and fight the Nazis?

MS: Yes, so he came back and brought his wife and Chaim to Bischofstraße. It was a big house. And in [19]36, he went to Spain to the civil war. And then he came back, and when I was born, 1.11.[19]37, he actually could not join the conscription, because he was under arrest in Gusen – not because of being a Jew, but because of being a Socialist. Then he came out, and in April, [19]38, he was lucky to come back to Heftziba, to Palestine.

LSY: So they experienced the Anschluss in Austria?

MS: Yes. And because of the Anschluss...yes.

LSY: Do you remember, when they talked about it, were they very surprised about the big excitement of the Austrians when the Germans came to Austria? Was it a surprise for them?

MS: I am afraid I did not understand the question.

LSY: The question is, if you ever talked about this in your family later. Was it a surprise for your family in Linz, how much support the Austrians gave the Germans when they entered Austria?

MS: Not in details, but of course there were those that...what I can tell you, I went back to Linz ten years ago...with a group of ex-Austrians, and I heard them talking about their experiences. I have to tell you, that I have the feeling, when they came to the places that they left...I did not hear any personal remarks against those terrible neighbors – even vice-versa. The small places, they even talked about nostalgia. Okay, most of them had come before, so they did not experience the entering.

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But then, I went with someone that did experience it, and he was fourteen and a half, standing in the street, the main street. He told me: “Here I was standing at fourteen and a half years, a child.” Knowing already that there are some difficulties between Austrians and Jews, and let me tell you what he told me – it is an example. – “And here was the march of Hitler, all the people shouting. And at a certain moment, Hitler looked at me, I looked at him, and he was not yet Hitler – he was Hitler, but not...and I went back home.” Now, how did he discover that he has a problem? When he was younger, at the school, the teacher shouted at his pupils that: “This Jew is much more clever than you.” So he went home and he asked...sorry, I cannot tell you.

LSY: Because your parents had already been in Palestine, it was easier for them to get a certificate and come back?

MS: Yes, but my father got special treatment, because the head of the Gestapo was studying with him in school when they were...it is an anecdote – or not an anecdote – that at Bischofstraße, we had neighbors named Eichmann. But anyhow, he had, I think, a British passport.

LSY: So the family of your father and the Eichmann family, they knew each other?

MS: No, they were...at the beginning of the family, the Eichmann family came to the street and lived in the neighborhood. [Adolf] Eichmann left the street with his mother already, I think, in 19...I do not know, but he was young. But his father was living there, and his children...and actually, Robert Eichmann, the half-brother of Adolf Eichmann, was still living there in 1960, in the same street.

LSY: When your family came back to Palestine, you went back to the kibbutz?

MS: We went to the kibbutz, but my mother was almost blind. They left and went to Tel Aviv.

LSY: Because it was just easier to live in the city?

MS: Yes.

LSY: So you grew up mostly in Tel Aviv?

MS: Mostly in Tel Aviv, until the age of thirteen. And then they moved...we lived in an apartment, in what is now a very nice place in the north of Tel Aviv, opposite the house of Ben Gurion. And in 1950, they moved to Holon, a suburb of Tel Aviv. In this apartment, by the way, we were three families in the same apartment. For the five first years, I grew up with them in the same room. Then my father got another room, but then also we had neighbors – we saw the connotations of such a living. But in 1950, they moved to Holon, to the suburbs, to a small apartment, where they lived until 1975.

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LSY: Did your parents speak German at home or Hebrew?

MS: They tried, because when I was a child, not to talk German in front of me...which I am very sorry...that I compelled her. But as we lived in the same room, some...when the children were asleep, they spoke German, and so I know some German. And actually, I can read a little bit, more than I can talk. No, they did not talk German between them, but they had friends with whom they...I was, from time to time, compelled to come with them to places where friends talked German.

LSY: Because at that time, it was not seen as good to talk German. Do you remember, did they take the Austrian culture with them a bit?

MS: What do you mean by Austrian culture?

LSY: [Lacht.] That is a good question.

MS: My mother, because she was blind, she heard music, classical music. We have here...those, I inherited from her. All the...or [Gustav] Mahler's records. They had books in German.

[Übergang/Schnitt.]

My father became politically involved, with a follow-up to the Socialists. And in a way, when I think about it, the food, some of the food – which I did hate, *Kartoffeln und Zwetschken*, and the *Schinkenfleckerl*, which I liked – was part of their culture. On the other hand, they both were kind of, what we call, very...I am trying to find the word. It is a word for people that know a lot, deeply, about music and about political and historical events. They knew how to gossip, but also to make a sort of [Sigmund] Freud analysis to their friends. So, it is, I would say, German more than Austrian. My mother was from Czechoslovakia, from Teplitz-Schönau. Yes...Central European culture.

LSY: Definitely, yes. Do you remember, during the Second World War, when you were already here, did they still have contacts with relatives who were still in Austria?

MS: They went out just before the Second World War.

LSY: Yes, but did some of their relatives stay behind?

MS: Next week, we have a gathering of the Schwagers, which are here – and even someone will come from the States. There is, kind of, a bigger family, who are the children and grandchildren of Isidor Schwager, who came in the eighteenth century.

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Even...now it is small...we are now condemned to be Shagrir, but there are some Schwagers here, and in other places. No, only a branch of the family, who emigrated to Germany, to Schwaben, were taken to Auschwitz. As I said, the sisters of my father went before, the brother of my father succeeded already...succeeded too, by an affidavit in, I think the middle of [19]39, and came to Tel Aviv. And the branch in Munich, and the branch in Saalfelden and in Vienna succeeded to go to Montevideo, to New York...no, some also...others came to Palestine and settled in Pardes Hanna. No, personally--

LSY: --they got out. So your father changed the name from Schwager to Shagrir?

MS: Yes, in 1949, with the excitement of becoming a state, a new state. It was almost condemned to have...not to have a Hebrew name, and especially German names like...Goldberg, okay...so he suggested that we will change the name to Shagrir, because of two reasons. Once, it has the 'G' of Grünwald, of my brother, but he discovered, Schwager means on one end cousin, or cousin-in-law, but it was a name of the profession...[Hustet.]...of the guy that travelled all over with the post office. So, the connection with Shagrir, which is a ambassador ...okay, in 1950, we changed our name.

LSY: Do you still have memories of the war in [19]48, the Independence War? How old were you there?

MS: I was eleven.

LSY: Do you still have memories of that?

MS: The war? Of course. Yes, in general, and also, because in the beginning, a son of the best friends of my parents was killed. We heard the noises of the battle between Jaffa and Tel Aviv.

LSY: You were living in Tel Aviv at that time?

MS: Yes.

LSY: Was your father fighting in the war?

MS: Yes, he was recruited, but you have to take into account that he was already more than 50. So he had some small...he did not fight, but he had to serve in a kind of military...but he was there already. Before the war, he was working in the...not newspaper...magazine research of the underground who later became the army, because he was an expert for wars, second...and so he was involved in this part of research, gatherings, and he wrote, I think, some articles, which I think may even be at *Leo Baeck* [Institute].

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LSY: They have them? I will look. Do you still remember the atmosphere of the war? A lot of times, people who are not in Israel, it is hard for them to imagine that six countries were attacking. Were people really afraid? How was the atmosphere?

MS: As a child, I did not know at eleven that there are six countries attacking. I know that people were in panic. Look, we had, near our house...*Ben-Jehuda-Straße*, there was a hotel, where the British army settled. They were there until the last day in [19]48, then they left. And we were fighting against soldiers, so that was a kind of...a war, and I could not tell if it was between us and British soldiers or other soldiers etc. So it was...and then, afterwards, I did not have...I even enjoyed the--

LSY: --it was exciting?

MS: Yes, I was excited...just...if I talk too much--

LSY: --no!

MS: Now, I have to add about two victims of the Second World War, of our family – one, outside Europe. The family that settled in Ramot HaShavim, they had a girl who was killed by an Italian air attack on Tel Aviv, I think...I do not remember the year, but in the Second World War, maybe it is [19]40. They did attack and 70 people were killed on a beach in Tel Aviv, and the girl, which I do not remember her name, was

killed – their only daughter. And I did regret...not because she was the victim of some, never mind, Italian or German, but because they lost their only child. And, as I said, one of my father's sisters, Paula Schiller – married to Schiller –, came already in 1938 with their only child, Maxi Schiller...which, by the way, was born in Bischofstraße at the same family home...and he was recruited to the British army, to the Air Force. And in 1944, he was killed by the *Luftwaffe*, attacking Basra, in Iraq. So Maxi Schiller came out of Austria to Palestine...so that is it.

LSY: That is interesting, yes. Where did you study, then?

MS: I studied...in Tel Aviv, I finished elementary school, then in Holon, and then I...being a devoted member of a youth movement named Haschomer Hazair, I came to a kibbutz named Harel, already a year before going to the army.

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After the army, some years later, I moved to Jerusalem, and I began to study at the University, but never ever finished anything officially.

LSY: Because you started working then?

MS: Yes, I did start...I cannot say being compelled, but when you are in a kibbutz, part of a big organization, of a party...special kibbutz has to contribute people to special missions, both to be a driver in the outside or political missions. And I was asked to come to Jerusalem to work for the party newspaper, *Al HaMishmar*. I came back to the kibbutz, but then I went back to Jerusalem. Because of my small experience as a journalist, I could join the Israeli radio. And I joined in 1960, and I was quite...I developed and in 1964, I was chosen to be one of the five first radio professionals to go to study television, to prepare ourselves, and four colleagues went to France and I went to the BBC. When we came back in 1965, we discovered that our prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, decided not to open a television station in Israel. So I had the chance to come back and for at the radio, and I decided, as I began to feel interested the new media, and I began, slowly but surely, to become a film producer and director. And from then, [19]65 until this very day, that is what I did.

LSY: Which topics were always the most interesting for you?

MS: I do not know if you know the word *Mischmasch*...almost every genre that you can think about: documentaries, movies, gameshows, commercials.

LSY: How did you have the idea then to do this movie about Bischofstraße?

MS: I did not plan it. As I said, we were invited to those trips, and I did not join the first two or three. First of all, I was very busy. Secondly, I was sure I did not feel easy with a group of old, Jewish people – which

actually are not so much older than me, but still, there is a gap, I would say, a minimal gap of fourteen years between me...

[Übergang/Schnitt.]

...born in Linz, and between the other one that was born in Linz...the guy that I told you, who saw the march of Hitler. And all the others, the gap was even bigger. But then, as I had an opportunity to take a short holiday, I said: "Why not take it and join the trip?" And I came, and the Austrians were very generous to allow to come as a couple, so I took as my spouse my cameraman – an Iraqi guy named Elias. And he began to photograph with a small...the trip. So, from there, I finished to...the Bischofstraße.

LSY: That was your first visit in Austria?

MS: No. I came to Linz already in 1958. I made this youngster's trip, crossing Europe, and I came to Linz...I hesitated...yes, I hesitated, because it did not interest me, but I came to visit my uncle. Wilhelm Schwager was then already the head of the community. [Telefon klingelt.]

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[Übergang/Schnitt.]

LSY: We were talking about your first visit to Linz.

MS: Yes, I came in 1959, being ready to hit every Austrian or German man that I see, and I had kind of an accident in Linz. I asked someone, a gentleman, in English: "Where is the French *Botschaft*?" And he said...he asked me: "*Sie sind nicht* Austrian? From where are you?" So I almost wanted to hit him. And I told my uncle about...I began to quarrel with him, and my uncle, when I came to Bischofstraße and told him about it, he asked me: "Did anyone see where you are going to?" Maybe I am exaggerating, but...and then-

LSY: --do you think he was afraid? He did not want to be connected--

MS: --yes, but he was officially the head of...maybe it is my imagination, but then, some days later, I went hitchhiking to Zell am See, and it was almost night, and a kind of limousine stopped. There was an American tourist in the back, and I began to chat with the driver, which I immediately saw that he has only one hand and one leg. So I asked him, and he told me that he is German, he lost half of his body in Stalingrad, and he studied something in machinery, and now he is a taxi driver. So I asked him: "What is

the bottom line for you regarding the Second World War?" He said: "Look, I went to war not because...I was not a Nazi. You see that I paid my duty, but I have to tell you that I am sorry that we did not achieve one mission, to eliminate the Jews." I am with him, almost in Zell am See, she is snoring, he was drunk, and I took my leg and scraped the car. He looked and said: "What happened?" So I said: "Look, I cannot hear it! I am an Israeli!" – "You are an Israeli? Oh, I admire you! You are the best people in the world! How did you kick out the dirty Arabs?"

1/00:40:29

LSY: That was your experience in...and your movie on Bischofstraße was also mostly shown in Austria?

MS: Yes, at ORF [Österreichischer Rundfunk].

LSY: How was it perceived in Austria? Did you talk with people about it?

MS: No.

LSY: In 2009, you also did this other project in Linz, *Upper Austrians Without Borders*?

MS: I did a project about Upper Austrians – about three: One lives in Namibia, one in Haiti, and one in Israel, and all of them were born in Linz.

LSY: So you had a special interest in Austria?

MS: Look, first of all, I became very friendly with the director of the *Crossing Europe* festival, Christine Dollhofer. She invited me to screen another movie, and then she even chose me to be in the jury. And then, I got the mission to make *Upper Austrians*, and last year, we had premiere in Linz of a movie called *Ha Bricha* in Hebrew, *The Escape*, about a group of eight Israelis, going again on the roads from Eastern Europe to Italy, as part of...as originally. Hundreds of thousands of Jews passed Austria...we did shoot in Austria.

LSY: What is your impression, if you can say it...how did the Austrians deal with what happened?

MS: I missed it.

LSY: How did the Austrians deal with what happened after [19]38? Is there a discussion about it?

MS: I do not know. I can tell you...you did not ask it, but I can tell you...I actually am enjoying coming to Linz, because it is a very cultural place. I do not have a problem if I see someone over 80 to...vice versa, the grandchildren of those are coming to me sometimes to comfort me or to apologize...but less and less. I am asking some of my friends about their past family, because it is interesting to me more on the human, personal level than the historical. And one of my best friends, who was also a professional colleague, Heinz Scheiderbauer, he was an excellent man – funny, intelligent. He was always telling me...he came from a

Nazi – officially Nazi – family from Salzburg, and he was arrested. He, personally, was a black sheep, he was a Socialist, so he was arrested – I do not remember where. And he said: “I was punished twice, but I came out with a woman who is Jewish.” When I came first, I came to Linz, the *Crossing Europe* festival put me in the *Wolfgang*...a hotel, and someone from the Jewish community came and said: “How are you not ashamed to sleep in a Nazi hotel?” Hitler was also there...so that is my reaction.

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At Bischofstraße, we had a thing, where I interviewed students, and I first asked them: “Do you know that I was born at the next street?” They said: “Yes, we heard that you were born in Bischofstraße.” – “And do you know why I do not live at Bischofstraße anymore?” – “Yes, you had to leave.” And then I asked them “What do you know about the Second World War?” As much as I remember, they did not say anything specific, not for good, not for...they said: “Yes, it was a war, millions were killed.” So I said: “But you know there was the Holocaust.” They said: “Yes.” – “So what are your personal decisions?” And someone said: “Look, I am thinking about it and I think we have to pay back, because of the past, and I do intent to join in Africa a group of peacemakers.” And then I asked them the questions: “Do you know any Jews here?” No one said yes. One said: “Yes, I have kind of a friend.” But a year later, I did this kind of interview at a school here in Israel, where the daughter...the teacher was the daughter of Albert Yecheskel Mandler, who was born in Linz, and she was a history teacher. And I asked the same questions, how much they knew. They did not know much more about the Second World War. It was very, very interesting, and on one hand terrifying, but on the other hand, I may say, a kind of normalcy, that both groups reacted and gave almost the same answers. But many had the same body language.

LSY: Did your children still know your parents?

MS: Yes.

LSY: And they talked to them about this?

MS: I do not know how much...yes. My young child, who was happy to take a bus, when he was already ten years old...as I told you, my parents lived in Holon, near Tel Aviv. They were born here in Jerusalem, that is 60 kilometers, and you have to take another bus. And he was very happy to go to see my father. They had...he was excited, because my father told him about...First World War stories.

1/00:49:58

And my grandchild, was not...and it is not easy to develop conversations with grandchildren about what we call serious subjects. And one day...usually I had the habit to take every Saturday my grandchildren. And

one...I have four grandchildren...and one week, one of them could not join us on Saturday, so I took him Tuesday. And were sitting, and usually it is a kind of conversation: “Grandfather, how are you?” – “Good.” – “What did you do this week?” And then he asked me: “Can you tell me some details about the family?” I told him almost...not like I am telling you. And he said: “I now studied more about the history of Europe and Israel, because of the small, intimate family story. And I did succeed to understand or to be interested in the history lessons in school.” And he said: “Now I understand Communism, Nazism, Zionism” – which is an excellent observation, that he counts them together.

LSY: טוב, תודה [hebr. Gut, Danke].

[Ende des Interviews.]

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