



Patricia: My father made sure that there was no question about his being a National Socialist. He openly made anti-Semitic, racist, cruel and inhuman remarks.

Klub Zwei: Could you give us an example?

Patricia: I don't want to repeat his exact words. But I can describe it to you. I am conscious of my background. I know how I grew up and it's not easy to talk about it, particularly about my early childhood experiences. There were so many contradictions that it's difficult for me to sort it all out in retrospect. I also have to rely on my memory to some extent. Sometimes I ask myself if it was like this or that, or I try to remember when he told a certain story. I have made repeated attempts to reconstruct when it was that he began recounting—his literally horrific reminiscences—in which he indulged with such pride and passion... My father had been an enthusiastic member of the SS ("Schutzstaffel," the Nazi's "Protective Squadron"), which is also where he got his recognition. I wasn't able to make sense of that when I was a child.

Klub Zwei: You told us a story about the partisans.

Patricia: Yes. Well, I don't know how old I was, but I had always thought that partisans were deer or wild animals because there was always talk about—or I heard him say a couple of times that he had been—shooting partisans or "shooting at" them. I thought about him "shooting at" something and thought he must've been hunting. Later I found out what partisans really were and was totally shocked. I was really shocked that I had thought "partisans are wild animals."

Klub Zwei: You confronted your father with the fact that you are researching his history. What was it like to ask him questions about his role during the Nazi era?

Patricia: Yes. That took place during the last five years of his life. To this very day, I still don't know his military rank. I don't have any real evidence. I put in a research request in Aachen, but they didn't find anything out. But that doesn't mean much, because I haven't been to Berlin yet. Still, the military archive in Aachen had nothing on him. In principle, the National Archives in Vienna doesn't seem to have anything either. I still need to get information from my half-siblings.

Klub Zwei: Are your half-siblings older than you?

Patricia: I only found out about them when I was 20 years old. I've only seen my half-brother twice in my life and we have a very troubled relationship. As soon as he notices that I am trying to get more information on my father he feels pressured. It must have been really taxing for him to have me ask so many questions. He said that he didn't want to have to deal with his "old man" at all anymore. My half-sister's idea of my father is fairly naive. He left when she was 15. He moved out and cut off all contact completely. I think I could find out more by talking to my brother, my half-brother. I want to know my father's military service number and his field post number, the military postal code of where he was stationed. That would make research at the archives much easier. My mother has no documents with this information either and another problem is that my father changed his name in the 1960s. He wanted to have a German name.

Klub Zwei: What was his name originally?

Patricia: Rzeschabek. My grandfather was Polish. He was born in 1888. My father was born in 1914 and I was born in 1970.

Klub Zwei: Did your father marry his first wife during or after the war?

Patricia: I'd have to look that up. I don't know it off hand. I only had the opportunity to meet her once. Her children had arranged a meeting and invited their mother to their house.

It was like receiving a present when she came into my brother's living room and joined the family. I shook her hand and did not dare ask her too many questions. That wasn't what that evening was about anyway. She was 80 years of age at the time. She died shortly after.

Klub Zwei: What was your father's role in the family?

Patricia: He was a patriarch. He always remained intangible and incomprehensible. He was a very distanced person. He was relatively old already, too—he was 60 when my brother and I were six and seven years old. As for my father's role in the family, I would say that it was powerful and tyrannical. He had a very short temper and would always shout and create an incredible amount of space for himself. He was an enigma, too. For instance, I never really knew how old he was. It was always a mystery to me. My father looked relatively young for his age. I never found out how old he was. I was never given any documents that contained information about him. If we had to bring anything like that to school my mother always held onto it. Now I know that it was because his name had been Rzeschabek and not Reschenbach.

Klub Zwei: Are there any photographs of your father during the Nazi era?

Patricia: Yes, in our family album. There's only one album from his second family, our family. There's a small black and white photograph of him marching in Paris. That's in our family album. There's also a photo of my grandparents when they got married, which is from 1808 or 1809. And there's another photo of my father with his brother who also died in the war.

We had lots of family secrets. Family secrets are damaging to people. They should have a right to know certain things. Children also have the right to know, to find out important things. For example, I didn't even know that I had half-siblings. My parents kept this from me. There's a feeling of anger attached to it, and I obviously didn't know who to direct this anger at, so I directed it at myself, which was self-destructive in the broadest sense.

Guilt was also a big topic in our family. When I found out and accepted the fact that my father is a Nazi, I felt guilty for a really long time. He died in 2000. In 1995 or 1996, when I did the family reconstruction in therapy, I finally had to contend with it. It was difficult for me. I felt responsible for my father's remarks. I also felt shame and guilt. I was often terribly ashamed of him.

Klub Zwei: What's it like for you to speak in public about the fact that your father was a Nazi?

Patricia: To me, making it public is part of dealing with it. Perhaps my feelings don't matter at all. What's important is that I do this! Making it a public issue is an act of breaking with it. And as for my emotions—I'd rather not speak about them.

Klub Zwei: You wrote that you have an inner resistance to your own emotions.

Patricia: Yes, because my emotions have been misleading. That's why. Analytical or critical engagement is much more helpful than following my emotions. My emotions have led me astray for so long.

Klub Zwei: What do you know at this point? What have you found out in your research so far? What did your father tell you?

Patricia: He said that he had been in the SS; sometimes he would say it was the Waffen SS, the Nazi's armed "Protective Squadron." He was over 80 at the time and a bit disoriented. And, in the last few years of his life he didn't recognize me at all anymore. He would also often say: "Why do you want to know that? That's none of anyone's business!" It was like coming up against a brick wall. It was pretty difficult to ask him questions.

My visit to the National Archives was a fifteen-minute affair. I went inside, requested the district records, copied them and spoke briefly to the historian. He said that the file was thin. When I asked him what that meant, he said that it didn't mean much and that there may be more information in Germany, which is where he suggested I continue my research. The most important thing for me to know today is that my father remained a National Socialist, a Nazi, to the very end. He conveyed this to me through what he said and his entire life philosophy. The most difficult thing for me now is that I never found a way to question it while he was still alive. What I mainly blame him for is that he kept that attitude until the very end.

Klub Zwei: We wanted to ask you about your daughter. How do you speak to her about your father?

Patricia: My daughter has read several books written for her age group that deal with the National Socialist era. She hasn't asked many questions. She may later. She is now eleven and knows her grandfather—grandpa, who she only knew for a few years but still has memories of—was a Nazi. I told her that he had been part of that history. Yes, she knows that. And her knowledge will grow when she's older. But I'm going to wait a little bit. I don't want to overburden her with too many things. Maybe she'll even want to help me do this research one day. That would be wonderful!

Klub Zwei: You told us about a situation when your daughter came home from school and asked you a certain question.

Patricia: Yes, I fell into a terrible trap. Wait, how was it then exactly...

Klub Zwei: She asked you how it was possible that someone could do something like that?

Patricia: Yes. That's right. I told her, "you probably know what it's like when you are part of something and you do things without thinking. Or when everyone else is doing something silly and you participate without saying anything against it." It was then that I realized how inextricably entangled my own history is. I had not wanted to downplay it at all. That is not the way I want to deal with it.

Ambivalences: Daughters dealing with their father's Nazi pasts; passages from a conversation between Klub Zwei (Simone Bader and Jo Schmeiser) and Patricia Reschenbach in December 2006 at Café Prückel in Vienna, Austria.
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