

THE AUNT FROM VILLACH

My great grandmother Eugenia Wechsler né Engelhardt died in 1908 in Gorizia at the age of 42. She left behind her husband Hermann and three minors, Bruno, my grandfather Otto and Gisella. And the mysterious "Aunt from Villach".

After Eugenia's death, her children spent the summers with "The Aunt from Villach" when Hermann Wechsler went about his business on mainland Europe. Family memory lead us to believe, that Hermann "dropped" of his children at an aunt's house in Villach in Tyrol.

Unfortunately family memory failed in remembering the aunt's name or who's aunt she actually was, just like it failed in remembering, where Villach was located. Like my elders and siblings, I never gave the woman's identity a thought. And without an inkling of Austrian topography or history, the story never was questioned.

In 2011, I discovered how frail family memory was. Due to bad weather, we had to cancel a trip to "climb" the Jungfrau. Instead we decided to visit South Tyrol. I suggested staying in Görz instead of Meran, which we normally visited. Görz was a town or village in South Tyrol, Italy, which family lore remembered as beigin the origin of Eugenia's family and was somewhere on my travel-to-do list.

The only town named Görz which we found was not located in South Tyrol but in Friuli. So we replanned our route, taking us past Villach, which we discovered, was also not part of Tyrol, as family lore remembered, but in Carinthia, another Austrian state.

Remembering the story about "Aunt from Villach", we stopped over at Villach, visited the protestant church and searched the cemeteries looking for familiar names like Wechsler or Engelhardt, hoping in a naive way, I would stumble over a clue to my grandfather's time in Villach. Without avail. I reasoned that the lack of clues probably meant the "Aunt from Villach" was married and went by another name than Wechsler or Engelhardt and put the case to rest.

A few months after our visit to Villach, I discovered a copy of my great grandfather's probate records in the National Archives of Great Britain. The records contained papers referring to a custody case entered around the orphaned Wechsler children Bruno, Otto, my grandfather and Gisella. According to the documents, the three Wechsler orphans were living with their aunt Emilie Engelhardt, Eugenia's sister. The records stated, that she had been taking care of the children after Eugenia's death in Alexandria, Egypt.

The court determined that the children would be placed under the guardianship of Bension Ventura, brother-in-law of Hermann Wechsler and husband of Egizia Wechsler, Hermann's sister. As both Bruno and Otto were earning money as

apprentices, there was enough for the orphaned family to remain in their own household, with Emilia continuing to care for them.

Just a few months later their economic situation worsened when Bruno, the eldest of the three Wechsler orphans died after contracting Typhus. The household was dissolved and Gisella and Otto were placed with members of the Wechsler family. Gisella went to live with Egizia and Bension, while Otto stayed at the home of a Bensilum cousin. Emilia took up work with a family and faded into the distant haze of family memory.

Even though the records shed some light on who took care of the children after Eugenia's death, they did not confirm that Emilia was the legendary "Aunt from Villach". Like Eugenia, she was born in Trieste, not Villach, so "from Villach" couldn't refer to her place of origin. The probate records also offered no information to her whereabouts after the household was dissolved. Did she stay in Egypt or return to Trieste, or relocate to Villach? The Ufficcio di Anagrafe in Trieste and a letter from Adolphe Billep, a son of Maria Engelhardt, a sister of Eugenia and Emilia, resolved the mystery.

From the records of the Ufficcio di Anagrafe in Trieste, Emilia probably returned to Trieste and emigrated to Villach October 19th, 1951, most likely to join her sister Anna, who, according to the Ufficcio di Anagrafe, had left Trieste for Feldkirchen, a town close to Villach, as a young woman.

In a letter to my father written in early 1957, Adolph Billep mentions, that he should visit Aunt Emilie, the last living Engelhardt sister, living in a senior residence in Villach, Carinthia, confirming the whereabouts of Emilia after 1951.

As the Engelhards were Lutherans, the senior residence, Billep referred to, most probably was the Old Age Residence run by the Lutheran Church and located in Waiern, a small village on the outskirts of Villach in the direction of Feldkirchen.

Further research confirms, that Anna died in Waiern in 1947, as did another sister, Emma, who died in 1953. Anna remained unmarried all her life, Emma married Imre Boskowitzc in Budapest in 1908. The other Engelhardt sister, Adolph's mother, Maria, was the only one, who didn't "return" to Villach. She probably died in Braunschweig, where she spent her married life with Fritz Billep. Emilia's death in the area cannot be confirmed presently.

The riddle of the unknown "Aunt von Villach" was solved. Or was it the "Aunts from Villach"?

Sources

Copy of death notice for Anna Auguste Josefina Engelhardt, 1947. Civil Records Office. Feldkirchen, Carinthia.

Copy of death notice for Emma Maria Wilhelmina Engelhardt, 1953. Civil Records Office. Feldkirchen, Carinthia.

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Folio di Familia: Carl Engelhardt. Ufficio di Anagrafe. Gorizia, Italy.

Letter from Adolph Billep to Hermann Wechsler. Adolph Billep alias Peter Rendalen. Berlin, 1957.

Marriages (Hzasultak) 1908. Budapest (VI. Kerulet). Fol. 47, img 53/603. Online data bank [accessed Dec 1st, 2016]

Spreadsheet Anna Baucer. Dobroski, Susanna. Ufficio di Anagrafe. Trieste, Italy.

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Names

EUGENIA TERESA CAROLINA ENGELHARDT (1865, Trieste - 1908, Görz).

Daughter of Carl Engelhardt and Anna Bauzher (Baucer). Married to Hermann Wechsler, with whom she had four children: Egidie, Bruno, Otto and Gisella.

EMMA MARIA WILHELMINA ENGELHARDT (1870, Trieste - 1953, Waiern).

Daughter of Carl Engelhardt and Anna Bauzher (Baucer). Married to Imre (Emmerich) Boskovicz. Assumed mother of Karl Boskovicz.

EMILIE JOSEPHINE ANNA ENGELHARDT (1873, Trieste - after 1957).

Daughter of Carl Engelhardt and Anna Bauzher (Baucer). Remained unmarried. Last place of residence was an old age home in Villach, Austria.

MARIA ELISABETH ANNA ENGELHARDT (1874, Trieste -).

Daughter of Carl Engelhardt and Anna Bauzher (Baucer). Married to Franz Billep, Braunschweig in Germany. Mother of Adolph Billep alias Peter Rendalen.

ANNA AUGUSTE JOSEFINE ENGELHARDT (1876, Trieste - 1947, Waiern).

Daughter of Carl Engelhardt and Anna Bauzher (Baucer). Remained unmarried. Last place of residence was an old age home in Villach, Austria.

HERMANN WECHSLER (1865, Alexandria - 1916, Alexandria).

Son of Israel (Giacomo) Wechsler and Rosina Camerini. Married to Eugenia Engelhardt, with whom he had four children: Egidie, Bruno, Otto and Gisella.

ADOLPH BILLEP (1907, Braunschweig (assumed) - after 1957).

Son of Franz Billep and Maria Elisabeth Anna Engelhardt, sister of Eugenia Engelhardt and Emilie Engelhardt. Lived in Berlin. Was an actor and went under the pseudonym Peter Rendalen. Remained unmarried.