

Frostig

My father Dr. Wolf Benjamin Frostig never talked about his childhood in Vienna, his arrest by the Gestapo in an early round up of intelligentsia, his release from prison at the Gestapo headquarters in Vienna, or his escape through Cuba. My father was 26 at the time of his arrest. A recent graduate from the University of Vienna's law school, lawyers were the first to be arrested. They posed the greatest threat to fascism.

At the end of June 1938, my uncle Hermann, fifteen years of age, accompanied my grandmother to the Gestapo headquarters at Morzinplatz (formerly the Hotel Metropole). Walking into a building cloaked with Nazi banners and lined with armed guards, they stood in a long queue, prepared to beg for my father's release. It was unclear how long he was imprisoned. Papers from that period are missing, presumably burned as incriminating evidence after the war.

My grandmother approached a group of Nazi officers managing family members desperately seeking to negotiate prison terms for their loved ones. My uncle recalls a familiar face of a neighbor, dressed in a Nazi uniform stepping forward. He responded to my grandmother's pleas, promising to release my father on the condition he leave the country within 48 hours. This neighbor saved my father's life. What my father packed on such short notice, with no anticipation of what was coming, is anyone's guess.

Many years later, I surmised my father had packed three objects: a gold watch given to him by his parents Moses and Beile Frostig, on his Bar Mitzvah (1924), a tallis and



Wolf's bar Mitzvah watch made of gold. 2" in diameter and ½ in depth.

tefillin tucked into an embroidered bag, a handful of legal documents, and boyhood and college photos with friends.

I buried my father in his tallis. The tefillin to this day, is stored in a cardboard box in the back of a closet. And the watch became a treasured object, coveted within the family. Carefully concealed in a jewelry box camouflaged by a plastic covering, it lives on a shelf in our laundry room, an unlikely place for something so valuable.

I hired a professional photographer to take an image of my father's gold watch, engraved with Stars of David. I planned to use the timepiece as an image within a series of memory panels about the Holocaust. The time was set at 3 minutes past 12, corresponding to my grandparents' deportation date, December 3, 1941. The photographer changed the time to something that seemed more intentional, unfortunately disrupting what was intentional.

The watch contains a story within a story.

In 1958, during a home robbery my father's watch was stolen. As you can imagine, my father was in anguish. Police and detectives came to the house at night, using flashlights to track footsteps in the snow. At age ten, I was quickly transported into a mystery novel full of suspense. I was also trying to understand the emotions surrounding my father's upset, and my mother's attempt to comfort him. I did not know about the watch and what it meant to my father. Then I discovered my new transistor radio had been stolen! I burst into tears joining the emotional chaos of the scene, with detectives and police present as onlookers of an event that surpassed your average home burglary.

Miraculously, they caught the robbers, teenagers who had stashed the stolen goods under a porch. My father's watch was returned, but it was missing the hands. The hands were replaced by a jeweler--I am not sure if they were the original hands or different hands. I also don't recall what happened to the watch, where it was kept, and how I came to inherit the watch many years later.

In 2008, I worked on a piece called the "Odor of Survival." At first, I wasn't sure if the story was true or just a figment of my imagination. When preparing a photo of the watch for inclusion in one of the memory panels, I used Photoshop (a software program for artists) to outline the watch. In this process, I magnified the watch. At that moment, I was confronted with a detail that confirmed my memory as a child. I could instantly see how the watch had been pried open by the teens who had removed the hands from the watch. Capturing the metaphor of "stolen" time, the story continues to feel dreamlike--

one of many instances when time stands still and all that remains is the memory of a faraway place.



“Odor of Survival”

In 2008, I created a series of memory panels that were placed on exhibition at the University of Vienna’s Law School, in commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the Anschluss. The exhibition was used to contextualize the university’s presentation of new curriculum about National Socialism, previously regarded as a period of lawlessness, not worthy of study.

The “Odor of Survival” uses the nose as a sensory organ associated with emotion and memory, to connote historic antisemitism. The noses, set in profile, are presented in a clinical fashion, mimicking Nazi generated caricatures of Jews living in Germany and



“Odor of Survival” (2008).

Artist: Karen Frostig

Austria, under Nazi ideology. The noses displayed within this frame are however distinctive, belonging to survivors and descendants of the Holocaust living in the Boston area. They represent accomplished writers, physicians, artists, musicians, professors, Rabbis, psychotherapists, and corporate CEO's.

The watch was used to reference the lunar calendar. No longer victims of antisemitism, these Jews now live in accordance with an independent sense of time and space, meaning and purpose. The gaze, no longer focused exclusively on the victims, now embodies the perpetrators, addressing present-day measures of antisemitism that continue to infiltrate the general culture.