

UNCLE RICHARD

My Uncle Richard, always known in the family as 'Dicky', knew me but I didn't know him. I was 8 months old when I left Vienna with my parents, Pauli and Francis, in 1938.

I don't know why he didn't come with us, other than that he probably didn't receive his papers, but my parents worked very hard to get immigration papers for England for all the family who were left behind, when they arrived here, for Dicky and his mother Emma, and my mother's parents, Helene and Leopold. The papers came too late - just 3 days before war was declared and the frontiers were closed.

Dicky and Emma were then moved to collective housing in Schrottgiesergasse, where they were with Helene and Leopold, until they were deported to the East in 1941.

Dicky was born deaf. Only in hindsight did my parents understand that the reason was that Emma suffered from German measles when she was pregnant with him, but this was not known at the time to be the cause. So that when my mother was pregnant with me she was terrified that it was hereditary, and made many bargains with God, in whom she didn't really believe. She was so desperate that she always felt that the fall of Czechoslovakia was her fault, having offered it up in exchange for my hearing. In consequence I have always suffered from an acute ability to hear very well.

However, it seems Dicky was so intelligent that his deafness was not noticed until he was five, in spite of being the first son in a loving and attentive family. His talent for design would have been noticed early, as his father owned a furniture factory and there were relatives who were eminent designers. In the house in Worcestershire where I grew up there were several pieces of his furniture. They were all made out of Walnut wood, though I have never seen any other examples of such a bright orange wood. The cupboard and sideboards were set in, on the top, with a pale creamy coloured Formica, which had been developed in 1913. The handles were exquisitely designed using brass, and were a perfect finish and unifying element of the design.

It seems that he was able to communicate well, at least with his family, and had a warm and loving nature, and he was much loved in return. My parents told me once that it was for this reason they didn't speak about him too much. It was too painful a memory. Thus I didn't learn more about his life. One day, when my mother was already in her nineties, and slowly slipping away from the world, I asked her why they hadn't brought any of Dicky's work with them from Vienna, as they had brought so many other things, including wonderful Christmas decorations (they had all been baptised early in

their childhood) and little silk undies for me, though I was 7 or 8 before I was big enough to wear them. But of course we did, she told me, because we thought it would help him to get work here. But then how is it I've never seen them? I asked. They are in your bedroom, on the bookcase he designed she replied. I rushed to look. They were not there. So I pulled the bookcase away from the wall, and there they were, fallen behind, where they had stayed, forgotten, for nearly fifty years.

And it gives me the very greatest pleasure to know that they are now back in Vienna, first here at Christian Siekmaier's seriously interesting gallery EXILE, so appropriately named in this case, and then they will go to M.A.K. where they truly belong, and there they will finally have come home and can rest in piece.

Tess Jaray, March 2021