

FOREWORD BY PHILLIP D. JENSEN

FORGIVING

HITLER

the Kathy Diosy story
as told by Kel Richards



A NOTE ABOUT NAMES

At birth she was given the name “Katalin Eva Kalafoni”. As a young woman she was known as “Kitty”.

Her married surname is Diosy, and to most of her friends today she is “Kathy”.

In the interests of historical accuracy, the name “Kitty Kalafoni” is used for most of the length of this book.

FOREWORD

YOU HAVE IN YOUR HANDS a most extraordinary book. The title itself warns you of its extraordinary character. *Forgiving Hitler* is about as obscene a title as one could imagine.

Then again Kathy Diosy is a most extraordinary person—as you will come to discover. The story is not a complete biography. It does not tell you all the details of her life. It does not detail all the dreadful things that were done to her or that she has done. It doesn't linger over the sordid details of an evil world for the entertainment of prurient or violent minds. While forgiveness is found in facing, not denying, reality—forgiveness is neither found nor expressed in the endless rehearsal of the details of offence. Forgiveness is the victim's release from victimology.

Forgiveness is important in whatever form it takes or level at which it operates. Forgiveness is about relationships, about improving relationships, about restoring relationships. This alone makes it important. In our litigious culture and in our age of war, hostility and divorce, learning how to mend and repair relationships must be important.

Forgiveness often helps the injured party as much if not more than the offender. It removes from the injured the sense of rage and bitterness, the sense of outraged injustice, the disappointment in life that colours everything else. It also removes from us that deception of divinity, as if the offender is the only person who has done something wrong in life and I, as the perfectly innocent sufferer, have the right to judge others.

Forgiveness is very difficult to achieve. Injustice is a reality not just a feeling—just as evil is a reality not just an opinion. It is a minor thing to forgive a minor inconvenience. But to forgive the betrayal of a hateful abuser of your trust—that is a pain almost unbearable. It feels like being the victim twice over and then some.

Kathy's journey in life was one that too many people shared

in the horrors of Hitler's rampage. She was one of that generation of survivors that we must listen to. We must hear the horror of the reality of evil and never be satisfied with the trite removal of 'iniquity' and 'sin' from our vocabulary by the spin doctors of ethical relativism. But we must also hear the story of how the survivors reconstructed their lives. We must hear the story of finding forgiveness.

When you have finished reading this book, I am sure you will be thankful that she has shared it with us, and thankful for the skill of Kel Richards in presenting Kathy's painful and difficult story so clearly and sensitively. I am also thankful to God, that he has dealt so kindly with my friend and sister, and given me the privilege of knowing such an extraordinary woman.

Phillip D. Jensen

I

AUSTRIAN PRESIDENT Willhelm Miklas was listening to a furious Adolf Hitler shouting down the phone line. Unless Austria submitted to all the demands being made within the hour, German troops would march across the border. It was six thirty in the evening, and the day had been a long and difficult one for Miklas.

‘Within the hour,’ repeated Hitler. ‘That is my last word.’

‘Once more, I refuse, Herr Hitler,’ replied Miklas. ‘Austria alone determines who is to be the head of the Austrian government.’

‘You have sealed your own fate,’ said the German dictator as he hung up the phone.

The calendar on Miklas’s desk read 11 March, 1938. With a hand that trembled slightly, more in anger than fear, he drew a circle around that date—a date, he was certain, Austrian school children would be learning about in history lessons for many decades to come.

At dawn that morning the Germans had closed the German-Austrian border. For over a year Hitler, the Nazi Chancellor of Germany, had been demanding that neighbouring Austria surrender its sovereignty and self-government, and submit to German rule. On this Friday in March those demands were reaching a tense climax.

During the afternoon Hitler had bombarded the Austrian Chancellor, Kurt von Schuschnigg, with furious phone calls demanding his resignation. Hitler insisted that an Austrian Nazi leader, Dr Arthur Seyss-Inquart, be appointed as Chancellor in Schuschnigg’s place.

As the afternoon dragged on, Schuschnigg gave in to the pressure and resigned. However, as President of Austria, Willhelm Miklas, refused to appoint Hitler’s nominee as his replacement.

Meanwhile, Nazi headquarters in Germany was in contact with the Austrian Nazi party. Phone calls quickly rounded up the

fanatically dedicated members of the Austrian party, and they were told to take to the streets demanding complete surrender to Hitler and integration into Germany.

‘Within the hour,’ Hitler had said. ‘That is my last word.’

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‘WHAT DRESS SHOULD I wear tonight?’ asked Kitty Kalafoni, turning to the Slovakian girl with whom she shared the room.

‘The pink one, perhaps? You know, with the pearl buttons.’

‘I’m saving that,’ said Kitty, ‘for the opera.’

‘Well, what about that light blue one with the little silver squares in it?’

‘I wore that last week.’

‘If you don’t want it tonight,’ said a voice from the doorway, ‘may I borrow it, Kitty? It’s so beautifully made.’ It was Shirley, one of the American girls.

The girls at the exclusive boarding school in the Vienna Woods were getting ready for their regular Friday night dance.

‘All hand-stitched,’ said Kitty, as she pulled first one dress and then another out of the wardrobe, held it up, and looked at it critically. ‘Excellent Hungarian dressmaking.’

‘So, will you let me wear it this week?’ asked Shirley again.

‘Yes, if you like. But what should I wear?’

‘What about your grey frock with the beaded collar?’ she suggested.

Lily had dropped out of the conversation, and was making her own preparations for the dance. Although Kitty had met Lily when visiting her grandmother in the village of Kosice prior to coming to the school, and although they shared a room, there was always some slight coolness between them. Later Kitty would discover why.



*Mama, Papa and Polly Kratky, owners of the boarding school
in Purkersdorf, Vienna Woods.*

‘The grey frock with the beaded collar?’ repeated Kitty. ‘Yes, that might be nice. I’ll try it on, and you tell me how I look.’

The school itself was a large, old white house—vaguely resembling a small castle. It was owned by the Kratky family. Mama and Papa Kratky managed the school, and their daughter Polly taught the fifteen girls in residence a range of languages and social skills. The school was preparing the girls (mostly aged 18 or 19) for entry into the Consular Academy in Vienna—which would then open the way to employment in the diplomatic service.

Kitty and Lily shared a double room that looked out over a vista of pine trees. It was like a small hotel room with flowered wallpaper, plainly furnished with two single beds, two desks and a single wardrobe. The whole building was set up like a large

guesthouse with rooms for the girls, a big family room in which lessons were given, a large kitchen in which the girls learned to cook, and a separate dining room. Around the building was a huge yard, and beyond the yard the dark pine trees of the forest began.

Throughout the school that Friday evening the girls giggled and whispered as they hunted through their wardrobes looking for the right dress for the social event of the week. They were thinking about the boys from the University of Technology, the tall, handsome engineering students they would dance with that night.

As Shirley turned to leave the room with Kitty's blue and silver dress over her arm she saw Merle, another of the American girls, standing in the doorway. In the corridor behind her were several others girls.

'Do you think Kurt will be there tonight?' Shirley asked Merle. Merle blushed but didn't reply.

'Of course he'll be there,' said Kitty with a laugh, 'and he will want to dance with Merle all night.'

Merle's blush turned a deeper red.

'And Hans will be there,' said one of the girls from the corridor. 'Oh, I do hope that Hans will be there.'

'And Freidrich,' said another.

'And Fritz,' said a third, and then they all broke in a gale of joyful laughter.

'Do you think Polly has a boyfriend?' asked Shirley, as the laughter died down.

This was a mystery they had all puzzled over every Friday evening. When Polly, their teacher, shepherded them into the ballroom, she always disappeared, only to return as the dance was coming to a close. Where was she in the meantime?

'Of course, she has a boyfriend,' said Lily, and then added with a conspiratorial whisper. 'Perhaps he's a married boyfriend, and that's why they can only meet on Friday nights at the hotel.'

'Do you think they ...?' began Merle, and then blushed and didn't finish her question.

‘Of course they do!’ replied Lily with cynical superiority.

‘But we’ve never seen her with anyone,’ Kitty pointed out.

‘Perhaps Lily’s right,’ said one of the girls in the corridor. ‘Perhaps he’s married and they can only meet in secret, and that’s why we’ve never seen him.’

‘One Friday,’ said Kitty with a cheeky smile, ‘someone should follow her when she leaves the ballroom and see where she goes.’

‘I’m not leaving the dance,’ Merle said.

‘Not if Kurt’s there, you mean,’ added Shirley, and Merle blushed again.

If the girls had followed their teacher one Friday night they would have discovered that she was attending secret meetings of the Austrian Nazi Party, held on the top floor of the hotel.

But they were not thinking about politics. Like so many teenagers before and since, they had no interest in politics at all.

The school was on the edge of the small village of Purkersdorf, and at six thirty—at the same moment that Austrian President Miklas was on the phone to Adolf Hitler—the girls were boarding a train into the city of Vienna where each week they attended the dance at a small, exclusive hotel called *Hubner In Hitzing*.

The electric train clicked rhythmically over the rails. Their heads and their conversations were empty of politics and filled only with dresses and dances and boys. The rail journey would take, they knew, some one and a half hours. At eight o’clock they would arrive at the railway station at Hitzing, a suburb of Vienna. As they walked out of the pedestrian underpass from the railway station they would be able to see the elegant two story hotel that was their destination on the other side of the square. The boys from the University would already be there, waiting for them.

‘Girls, stop fidgeting,’ snapped Polly, as Kitty and her friends whispered and giggled. Polly was never particularly friendly with the girls. She was somewhat aloof and cool, with tendency to be secretive and quite abrupt in her dealings with her students. The girls thought of her as a very plain young woman with short brown hair—not at all pretty—and lucky to have a boyfriend

(if, indeed, she did have one).

Kitty had checked her appearance half a dozen times in the mirror before they left the school, and she knew she looked pretty in her grey dress with the beaded collar. A number of times she glanced enviously at her roommate Lily—she was so petite and blonde and so very pretty. She patted a stray hair into place, and leaned over to whisper quietly to the other Jewish girl in the group, Eva Perl. Eva was something of a loner at the school, an awkward girl she spoke German with a heavy Polish accent.

Then Shirley was tapping Kitty on the elbow and leaning over to whisper, 'Did you know that Kurt and Fritz are cousins?'

'No, I didn't,' replied Kitty, 'they certainly don't look alike.' And soon they were deep in conversation about the boys who would be at the dance.

As the train rattled on through the darkness, the fallen Austrian Chancellor, Kurt Von Schuschnigg, went on the radio ordering Austrian troops to offer no resistance if the Germans invaded. Later he was to say that he had issued that order only to avoid bloodshed. But when it was broadcast, it caused jubilation among Austrian Nazis, and fear in the hearts of those who knew what Nazi rule would mean.

The train from the Vienna Woods into the city was crowded, and the journey felt, to the impatient schoolgirls, as if it was going on forever. But at exactly eight o'clock the train pulled up at Hitzing railway station, and the girls enthusiastically piled out.

But when they trooped out of the station via the pedestrian underpass they stopped in shock and bewilderment. The sight that met their eyes was not what they had expected. Instead of the usual Friday night traffic, the square was packed, shoulder to shoulder, with a restless angry crowd of people, hundreds of people, many of them carrying flaming torches, and most of them shouting 'Heil Hitler! Heil Hitler!'

The fifteen schoolgirls huddled together, frightened by the tension, the angry voices, and the feeling that, at any moment, violence might break out.

The crowd surged around the square, defying anyone to try to stop them, or to call them unpatriotic. The angry demonstration had blocked the square to all vehicles. The noise, the crush of bodies, and the flickering torch light in the darkness gave the scene the feeling of a medieval witch burning crowd, baying for a victim.

‘Heil Hitler! Heil Hitler!’ they chanted.

Someone in that milling crowd recognised Polly Kratky and came hurrying across to her. ‘Heil Hitler!’ he said, making the Nazi salute.

To the girls’ surprise and horror, their teacher smiled broadly, raised her right arm in the Nazi salute, and responded with her own enthusiastic ‘Heil Hitler!’ Soon Polly and the man were deep in conversation. As he turned back towards the milling throng, Polly told her girls, ‘It’s wonderful! Simply wonderful!’

The schoolgirls were puzzled as well as frightened. They had their best dresses on. Were the boys from the university waiting for them? Would the dance still be held? What was going on?

Eva Perl grabbed Kitty’s arm. Kitty could feel her trembling.

‘What on earth’s going on?’ whispered Eva.

‘I don’t know,’ said Kitty. ‘I don’t know.’

The whole area was filled with flickering yellow light from the mass of flaming torches carried by the crowd.

‘It’s just a sea of flames,’ Merle whispered in a horrified voice.

The chanting was relentless: ‘Heil Hitler! Heil Hitler!’ It was a cool night, and many in the crowd were wearing overcoats over their business suits or working clothes. Some coats flapped open, casting large, black shadows like bat wings. A few of them were wearing uniforms—the black shirts of the Nazi *Schutzstaffel*, or SS. The flaming torches crackled and leaped into the air.

Polly Kratky turned to the fifteen schoolgirls who were huddling together, and cried, ‘Hitler is coming!’ Her eyes were alight, and her face was jubilant. The girls felt confused. They didn’t know what to do, and didn’t really understand what was happening. They huddled close to each other for comfort in

stunned silence, the strain showing on their young faces.

‘Don’t you understand?’ Polly cried enthusiastically. ‘Hitler is coming!’

Some of the girls realised then that their teacher expected them to be pleased, and so they tried to smile and pretend they were happy to hear the news, although why it was supposed to be so wonderful, or what it might mean for them, they still didn’t understand.

‘I’ll come back in a minute, girls,’ said Polly Kratky abruptly, and she hurried off to talk to someone in that swirling, aggressive crowd, returning a few minutes later.

‘There’ll be no dance tonight,’ said Polly, rejoining the girls. ‘We will stay here for a little while, and then we’ll return to the school.’

For half an hour they stood on the edge of that surging crowd, while Polly dashed off to speak to this one and that one, and to join in the chanting of ‘Heil Hitler! Heil Hitler!’

Around the square Kitty Kalafoni could see red and black Nazi swastika flags that were now flying from buildings and flagpoles—flags she had never seen in that square before.

The Nazi Party—or National Socialist German Workers Party, to give its full name—had been formed by Adolf Hitler in 1919. It was a highly disciplined, militant party passionately committed to pan-German nationalism. What Kitty saw in the square that night was the power of the aggressive, well-organized Nazi Party machine to mobilise its members, and intimidate its enemies.

At half past eight, Polly Kratky, concerned that there might be violent resistance to the Nazi take-over, led her party of schoolgirls back onto the railway platform, where they caught the first train that would return them to Purkersdorf, and the boarding school.

As the train carried them back through the darkness, the girls were filled with a jumble of conflicting emotions. Their only thought was: ‘What else would the night bring? What surprises might it still hold?’

As the train rattled through the darkness, at exactly 8:45 that night, Hitler issued the invasion order. Soon German troops were pouring over the border. Hitler's storm troopers swept rapidly through Austria, finding no resistance—the local Nazi party had done its job, and power was theirs for the taking.

Fifteen teenage schoolgirls sat in their seats in that rocking, swaying train, too stunned by the night's events to say anything. The train was packed tightly with passengers, all of them talking about what was happening, and what was about to happen. Kitty sat between her American friends and they clutched each other's arms during that hour and a half long return journey. Eva Perl sat by herself in a corner of the crowded railway carriage, a plain, lumpish girl trembling with nervous agitation. Only Lily, Kitty noticed, seemed to be accepting the events of the night calmly and quietly. She sat upright in her seat, her face composed, staring at the reflections of the passengers in the windows of the carriage as the train roared through the night.

It was after ten o'clock when the weary girls—exhausted by the emotional turmoil as much as anything else—tumbled out of the train. To their amazement they found the scene in Vienna was repeated, on a smaller scale, in the little village of Purkersdorf. The streets were filled with people, many of them giving the Nazi salute, and many others shouting 'Heil Hitler! Heil Hitler!' The railway station itself was flying a swastika from its flagpole.

Polly didn't let them linger in the village, or on the main road, the Linzerstrasse, where the biggest crowds were, but walked them up the hill from the station to their school.

But that night still held one further, unpleasant, shock for them. Ten minutes after leaving the village railway station, as the school came in sight, they saw that a red and black Nazi swastika flag was hanging from every window of the building in which they lived.

'They can't have found so many flags in just a few hours,' Kitty whispered to Shirley. 'They must have been planning for this.'

'They must have hung out the flags when they heard the

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news on the radio,' responded the American, in a hushed and horrified tone. 'Mama and Papa Kratky must have done this. They're so nice—why would they do this?'

'Hurry up you two,' snapped Polly sharply. 'Get to your rooms and get to bed.'