

## Paul Back

### Introduction

Try to recall two or three important, significant, dramatic, and/or vivid memories from your childhood. Now, write about one of them in as much detail as you can remember.

### Getting Facts Straight ... Looking Close

1. What was Paul's family name at birth? Why did it change?
2. How old was Paul Back when he was interviewed by Tanja Eckstein?
3. The photo here shows Paul, his mother, Miriam, and his father Leo Hochbaum.
  - a. Paul was born in 1926. How old was Paul when the photo was taken?
  - b. Look closely at Paul. What is he wearing? Have you seen this outfit before? Does this outfit say anything?
  - c. How is this photo similar or different from family photos we take today?
4. Paul explains why he thought that the Luftwaffe – the German air force - filled the sky with so many planes.
  - a. What is the first explanation he gives? What do you think of this?
  - b. Paul says that they had so many planes "in order to do what they had come to do..." What was that?
5. What held up the German army from arriving in Vienna sooner?
6. What were the "HJ shirts" young Austrians were wearing? How did they look?
7. What actions in the streets of Vienna increasingly occurred against Jewish people? How did people in Paul's family react to this news?
8. Paul claims that when people heard of these actions in the streets "[Jewish] people were probably still deluding themselves..."
  - a. What did he mean by this?
  - b. Why do you think that would people "delude themselves"?
9. Which specific measure against Jewish people particularly irked Paul? Why do you think so?
10. Paul tells us that when he was a child he used to enjoy watching the changing of the guard at the Ministry of War. How did this change for him when the German troops marched in? Why do you think so?
11. Max Back was a family friend who later became Paul's stepfather. Where did he work and what happened to him one day?



12. Paul tells us that "the neighborhood was buzzing with Hitler Youth and BDM groups." How might Paul feel about this?
13. It seems that prior to the invasion of Austria by Nazi Germany, things appeared to be somewhat quiet in Vienna. However, Paul says, "Back then there were plenty of people who enjoyed wreaking havoc." What do you think happened that created this change in their attitude?

### Looking Back

1. List three main points or ideas that stand out for you in Paul's tale in this excerpt.
2. How might these ideas be important to Paul Back's life?
3. Paul Back was interviewed at length. Why do you think this particular excerpt was chosen from the lengthy interview.
4. This excerpt was chosen from Paul's childhood memories. Explain why a tale such as he told here resonates so strongly for the reader.
5. If you were asked to summarize this excerpt from Paul's biography, what would you say in two or three sentences?
6. What other documents or historical evidence might you use to learn and understand more about this event in history?

### Writing:

"On 12th March 1938, I saw entire formations of airplanes that clouded the sky."

Continue Paul's childhood description of the airplanes in the skies over Vienna, showing how he may have felt emotionally about seeing this. Write a page in his diary later that evening or a conversation (dialogue) talking to a friend about this. Remember, he was only 12.

### For background and understanding, identify the following:

1. Anschluss
2. Wehrmacht
3. Heldenplatz
4. Hachshara courses
5. Hitler Youth
6. BDM
7. Reichspogromnacht / Kristallnacht, 9–10 November 1938

## Centropa Resources About Paul Back

### Paul Back's Family Tree

[http://www.centropa.org/sites/default/files/person/family\\_tree/familienstammbaum\\_back\\_fuer\\_centropa.pdf](http://www.centropa.org/sites/default/files/person/family_tree/familienstammbaum_back_fuer_centropa.pdf)

### 20 photos from Paul Back's Family

<http://www.centropa.org/de/pictures-stories?type%5B%5D=photo&title=Back&donor=61054#collapsed>

### Epilogue - The Ones I Lost

In this Centropa film, Paul Back tells how his relatives became tragic victims on the Kladovo transport on the Danube River.

[http://www.centropa.org/centropa-cinema/die-verlorenen?subtitle\\_language=](http://www.centropa.org/centropa-cinema/die-verlorenen?subtitle_language=)

### Looking Further: Read the complete biography of Paul Back

To better understand the compelling story of Paul Back's family, read the complete interview with Paul Back. Pairs or groups of students can each focus on two to three "chapters" in the story, sharing what you have learned with the entire class. Finally, using everyone's "contributions", put together the pieces of the puzzle that make up the story of the Back Family.

<http://www.centropa.org/biography/paul-back>

[My Family History](#)

[My Childhood](#)

[During the War](#)

[After the War](#)

## Meeting Paul Back

1. If you could speak with Paul Back, work with a partner and brainstorm a list of five to eight questions you would want to ask him.
2. Re-read Paul Back 's family story carefully. Given what you know about him and the questions you would have liked to ask him, answer the questions as you believe he might have answered them.
3. Why do you think Paul Back has chosen to tell his stories to the world? What do you think he hopes that you and others will learn from such stories?
4. If you could share this story with others, as Paul Back has done, with whom would you want to share it? Who would you want to hear it?
5. What particular elements of Paul Back's story or the story of his family do you find most interesting? Most memorable? Most touching?
6. Understanding what had happened to Jewish people during the war, to Austrian Jews, and to members of his own family, why did Paul return to Vienna after living in Israel for many years?
  - a. What is your personal opinion about his decision?
  - b. Imagine you are Paul and someone poses this question to you. What would you say?
7. What would you want people to learn from his story?
8. The world renowned author, recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, and Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel, once wrote in his book, *Souls on Fire*, "Listen attentively, and remember above all that true tales are meant to be transmitted – to keep them to oneself is to betray them."

Having read about Paul Back family story and having viewed the Centropa film, in an essay or personal reflection, share your thoughts about Elie Wiesel's words here and how they might connect to Paul Back sharing his own story with us.

## Photographs Speak: 20 photos from Paul Back's Family

Using the link under the introductory excerpt to Paul Back family's story, browse through the 20 photos available on the site. Choose one.

<http://www.centropa.org/de/pictures-stories?type%5B%5D=photo&title=Back&donor=61054#collapsed>

1. What do you see? When and where was the photo taken? Who is in the photo? Who might have taken the photo? Do these photos differ from photos we take nowadays? If so, in which ways?
2. Pretend you are one of the people in the photograph you chose. Write a personal diary entry telling about the day the photo was taken.

## Extending Your Knowledge Through Research

1. Conducting research, create a timeline showing at least three "creeping" restrictions and progressive loss of civil rights placed upon Jews in Austria after 1938.
  - a. Discuss what each of these restrictions meant for the lives of individual Jewish people.
  - b. List and describe those anti-Jewish laws that had direct bearing upon children.
2. Other European countries in the 1930s such as Poland, Hungary, and Romania also began to place legal restrictions on their Jewish population. What were they and what was going on in the countries at the time.
3. Find out the response was of other nations in Europe and the United States to the German invasion of Austria? How do you think many Germans and Austrians might have viewed this event?

## Writing

Pretend you are an Austrian Jewish person living in Vienna in 1938. Write a personal diary entry that begins with these opening words:

*"Dear Diary,*

*Today, the new Nazi government took away our right to ....."*

Continue the writing as a person writing a diary would.

## Centropa film, "Epilogue – The Ones I Lost"

[http://www.centropa.org/centropa-cinema/die-verlorenen?subtitle language=](http://www.centropa.org/centropa-cinema/die-verlorenen?subtitle_language=)

Part of this film tells the story of the ill-fated Kladovo Transport. Conduct research about this boat transport on the Danube River comprising Jews fleeing Austria. Some of Paul's relatives were on this ship.

### Map Activity

Draw a large map that traces the places Paul Back and his family lived, to where they fled, and where they finally settled. Label each place clearly and provide a key with brief explanatory notes for each place as well as the years each member lived there. Be sure that your map reflects changing borders and changing history. Historical maps are readily available on the Internet.

### Looking at Lives

Compare the events and experiences of Paul Back's life with the life of another Jewish person from Austria presented on the Centropa website, <http://november1938.centropa.org/>

Make a chart or table with three columns. In the first column on the left indicate a year or years. In the middle column, write Paul Back, and in the column on the right, the name of another Austrian Jewish person. The chart could look like this.

YEAR	Paul Back	(OTHER PERSON)

Reading the complete biographies for each person, choose years that had significant impact upon or were important milestones in their lives. Complete the chart describing events and experiences that occurred during the years you chose.

Share the information and draw contrast and comparisons.