

## FAMILIENGESCHICHTE

### MALVINE, THE SECRET JEWESS

*Waltraud Barton followed in the footsteps of a secret Jewess in her family. Meantime, a commemorative stone in Minsk is a reminder of her and of many other victims of National Socialism.*

[Photo caption. Flower seeds for Malvine Barton: Waltraud Barton sows a symbolic memory of all the Austrian Jews and Jewesses murdered in White Russia.]

“For a long time I didn’t utter the word ‘Jewish,’” says Waltraud Barton, single mother aged 50. The Jewish Malvine Barton was her grandfather’s first wife, but the Barton family never spoke of Malvine.

When Waltraud was pregnant with her first child, she learnt from her father of Malvine’s existence: Nobody knows what became of her, so he thought. “Like so many people of his generation, my father didn’t have the strength to seek answers, but looking away uses up much more energy – until it makes you ill anyway.”

Waltraud felt the need - and for the sake of her two children as well - for an explanation about Malvine that would complete her family history. “But I had the feeling I didn’t have permission to do it,” she concludes. “I’d have liked to meet Malvine, or at least see a photo of her, but unfortunately there’s nothing to remember her by.”

One day Waltraud could wait no longer and determined that, for her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, she would go to the place where Malvine died and pray there. She also began her research about Malvine, and made the following discoveries: Malvine’s marriage to Waltraud’s grandfather ended in 1938 when she was 60, but by 1934 she had already moved out of the marital home where Waltraud’s grandmother (who gave birth to her father in 1935) was now living. In the years that followed, Malvine moved frequently, her living conditions deteriorated, and finally she went to live in a collective apartment for Jews in Vienna’s second district. “Malvine was old, poor and alone,” claims Waltraud. “Her parents and siblings had already died.” At the age of 64, Malvine was deported to White Russia. On the MA8 announcement appear these words: “Departed for Minsk.” Five days after leaving Vienna, Malvine was shot at Maly Trostinec extermination camp.

It is barely known that, between 1941 and 1942, a total of ten transports went to Minsk carrying 1,000 Austrian Jews. Until recently, nothing existed there by which to remember the dead. “I was shocked when I found out,” says Waltraud. “Initiative Malvine”, which she founded, is responsible for the establishment by the Austrian Republic of a commemorative stone in Minsk. Waltraud collected signatures and approached the Republic with a petition. With other descendants, she also visited the area of the former camp at Maly Trostinec – trees are growing there meanwhile. Waltraud tied a card with Malvine’s name onto a tree and scattered flower seeds beneath. “Now, whenever I think of Malvine, I have a picture: the tree, the card and the flowers,” she says. “But there are 10,000 Austrian Jews whose names don’t appear anywhere. We owe them an honourable memorial; we owe it to them not to turn away from their suffering.”