

First Missions – Austria

First Missions – Pioneering Workers – Austria

Austria

Revised Sept. 7, 2008

AUSTRIA

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Deceased 1987 in Wisconsin

Based on a recording

Retyped from hard-to-read copy received July, 1988

When the gospel first came to us, my mother was very moody, and had been praying that if the Lord had His way on the earth, that He would send help.... It was for the benefit of our whole family, because previous to that, my Mother would attend her own services, and Father would go to his; and he'd give money for her to support hers, and he would take for his; but Mother worried, because they weren't one. She said, 'We are one in everything except in what we believe: if we're going to be one in heaven, we should be one here — but we're not!'

Her pastor would always use his (Father's) side for an example of those who were damned, and it would hurt her terribly; so one Sunday, she decided she'd go to his church — and that Sunday, his priest preached against her side of it, and said 'If we bury (so-and-so) there, we might as well bury that man there, and bury that dog there....' My Mother said, 'That's not right either;' so then she began to pray that IF the Lord had His way on the earth, He would send it.

A year after that, two of the workers came — two young brothers, one had been in the work five years, and the other three. **(Peter Hanson was from Sweden and Hugh Brown from Scotland.)** They came to our district with the Gospel. Father and Mother both began to read the Bible, because they were seeking for what was right, and when they attended this meeting in the Townhall in the town of Hoghton, Mother said, 'Well, now, there are two of them there; I wonder if that's what we read in the Bible?' She remembered where she had read that Jesus sent them out two and two; so she invited them to come over to her house, and she had many questions to ask. They would always turn to the Bible, and read the verse that answered her question. Before they were through with their visit at our place, she was convinced that 'this is what I'm seeking for,' so she went to the gospel meeting and decided.

She was so happy, whereas before that she was always sad, always felt, 'We're not saved.' Father said no matter what he did, she'd be happy for two weeks, and then she'd be sad again. He'd buy her a new dress, new material; she'd sew it, wear it for two weeks, and then she was sad;.... bought a car (in those days they didn't have many cars), and ran around with it for two weeks, and then she was unhappy. After she heard the Gospel and made her choice, she sang all day long, and Father came into the house and said, 'If these meetings could do for me what they've done for you, I would go too....' (his side of the house never went to any kind of services, hardly even to funerals, because they were taught not to listen to anything else).... and he went! He went for two weeks — and after that, Father and Mother were one.... I started going at that time, and my sister soon after, and then our household was one, because of what the Lord had done for us through the Gospel.

The following year: It was **Herbert Vitzthum's** first year in the work, and he came to Abbotsford, Wisconsin in a tent mission. I was ten years old and they brought in an old organ, and I played the organ for the mission. It was very interesting for me because it was a start, but later on, many years later, Herbert Vitzthum was at a convention in Wisconsin and he told how many years ago it was since he was in that first mission in Abbotsford, Wisconsin where Arvid and his relatives attended the mission too. And then he said in the course of his sermon, 'Irene sitting here, she was ten years old then.' I could see peoples brains going like that, figuring, adding up....so after the meeting I said, 'Herbert, I dare you to tell that one again, because now everybody knows how old I am!...

Three years (i.g. two more) passed by. **We had convention on the farm, my folks' place, in 1916. (1915 was at Skilbuddy).** This is all so strange. The neighborhood was divided then: before that, they were all just a jolly, dancing, card-playing crowd. They'd get together at this home and that home, they'd dance on the barn floor, in the house or where ever. Then, when the Gospel came, it brought a rift, because those who accepted the truth no longer went. Naturally the workers and the friends were blamed for all of this. The neighbours had all been waiting for a floor to be put into the 'wagon shed,' as they called it then. Upstairs was the granary, and beneath was where they kept the implements. They wanted that floor to be put in because as soon as the floor was in they were going to have a dance up there. When the floor was put in it was for the convention! So they never had that.

One year when the convention was on the farm, I was working away from home, but I came home for the convention, and I went into the work. **I was one year in Wisconsin, two years in Iowa, and I went to Europe. I was 24 years of age. I was quite young for**

pioneering. But I had the gumption.... I was in Germany that first year with Henrietta Schildt. We later were changed around, and Bessie Corcoran, a little girl from Scotland, was sent to Henrietta, and I had another companion. We lived in a little upstairs granary. We'd come home late at night and it was dark and beneath we'd either step on a goose's back or get butted by a goat or something because it was all downstairs, and where we slept was upstairs. They felt so sorry for Bessie, poor Bessie, and I said, 'I wasn't raised in a barn either!' But I was the same age as Bessie....

That was the first year. The next year, I was with Bertha Schmidt. **We went to Austria. Ten months before that Arnold Scharmen and his companion (Gustav Ege) had gone to Austria.** It being a Catholic country, we had no religious liberty. It was against the law, really, to propagate or tell anything of religion. Arnold had come back to Germany for convention, and said he believed that Austria would be a good field IF they would send reinforcements; with only two brothers there, it would go too slowly.

My companion, Bertha Schmidt, had been sick, so we had no field until she was able to go out. When she was ready to go, we came to Austria. We were riding on a very slow train like a freight train because we didn't have the funds for a fast train. When we were half an hour's ride from Vienna, the capital of Austria, Arnold said, 'You know, it never dawned on me that they would be sending sisters to Austria, because when I asked for reinforcements I was thinking about brothers coming!' I said, 'Arnold, you're twenty three and a half hours behind time! Now you've got to put up with us. We're here. We're just entering the city of Vienna.'

They had rented a room before they left. Arnold said we should take their room, and they would go down to the city of Graz, which is on the Yugoslavian border. We just exchanged fields. They weren't there but a month when they discovered that the detectives were on their trail. They were dogging their steps — every place they went they followed them. So he wrote back and asked if we would change fields, because they wouldn't know us yet.

Bertha and I went down to Graz, and the brothers came back to Vienna. We were there four years before the detectives got on our tracks, but we couldn't have any public meetings.

When we arrived in Graz we said, 'Well, now, what are we going to do? We know not a single soul here. How are we going to get acquainted with people? How are we going to find the needy souls? And we are not allowed to make ourselves public!' But we went down and prayed and we said, the Lord knows where they are, and the Lord knows how they can be found, if we can't. We had that confidence. To get acquainted with people wasn't so simple. You had to be careful who you were talking to, what you were saying to them and (about) inviting them. We'd go to a park and sit down. If there was someone sitting on a bench alone in a park, we'd sit down beside them, so we'd have an excuse to visit. If nothing opened up, I would drop something on the ground, maybe a book or a handkerchief, and I'd have to stoop and pick it up, and bump them.... 'Excuse me, please....' — 'You've got a foreign accent, where are you from?' 'I'm from the States.' — 'What are you doing here? I'd be so glad if I were there.' Then we'd explain why we were there. Because they had no knowledge of the Bible, this was all so mysterious to them. They said 'We'd like to hear a little about...' 'Well, just come on over to our room and we'll tell you what's in the Bible.'

In the course of four years, we made quite a few acquaintances. We'd invite them to our room for Thursday evening for a Bible talk. We never called it a meeting, because 'meeting' was the word that was in the paragraph of the law that said all meetings were prohibited unless the priest in that area consented to it. We never let him know what we were doing. These were invited guests. We had seventeen coming to our room every Thursday evening, and every evening of the week in different homes. But Thursday evening was spent in our room, talking Bible. Everyone had a Bible by that time, and would look up the references, because Bibles were very unfamiliar and they were curious to know what was in them. It was very easy to talk to these people and tell them what we were doing, and why we were doing it. Some had enough light, enlightenment, to make a decision. They said 'Now we know this is Jesus' way, and we want to walk in it.' So they made a start. Some were just commencing — we had a mixed crowd.

After four years, we knew there were too many of us, because the neighbours began to get curious. Someone reported us, so one night three detectives walked in on us, treating us like criminals, and grabbed our Bibles, took them, wrote down the names and the addresses of everyone present, and said we'd all be called to court to answer for what we were doing. There were seventeen in our little room — we had a very small room. We said, 'We'll come up tomorrow morning; we don't need to wait until we are called, because we can answer for what we have done.'

My companion and I, a Swiss girl, **Katie Berger**, went up the next morning, and tried to explain what we were doing. We said 'This was not a meeting, those were our invited guests. We've invited every one of them, and it wasn't conducted on the principles of a public meeting.' Four forenoons we spent with them in the courtroom, and after the fourth day was about over with, I decided, 'these poor men (the room was lined up with lawyers) have never heard the gospel, and they perhaps never will, but they're going to hear it today.' I knew they were trying to get us out of the country, and if they could possibly find a reason, we'd be expelled. Finally, when I finished, one of them said, 'Personally, I've nothing against you. This is my position and I have to execute what I've been hired for.' The next one said, 'Wish you good luck.' So I knew two men were on my side, or sympathetic. One fellow was really antagonistic. It was just twelve o'clock when it was all finished. The church bells were ringing, which meant it was twelve o'clock, and they were going for dinner. They said 'Now go and get the Bibles,' (they returned the Bibles) 'and we'll dismiss the case.'

I said to Katie, 'This is our chance. We'll take the Bibles to all of those homes where they came from, because we were warned by one of the men, 'We're going to watch you closer than ever, because we're going to get the goods on you. We're going to find out what we can do to get you out.' I said to Katie, 'Now let's rush around to these different homes with the Bibles, while these men are away eating their dinner, because afterwards they'll be watching us.' They were watching whose homes we were affiliated with and who came to our room. These people were so happy to see us because they wondered when they would be called to court, and some were very timid and frightened. One poor soul said, 'I didn't know what I would ever tell them if I were called up.' She had only come

to our room for about six months and didn't know too much about how to defend the faith. On her way home that night, she had trembled so terribly she could hardly walk, because she thought 'My turn will be coming next.' They were quite relieved when they heard that they wouldn't be called, that they were satisfied with our explanation, but we warned then-all not to come anywhere near our room on Thursday night, because we knew that night in particular they would be watching. Those of our friends who understood would drop in anytime of the day, on their way home from work or to work, and say 'Let's have a little Bible study now — why wait until a particular hour?' One man stopped at five o'clock in the afternoon on his way home from work. His wife said, 'I've often wondered when I read about persecution what it would be like. I'm so happy that we can have a little of it now.' This was an evidence to her that this was like the Bible days.

Five weeks before that, one of the brothers had passed through, and had given us a little card. We listened to see if these lawyers, these detectives knew anything about this brother, and they didn't, so they hadn't been following us that long. On one occasion. I had come down to a shop to get something. on our way out to visit someone. A big tall man was standing in this store, and when I walked in he just whirled around on his feet, and I thought, 'Why does he do that? He doesn't need to do that,' and I stood and gazed at him. It developed he was one of the detectives who had been watching us. They would go into this shop and watch. When we would leave, they would see us going down the street, and they'd follow us. They knew every home we went to, how long we were in each home, and had this all down on their papers. They would say, 'Tuesday night at seven-thirty you were in that home.' — 'Yes.' — 'Where did you go Wednesday night at seven-thirty?.....' They were trying their best to corner us, to get us to get mixed up in our explanations, so that they would have something on us.

During the time when we were coming together, a lady from the western part of the country had visited her girlfriend. She had written 'I'm coming to see you. I haven't seen you for seven years. But when I come, I don't want to know anything about your new religion.' Our friend said, 'We'll be coming in tonight. When Rosa comes she can just stay home, but we're coming in anyhow.' At one o'clock in the afternoon, they appeared, and Rosa was with them. She didn't stay home at all. All afternoon Rosa was with them. She didn't stay home at all. All afternoon and all evening she sat in to listen and watch — didn't miss anything. She did that three evenings, and then she had to go home. When she returned home, she said 'I hadn't even taken my coat off, and I told my family about what you were doing over there in Graz.' They said, 'That's just what we want. Write and tell them to come here too.' They were waiting for that.

She wrote three different times, asking us to come to this western part of the state, near the Swiss border. But we said 'We have seventeen people here, we can't up and go. Maybe when we get there they don't want it at all. Besides, its a long distance.' But when the detectives got after us and threatened us, I was praying the next morning, and it was just like a voice said to me 'NOW GO. WHAT'S KEEPING YOU?' I said to Katie, 'We'll go now and see what Rosa has to say, what she's like, and by that time the detectives will have forgotten about us, and then we can come back again.' But there was another hitch. I ran down to the station to see how much the fare would be to the western part of the state. We counted up every penny we had, even taking apart the linings of our purses to see if we could find another penny. We had just enough to get there. This town was Kitzbuehel. We wrote to Rosa, 'We're coming on a certain train.' (We took a slow train like a freight train, changing trains every three or four stops, because it was much cheaper.) We didn't know what would happen to us when we got there because we couldn't stay in a hotel, or a rooming house, and it was too cold to sleep in a culvert, because it was in April. 'But we'll go and see what Rosa wants.'

We arrived at a quarter after four in the afternoon, and Rosa and her husband were at the depot to meet us. He picked up our little bag and walked off with it, and she took us by the arm and led us to their little house. They had a very, very small apartment: a little kitchen, a little bedroom, and then there was a little porch on the side where a young man had a rusty knitting machine that he used for knitting socks. Those days, rich people from Great Britain (the Prince of Wales, and the royalty) came over to ski and wore big heavy white socks. Rosa would do the hand work, because they had no machines to do the ending. The husband would peddle the socks. That is how these three people made their living. The young man that had the rusty knitting machine had this little porch. It was where he lived.

Rosa's husband cooked coffee, and she hung up our coats, then said, 'We want you to give thanks, but real slowly so we can hear how it's done, because we want you to teach us everything that we're supposed to do.' I felt like laughing and I felt like crying, to think we had worked for four years to get a little bit of interest, and now out of the clear blue sky somebody wants you to teach them everything. We talked until a quarter to twelve, answering questions and talking Bible — and the next day we started at the breakfast table. This kept on for two weeks. They were so curious to know everything. 'Teach us everything.'

But that first evening. Rosa said, 'We have lust two little narrow beds. My husband and I can sleep together in that one bed, if you two can sleep together in that other bed.' I felt like saying 'Thank you, Lord, we're not sleeping under the culvert. You're looking after us. There's a roof over our heads. We're taken care of.'

After two weeks they said, 'We want you to know that we want to walk this way. We're making a start in walking this way.' The young man told us he used to go out into the pasture and look up at the stars, and would cry and say 'Lord, if you are up there, send me help. Send me help.' He said, 'I had no idea how the Lord was going to do it.' The Lord heard that cry, and sent him help. **This was in 1935**, and we had convention in this young man's knitting factory until just a few years ago. (Now his nephew who decided after Alwilda and I went back has the convention in his knitting factory, so we still have the conventions there after all these years.) That was a good start!

A little incident that took place one time: I was looking out of the window of our batch, and saw men putting up a skyscraper. They had huge, heavy cement beams that they were placing in a trench for the foundation. There was a derrick that took the beams and placed them; they would wiggle and jiggle, and finally they would put the beam 'right there,' and put another one 'right there.' There was a

man sitting at the top of the derrick, controlling the layers and getting the beams just where they belonged. At that time I was having an experience with some folk near the Polish border, and this was so real to me: 'From His throne the Father sees us. This should help us to prevail.' Whenever I hear the word 'maneuvering' I think of that, and the Lord up there maneuvering things, bringing them just where they should be at the right time, because He is up there and He is watching. That was very real to me in this experience with the man with the knitting factory. Quite a few years later he gave his testimony at a convention, about calling to the Lord for help and the Lord sending it. I spoke right after him in the same meeting, and he expected me to finish the story and tell my side of how the Lord maneuvered and made it possible to get together.

The beginning of 1949 was when we returned to Austria after the war. During the war years, only soldiers were permitted to enter. One day I picked up a newspaper which said that six nuns were on their way to Austria. I was excited, because if nuns could go over — they're not soldiers! — then there's some hope for us. But to go over by boat would take seven days over and seven days back; that would be half a month. However I wrote to Washington, DC, and explained my position; we had sent food packages and clothing over for the needy after the war, and it was time to go over and see that it was distributed properly, and I had been there before the war, so I knew these people personally. To my surprise, I got a reply: permission to go over for one month. I was so delighted, I was so elated. The friends had been writing 'Come over, and when you get here, don't let them get you out — just stay.' I was delighted about that, but then my second thought was, 'Who would give their consent to go over for one month?' Those days by boat, only rich people went over for some gala affair, but poor people wouldn't go over on a boat for one month.

The day before special meetings in Mount Sterling, **George Walker** was in the sitting room, alone, and I went in and sat down beside him. I told him what I had done. I expected him to say 'You stupid child, what do you think anyhow?' But he said 'You've spent quite a few years over there haven't you?' — 'Yes, before the war.' — 'You have a number of friends over there, too.' — 'Yes.' — 'And they've been alone all of those

years during the war.' — 'Yes yes.' — 'They've gone through quite a bit, during

the war years.' — 'Yes, they have' — 'They've been alone all this time.' — 'Yes, they have.' He said, 'I think it would be nice if you'd go over, even if you could only stay one month.' I was so delighted, I didn't know how to conduct myself — to think that he would see it that way. I was interested in these souls who had decided before the war and they were alone all this time and now to think of the possibility of getting back. And George consented to it.

My next thought was 'They won't let me go alone, and who could I take over with me?' Alwilda Watkins and I were companions at that time and I knew Alwilda had what it takes. She had that grit to face anything.... So I (discussed it with) the older brother in that state: I said, 'Well really, I think Alwilda would be the one to take.' 'Yes,' he said, 'I think so too.'

As soon as we got the green light, off we were for Austria, by boat, of course, and we landed in this town where Rosa lives, or lived (she's gone now). Before the war and then since, the little number had increased. There were three to begin with and the two neighbors, elderly folk, came in. They wanted to hear it and they listened and thought it was good; and then two others. Now there were seven there in Kitzbuehel when we returned after the war.

Alwilda hadn't any knowledge of the German language, so she was interested in study. A lady invited us home with her, saying we could live at her house while we were there. Alwilda and I had arrived by train. She lived in a very small place; a little kitchen, a little table, and behind the table a bench, where we always sat. A little boy four years old would crawl from one lap to the other, the cat would run around, and there wet chickens under the table. There were slats in front of the table and there were chickens there. Alwilda would say 'Irene, I think I could learn German faster if we were off by ourselves.' Maybe, but I didn't want to hurt this woman's feelings. She was doing the best she could. 'Alright.' She stood it two weeks, and then she started again. 'I think I could do better with the language if we were alone.' It was anything but quiet in this room.

We walked down the length of this little village, and Alwilda said 'See that house over there? I'd like to go over and ask for a room there.' It was a bumptious-looking place with a big sign in the front 'Haus Kaiserblick, rooms for rent.' This kind catered only to people who had money — people from Great Britain or anywhere who came over for skiing. I said 'Maybe you can afford a room there, but I don't think I can.' We both laughed, and turned around and walked back.

Alwilda stood it another two weeks and then she started, 'Irene, I don't think I'll ever learn German under this set-up.' Well, I had nothing against it. She said 'If we look for a room we might get acquainted with somebody that would want to get help.' We went to a travel bureau first to enquire. They gave me a list, typewritten, with 25 names and addresses on it. It was right after breakfast and it was cold and frosty that morning as we started down the street. At the first room we went to, they said 'What kind of work do you ladies do?' I told her we were missionaries. 'We don't have rooms for people like that.' (We must remember that this was a Catholic country — 96% of the people were Catholic and the other four used to be, so they were all Catholic minded.) We went to the next one, and told them we'd like to have a room where we could cook for ourselves. 'No, no room, we wouldn't rent like that.' 'Alright.' We went through 24 names and addresses, and there was only one name and address left. We were on the road the whole day; it was starting to get dark. We said, 'We'll finish up the sheet, and then go home.'

We walked and walked and walked, and kept watching the numbers. When we found the 25th place it was the very same house where Alwilda had wanted to go two weeks before to enquire for a room. As we came to the house the lady came out to meet us. She said, 'Yes, I rent rooms — I make my living by renting rooms. Some of them are empty right now — it's between seasons. You can come right in and look at them.' I said to Alwilda as we went in, 'I'll eat humble pie now and I'll go in with you now.' The first room we came to was beautiful! Blue and white — I can still see it. I said 'Oh, isn't that beautiful!' She said, 'Do you like that? That room is empty, you can have it.' I said 'No, it would be too expensive — we couldn't afford a room like that.' She said, 'You could have it for

half price.' We didn't know what the first price was' We went to the next room and I said 'We'd like a room where we can cook for ourselves. I wouldn't rent a room like that to people that cooked in it myself, because you'd like to keep it nice.' She said, 'Do you have a hot-plate?' — 'Yes.' — 'Well, you can cook for yourself there.; Then I said 'What if we wanted to wash out a piece or two? Go to the laundry?' She said, 'There's running water, you can just help yourself.' No matter what request we had, she was agreeable. Finally I thought there must be something wrong with the place — it must have a bad name, because it was too easy to get a room here, we'll let you know tomorrow.'

That night Alwilda was so restless during the night, and I couldn't sleep. I said, 'What's the matter? Don't you think that we should have gotten the room there?' And she said, 'I think so, too,' The next morning as soon as we dared show ourselves, down the street I ran to tell this lady that I'd take a room in her house. She saw me coming and came out to meet me. She said 'I didn't sleep last night because I was afraid you weren't going to come back.' By ten o'clock we had taken a room, had taken our things over and we were settled.

We had started gospel meetings, because after the war this was permissible. The man that had the knitting machine said 'We've never sat in a gospel meeting. Let's have some gospel meetings like you tell about in other parts of the world.' So we rushed out and got the use of a hall, and started meetings, the very next night after our arrival. About 25 people came; they were curious, they had never heard the gospel and never sat in a gospel meeting. After three nights, the owner of the hall said, 'I have nothing against you, but I don't make enough money on you to let you stay, because the priest has threatened to boycott me if you stay here.' So we had to get a room somewhere else. The man who had the knitting factory invited us to have meetings in his living room, which we did.

After a while there was a Sunday morning meeting in a cellar, in the home of an old couple. Don't be shocked, because we were glad for anything and everything. We had meetings in that cellar with little windows around the top, a typical cellar. It was pitch dark when you'd go down the steps, bump into the wall — and then turn to the right and bump into the wall — and then you're there. That was where these people came together for fellowship meeting on Sunday morning — the seven whom we had met before the war, and several that were won in the meantime, including the knitting man's wife, and two nephews, and a few neighbours.

After our move, at Sunday noon I said to Alwilda 'I think I'll run upstairs and show myself with our landlady because we hadn't seen her from Thursday on when we first moved in; maybe she has something to say or comments or something.'

'You've been to church?' — 'Yes.' (I thought in the course of time, if we lived there, we could always explain.) Our landlady turned and she said 'What? You have church and you never told me anything about it?' She was kind of offended, but there was no hurry, there was no rush about telling her. She said, 'Next Sunday I am going with you.' Their conception of church is a high building with a steeple and coloured glass windows and a bell. I ran downstairs and I said to Alwiida 'What do you think? She says next Sunday she is going with us to church. We just can't take that woman along to that cellar. She'll never want to go again. And we might even lose our room if she thinks that we call that church.'

The week passed by; we were busy with meetings and inviting people, and I'd forgotten about it. Sunday morning there was a rap at our door. I was just getting my coat on, and here our landlady stood, pulling on kid gloves, with a necklace of pearls around her neck, saying 'I'm ready to go to church with you.' There was nothing we could do but take her. We walked down the dusty street looking at each other behind her back, as if to say 'There she is, what'll we do with her now. She's with us -we've got to take her now!' We went down the steps into this dark cellar (in the room a bulb hung down). We had our little meeting. Most of these people didn't know what was in the Bible at all, and maybe their explanation wasn't correct, but it was our little fellowship meeting. This woman sat there and took it all in. On the way home, we didn't ask her what she thought of it because we didn't want to know what she thought of it.

Along the road she said 'Next Sunday I'm going to give my testimony, too.' We thought, 'Whatever will she tell us?' She had never seen a Bible till we had come to that home. The next Sunday, she was ready again to go with us to church, putting on the kid gloves, all dressed up. But this time she knew it was a cellar. And when others were giving their testimony, she was going to speak, too, but she broke down and cried most pathetically. On the way back she told us what she would have said in the meeting.

She had had an experience twenty-two years before that. She had worked in Berlin, Germany, where her husband was the owner of a big factory. Her little boy was two years old when the husband came home and declared, 'I'm leaving you.' Then she was penniless, and all she had was just this little boy. She said 'I left then, and came back to Austria to get a job in a candy factory, and I put my little boy in a convent for the nuns to raise, and I tried my best to get through.' That had been twenty-two years before. Then the war broke out. Hitler had his elite SS troops, his own chosen troops, and they had to be perfect in stature and all. Her boy, grown now, was chosen as one of the SS men.

They were guilty of a lot of atrocities — they had to carry out what Hitler said, in other words. Eventually the war came to a close; Hitler disappeared, and everything was in a chaos and a terrible state. Countries, nations were just torn up. The country feared a military putsch, and if anybody would do it, it would be these SS Hitler men, so they put them in prison in Vienna, and in the back yard they shot them all, just as fast as they could, to get them out of the road before anybody could stop them. Her son was amongst them.

She said 'I went to the prison and looked up, and I could see him sitting behind the bars. One window after the other, and they'd be empty at night. I'd hear the shots out at the back, and I'd think, 'Tomorrow will be my son's last day.' No, he was still there. Well, maybe the next day. And he was still there. And she said, 'I prayed; it wasn't mass, it wasn't the litany — I just talked to God, ;if you have some way of saving my son, I'll serve you the rest of my days.;' She told us that's what she would have said in meeting, but she started to cry and couldn't....find words for it. She said, 'I always believed in paying my obligations, paying my debts as I go. I promised the Lord this, and I believe in keeping my word, but that's four years ago, and I don't know how to do it.' (Her boy did come back, he was nice and friendly, but never professed.) However, his life had been spared, so her prayer had been answered. 'I want to

do it but I don't know how. When you ladies crossed my doorsill that day, a voice said to me, 'through them you can find out how you can serve me.;

Then we understood why she didn't sleep that first night, and understood why she was determined we should take a room in her house, no matter what it would cost, determined we should live there. Then we understood why she said, 'I'm going to church with you.' She never saw that this was a cellar, or what it was like. She was determined. And someone asked, 'Did she make her choice?' Did she? I think she did the day that the Lord spoke to her, when we crossed the doorsill, because no matter what it was, she was agreeable.

She is the one who started our special meetings. She is the one who started our convention. And she never knew that we had conventions. That winter, Fred Kinglake, who used to preach in Indiana where Alwilda came from, was visiting in Germany. Arnold Scharman was an old fellow-worker of his. When they were visiting, Arnold said, 'Why don't you take a run down and visit them.' So Fred came. He arrived on Saturday, and our landlady said, 'He can have a room in the house. He can be right at home at my place.' So we cooked in our batch, served in her dining room, and invited help in, too. And Fred was with us.

On the Sunday, Fred went for meeting in the cellar, too. I can't describe it all, but in one corner they had a table with slats in front, and that's where she had her hens. When we'd sing the hens would cackle. When we'd be sitting with our Bibles in our laps, their two cats would jump from one lap to the other, and we'd grab our Bibles so they wouldn't tear the leaves. That was the place where we had our little meeting. It was precious....it was precious.

But this noon when Fred was there, this nephew (He was sixteen then) said, 'We're all coming over to Mrs. Beyersdorf (that was our landlady) this afternoon. We said, 'It won't do any good — you can't understand our conversation anyway, it's English.'

'It doesn't matter,' he said, 'we are all coming.' So the whole church came. Of course, some of it was English and some of it was German. Afterwards our landlady said, 'I think this is good. We should have this three times a year, say at Christmas time, and Easter time and in September. You can invite everybody in from Germany and Switzerland, whomsoever you want, and I'll have my rooms empty for the time when they're here. So they can sleep in my house.' **That was special meeting. So she started our special meetings.**

In September we decided then we'd have a two-day convention. She rented her rooms on condition that they would be vacated at this particular time with a special price. She said, 'You can get a room somewhere else if you want to. You can come back, but these rooms must be empty at that time.' **So some of the workers came over from Switzerland, and also from Germany, Arnold was amongst them. And we had our first convention in Austria.;**

When did the workers first arrive? 1930's?

Who were the first brother workers? Arnold Scharmen and Gustav Ege

Who were the first sister workers? Bertha Schmidt and Irene Zahorka

Who was the first to profess? 1935??

When & Where was the first meeting? "in a cellar, in the home of an old couple"

When & Where was the first convention? In a knitting factory in St. Johan owned by Sigi Schdiber – 1935?

Where is the convention currently held? Wien (Vienna)

Who have the Overseers been? Bert Todhunter for many years until 1990s. Peter Zürcher from Switzerland is overseer over Czech Republic, Austria & Hungary, which work as one group.

TTT Editor's Note: In the absence of a written account, the above information has been compiled by the TTT Editor from various sources. Corrections or additions are most welcome; as well as other historical accounts for this country [Email TTT](#)