

## **A Glimmer of Hope**

by Sarah Stipanowich

"In spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart", Anne Frank and Sandor Vador were some of the millions that lived the vivid, nightmarish life during the Holocaust. Life for Sandor Vador in 1944-1945 was filled with shattered hopes and horrific torture. He was shut up in a small town in Austria called Sankt Anna am Aigen, a prisoner of war in a forced labor camp. Back breaking work would weaken the bodies of many and food in meager amounts would cause lots of men to starve. Can you imagine the feeling of being wrenched from all that you have ever known and placed in a world that resembles hell? Mr. Vador has been through more than I could ever grasp, and I have learned many lessons through his shocking story.

Everyday Mr. Vador thinks about the strong-spirited and helpful community of Sankt Anna am Aigen, and how they helped him survive by giving him a little extra food each day. It is very inspiring that he actually traveled across the vast ocean and land to give a huge THANK YOU to the community that saved his life. If not for them, he would not have his loving family. The friendships that were made on Mr. Vador's journey back to Sankt Anna am Aigen in 2005 were strong-bounded and will always remain. Mayor Josef Weinhandl and his wife, Elisabeth, became especially close with Mr. Vador, and gave him a psychological liberation in which they cut the "chains" that the Nazis had placed on his ankles so many years before. When he found one of the many ladies who had ushered him inside so many years ago to feed him an egg sandwich and cider, I was astonished and felt very moved. Ms. Lackner had finally met one of the prisoners that she had fed and he was alive and well in front of her, thanking her in person! In the words of Ron, Mr. Vador's son,

"Between the tears, there were expressions of gratitude from Mrs. Lackner. I truly believe a weight has been lifted off her shoulders. My father's visit brought back a flood of memories for her. But it has also brought her peace."

Life is sometimes hard for a teenager, but compared to what Mr. Vador encountered the hardships are minor! I am even more thankful for what I have and the community that I live in after reading this! If I ever complain about suffering again, I will remember this story and stop complaining. I feel like taking action and want to get up off of my seat and help those in need. As Mr. Vador said, "Young people who volunteered to work on the Memorial for Peace in the Hölle were speaking out loud and clear with their actions. And the world is listening." These lines stood out to me, and got me thinking of all of the possibilities for helping the world, one step at a time. Powerful words can go a long way, as symbolized by this enlightening account of some of the darkest days in our world history.

As I began this essay, Anne Frank states that all people are good at heart, even the harsh Nazis who inflicted much pain on her mind and body. Mr. Vador says, "I lived 57 precious years with my wife Anna. Mentioning the holocaust in our conversation was a daily occurrence for those 57 years. We talked about the bad things the Nazis inflicted upon us. We mentioned untold times the good deeds done for us by individuals during those times." He can actually talk about those horrific times and try to think of the positive points, such as getting some food from some of the townspeople of Sankt Anna am Aigen and neighboring communities. These people risked their lives by giving food to Mr. Vador, and the food sustained his life! His life story is one big adventure that is spreading around the world and teaching everyone to have hope, and always try to see the positive outlook. This is a true survival story

about one man and his destiny to overpower evil and spread goodness through his teachings.

“With those actions 60 years after the physical liberation, the Weinhandls’ handed me a psychological liberation. With their loving kindness, Elisabeth and Josef Weinhandl cut off the chains and trimmed the anklet of the shackles to be much lighter”.