

## Relais Vienna 2017

### Ellie Hutton:

#### Witness

I had the opportunity to listen to Richard Wadani in a small group in Vienna. He told us the fascinating story of his life and shared his personal experiences during the second world war. Mr Wadani shared very shocking descriptions of what he had seen and how terribly the Nazis treated innocent people. Hearing this from a witness really makes a difference as it is so much more personal and moving than reading it from a book or on the internet. He was forced to join the Nazi army but left illegally. He called his young self “naïve” when describing how he openly admitted to leaving the army illegally in his CV, which proved to have a very negative effect on his future career. Mr Wadani said that he received bad treatment from others because of refusing to fight with the Nazis for sixty years. His story helped me to see another perspective which I had not thought of before, the soldier who had been unwillingly enlisted by the Nazis, and bravely stood up for what he believed, despite difficulty.

Listening to Richard Wadani was one of the most hard-hitting parts of the trip for me, and I believe it was very beneficial to me and the other people in the group. The opportunity to hear witnesses' stories is an important part of Relais because it reminds us of how fortunate we are, and it helps us learn exactly what it was like for the witnesses, directly from them.

#### Workshop

I took part in a photography workshop in Vienna which was a lot of fun and was an interesting way to look at the theme. We chose words that we thought represented migration and took a picture to go with each of the words. The workshop was a nice thing to do with the students from other schools and was a nice way to get to know some new people. I learned a lot about using a camera and enjoyed going out into the city to take the photos for the final presentation to the students from other workshops.

#### Highlights

I don't think I could choose a single moment that I enjoyed more than others, but my favourite part of Relais is socialising with students from different countries that we would otherwise never meet. One of the best parts of the Vienna trip was before the first evening conference when we had time to catch up with people we had met before and meet those that we hadn't. I was so happy to see the people I had made friends with on my first Relais trip in March and hear about how they are. It was also nice to introduce them to my friends in the Newcastle team who hadn't been on Relais before.

I think the social aspect of Relais is important as young people because it helps to connect us with people from different backgrounds. It is beneficial to see how much we can all have in common, despite all coming from such different places. During Relais we get to broaden our horizons by experiencing the life of a young person in a different city for a few days.

## Emily Bell:

### Witness

One of my most memorable moments from the time in Vienna was the round table discussion with one of the witnesses - I signed up for the group where Richard Wadani was the witness speaking. He started by talking about how he was forced to join the German army after they invaded Austria, but nevertheless he worked against them at every opportunity, vehemently believing in and supporting the resistance. He spoke about the numerous times he was arrested and the time he spent in prison, the horrors he experienced in the army, how he eventually managed to escape, and then of the constant humiliation he was subject to at the end of the war when, after he had returned to Austria, despite his bravery, he was labelled a deserter. He went on to outline the work he had gone on to do to support victims in the same position as him, touching on the monuments which he had helped to set up. There was also time for questions at the end. All of us were struck by Mr Wadani's story and the emotion he clearly felt about it, and were inspired by his actions to overcome the struggle that he had continued to face throughout his life. At the end he implored us to learn from the past, as he was placing his hope in us as the future of a more peaceful world.

### Workshop

The workshop I chose to take part in was 'Photography', which was based around the idea of photographing migrants and refugees. On the first day we looked at famous photographs of migrants and refugees, and techniques used when taking pictures; for example, how the photographer's physical attitude, and in particular, stance, can affect how the subject acts, and ultimately, how the photograph turns out. On the second day we thought about our own ideas on themes surrounding the issue, and as a group we came up with five different headings: hope, specifically hope for a better future, displacement, the question, 'Can a human be illegal?', and the topic of how people change over time. In pairs we went out into the area surrounding the school to take photographs on each of these themes, eventually compiling them all into one exhibition which we presented to the other groups from the other workshops.

### Highlights

Whilst I really enjoyed the talks, seminars, and workshops, for me the most invaluable part of the whole experience was the time I was able to spend with the students from the other schools, and the friendships I formed as a result. One of the aims of the founders of Relais was to build a future free from the horrors of the past, and also to create friendships across borders with people who, without Relais, we would never have the opportunity to get to know. From the first evening I was introduced to everyone by the people from our group who had been to previous meetings, and had already made friends amongst the members from the other schools. All the free time we had was spent together, and my favourite moments are all from these times, from the meal out as a big group on the final evening, to the games played to pass the time in between workshops. I have continued to keep in touch with many of them, and cannot wait for the next meeting to see them all again.

## **Mark Evans:**

### Witness

My witness was an incredible Viennese lady who described the mood of Austria when Hitler moved into their homeland, and how as a young teenager she left home to join the resistance. She met with many youth groups across Europe, and described her travels as being similar to that of a refugee, as she travelled through hostile Germany to the Belgian border, where she was allowed in, but none of her fellow members were. After weeks of starvation, she found a couple who offered her a flat to stay in and safety with their group, before moving to Paris with said group. Her story was incredible to hear, as she did not resist the Nazi regime for the benefit of her own culture, as she was a “pure” Christian Austrian, but also because she recounted her life’s work in perfect French, with no help whatsoever.

### Workshops

My workshop was a drama piece, of two boys and six girls: the real challenge came in the languages, as we had one Austrian, one German, five French and myself the only Brit. We discussed the most moving parts of the Relais meeting, and decided to devise our piece around three people fleeing an oppressive dictatorship, and struggling to survive the journey to refuge. Here, they are laughed at and cast out by the asylum country, and then upon return to their broken homeland, are killed by the dictator. This piece was especially different to previous theatre workshops, as every other piece has been a compilation of smaller pieces put together: this format was recommended to us at first, but as a group we decided that we were capable of a trilingual refugee devised drama piece. Our practises led to a great performance which we were all very proud of, and really enjoyed incorporating all our languages into our characters.

### Highlights

My favourite moment was when I had to translate between the French and German speakers for our drama workshop, as our group mostly consisted of French speakers who spoke little (if any) German, and therefore I was the messenger between the two groups. While this has also been the case in previous Relais meetings, this one was particularly poignant to me, as I was the linguistic minority, using my second and third languages fluently for four hours, and yet I became the go-to translator for our group. I really enjoyed breaking the trend of lazy British linguists relying on other people to speak only English with us.

The social aspect of Relais is the main reason that I participate. The debates, discussions and workshops would be useless without the moments in between where 14-18 year olds can just talk to each other in as many languages as they want. Vienna was my fifth meeting, and coming back to see people I’ve known since I was 14 was simply incomparable to any other part of Relais de la Mémoire. The friendships and bonds made during 4 days are immensely strong, and make it very easy to arrange foreign exchanges, as you now have a list of potential hosts in many cities across Europe! The social aspect of Relais is what makes it so unique and highly addictive, and thus I cannot wait until Paris in March!

## Fran Bell:

### Witness - Lucia Heilmann

The 'Round Table' discussion activity with a witness of the tragic events of the war was the most interesting part of the program. I was part of a group who was listening to the experiences of a woman called Lucia Heilmann. She described to us how the life of Jews in Austria was terrible. She told us how her family and other Jewish families were persecuted and how she had to try to survive in a Nazi invaded Austria. She described how at the age of six she was taken from school and was not allowed to be in contact with other non-Jewish children. Lucia also told us the heartbreaking story about how her grandfather and best friend were taken to concentration camps and never returned. This was very emotional for both Mrs Heilmann and the group. It is very difficult for anyone to imagine the terror and heartbreak these people have gone through, however I feel very privileged to have been able to talk to Lucia about her experiences and am very grateful for the opportunity.

### Workshop

This years workshop was about the topic 'Migration, Flucht und Vetreibung'. The workshop I chose was called 'Fuir.Et après?' with Bettina Jordan. At first Bettina introduced the ideas of migration and the huge number of people fleeing countries every day and the global problem this causes. We then split into two groups; one group discussed the situation of the migrants themselves and the emotions that they were feeling and the dangers they face and the other group were discussing the situation of the welcoming countries e.g France. I was part of the group discussing the migrants. There was some really interesting and thought provoking discussions, all in French of course. We then came back together to discuss each topic with Bettina and the rest of the group. It was really interesting to see how passionate the French were about migration and how different their culture and way of dealing with migration is very different to ours.

### Highlights

The social element of Relais is just as important as the conference element of it. I really enjoyed getting to know everyone an even though it was my first time on Relais, everyone was very welcoming and friendly. We spent a lot of time together in and out of the conferences and had some time in the evenings together too. I was also able to practice my French and German, however everyone spoke perfect English so there was unfortunately no real need to speak in a different language.

My favourite of Relais was getting to meet the veterans in person and hearing about their experiences. Although I was only able to visit one of the veterans, I was given an insight into what it would have been like living in Nazi Austria. I found this workshop the most interesting and rewarding.

## Lowri Waugh:

### Witness

During the Table-Rond discussion on the Saturday of the conference, I took part in a talk by Lucia Heilmann who was an 8 year old Jew living in Austria whilst Hitler was in power. She described her difficult childhood in great detail and described how it was a miracle they even survived the Nazis. When she was nine she was forced by the Nazis to move house and leave all of her friends and school. It was 6 years later when she finally returned to school and it was the happiest moment of her life. Lucia finished the talk saying how surprised she is that even today, there is still discrimination against race and culture despite what she and so many other people went through during the horrific period of World War 2.

### Workshop

For my workshop I chose the art workshop. Our task was to create a new map of the world according to our own ideas and imagination. We created the map using cut out parts of magazines and various other materials. For our map we decided to use it to show where migrants migrate from and why. We did this by having "poorer" countries in the centre of the map and having "paradises" (richer countries) around the outside. By linking these countries with string, it showed where the migrants went from and to. We also designed a compass for the corner of the map which showed the 8 main reasons we thought that migrants chose to leave their countries. Some of these reasons were: war, economic problems, political problems, and poverty. It was a really enjoyable experience and we met new people as well which was good.

### Highlights

The socialising part of the conference took part in the evenings; the first evening we met everyone and had a meal together; the second evening we were invited to a party at one of the Austrian people's houses, this allowed us to meet even more new people and allowed us to get to know everyone better. The third evening we went for a meal with almost everyone on Relais which was a great way to chat and learn new things about different cultures and languages. The socialising part of the conference was in my opinion the most important part as it allowed us to build international friendships and meet new people who we will remember forever.

My favourite part would have to be the talk by Lucia Heilmann as it was very eye opening and shocking to hear a first-hand account of what Nazi Austria/Germany was really like.

## **Pippa Southern:**

### Witness- Richard Wadani

I found his story about his resistance against the German army emotional and inspiring. He was a true example of someone not afraid to defy authority in order to help people in danger. His selfless actions led to him being discriminated against for nearly 60 years but he never regretted anything he had done and made it clear to us his passion for the fight against fascism and extreme populism to continue.

### Workshop - photography

We spent the first day of the workshop analysing the techniques of portrait photography and the power of photographing political themes such as migration. On the second day we practised the 3 technical elements of photography and then went into Vienna and photographed things that we felt symbolised phrases associated with the theme. For example displacement and hope for a new life.

### Highlights

My favourite moment from Relais was on the last night when we went into Vienna with all of our European friends and talked about not only Relais but about the contrasts and similarities between our lives in different countries within Europe. I felt that this was vital to the integral aims of Relais and the unity it creates between young people all over Europe.