

“The Sound of Music”: Fact or Fiction

Real Story of the von Trapp Family

Historical Archives of the von Trapp Family

When Captain von Trapp lost his fortune after the Austrian national bank folded, the children had to learn how to work, doing laundry and other household chores. They looked at their misfortune as an adventure, but their father was hit hard by the loss. He had nine children to support, and no money. When the von Trapps began to earn money by singing in public, the Captain faced another conundrum. For a man in his position, earning a living on stage was considered *déclassé*. But they had little choice. As the head of the family, the Captain would come out and introduce the group after they had performed a few numbers, and then at the end of the show he would come back out and take a bow.

According to Hirsch's book, this new life was abruptly halted when Hitler invaded Austria. The Captain brought his family together and said, "We are standing at the open grave of Austria." He asked them if they wanted to stay or to leave. Despite the hardships sure to face them, they had no moral choice but to depart. Although it was a terrible blow to leave their home and all their belongings behind, when they learned that Himmler himself had taken over their house, their grief was almost unbearable.

The von Trapps arrived in America in 1938, and spent the next eighteen years on the road. Because they traveled so much, the children basically had to put their personal lives on hold. Every time they made a stop during a tour, Maria made all of the family visit a nunnery. A strong figure, Maria would not hear of any of the children leaving the family to strike out on their own, even after some married and had families. She also seemed torn between what she thought God wanted her to do and what she felt to be most important -- which caused her to lash out at her family.

When the Captain died on May 30, 1947, the children started to rebel. They were tired of living on the road, and they wanted to start families and settle down. All of the children eventually broke away, and the von Trapps stopped touring in 1956. The family corporation bought an old farm house in Stowe, Vermont, with everyone helping to build the home and take care of the farm. They soon found out that this was not enough to support the whole family, so while they were away on tours they rented their home to skiers. This was the beginning of the von Trapp hotel business.