

“The Sound of Music”: Fact or Fiction

Real Story of the von Trapp Family

The History of the von Trapp Family

The Hollywood version of the story only hinted at the terrifying struggle that lay ahead of the Trapp Family. In 1938 The Trapp family left their belongings, friends and home to escape Hitler's reign. Maria was pregnant with their tenth child, Johannes, now president of the Trapp Family Lodge. In order to avoid suspicion, the family appeared to be going on one of their frequent mountain hikes, and left only with the packs on their backs.

Accompanied by the family priest, Monsignor Franz Wagner, they climbed over the Austrian Alps into a tiny mountain village in Italy and never turned back.



After The Movie....

Fun fact: The real Von Trapp family escaped Austria by boarding a train in their back yard!

When the Nazis annexed Austria in 1938, the von Trapps realized that they were on thin ice with a regime they abhorred. Georg not only refused to fly the Nazi flag on their house, but he also declined a naval command and a request to sing at Hitler's birthday party. They were also becoming aware of the Nazis' anti-religious propaganda and policies, the pervasive fear that those around them could be acting as spies for the Nazis, and the brainwashing of children against their parents. They weighed staying in Austria and taking advantage of the enticements the Nazis were offering—greater fame as a singing group, a medical doctor's position for Rupert, and a renewed naval career for Georg—against leaving behind everything they knew—their friends, family, estate, and all their possessions. They decided that they could not compromise their principles and left.

Details of the history of the von Trapp family were altered for the musical. Georg Ludwig von Trapp lived with his family in a villa in Aigen, a suburb of Salzburg. The real Maria von Trapp was sent to be a tutor to one of the children, not a governess to all of them. The Captain's oldest child was a boy, not a girl, and the names of the children were changed (at least partly to avoid confusion: the Captain's second eldest daughter, the third of the seven, was also called Maria). The von Trapps spent some years in Austria after Maria and the Captain married – they did not leave Austria right away. They did not flee Austria; they merely boarded the train to Italy, not Switzerland. Maria von Trapp is said to have been unhappy with the movie's portrayal of her future husband as having been cold and stern prior to her arrival, which she and their children strongly dispute.^[3] However, the scene in which he summons his children with a bosun's whistle to introduce them to Maria is taken from her 1949 book, *The Story of the Trapp Family Singers*,^[4] and that book has a chapter entitled "The Baron Doesn't Want It,"^[5] describing the activities in which the children could not engage for fear of offending their father, the captain. In 1972, however, Maria wrote another book, *Maria*, in which she states that the captain was not home when she first met the children.^[6]