

VON TRAPP FAMILY

Life in Salzburg, Austria

Departure from Austria

After performing at a festival in 1935, they became a popular touring act. They experienced life under the Nazis after the annexation of Austria by Germany in March 1938. Life became increasingly difficult as they witnessed hostility toward Jewish children by their classmates, the use of children against their parents, the advocacy of abortion both by Maria's doctor and by her son's school and finally by the induction of Georg into the German Navy. They visited Munich in the summer of 1938 and encountered Hitler at a restaurant. In September, the family left Austria and traveled to Italy, then to England and finally the United States. The Nazis made use of their abandoned home as Heinrich Himmler's headquarters.

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.

Traveling with their musical conductor, Rev. Franz Wasner, and secretary, Martha Zochbauer, they went by train to Italy in June, later to London, and by September were on a ship to New York to begin a concert tour in Pennsylvania. Son Johannes was born in January 1939 in Philadelphia.

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.



Leaving the family fortune behind, the Trapp family had to find a way to survive. In her book *Maria*, Maria von Trapp describes those early days. "Overnight we had become really poor; we had become refugees. A refugee not only has no country, he also has no rights. He is a displaced person. At times he feels like a parcel which has been mailed and is moved from place to place." But there were nine children and the tenth on the way. According to Maria, "The only thing we could do well together was sing, so we had to turn a hobby into a way of living."