

Reading Group Guide

Escape Home, Rebuilding a Life After the Anschluss

By Charles Paterson and Carrie Paterson

Edited by Hensley Peterson, Carrie Paterson and Paul Andersen

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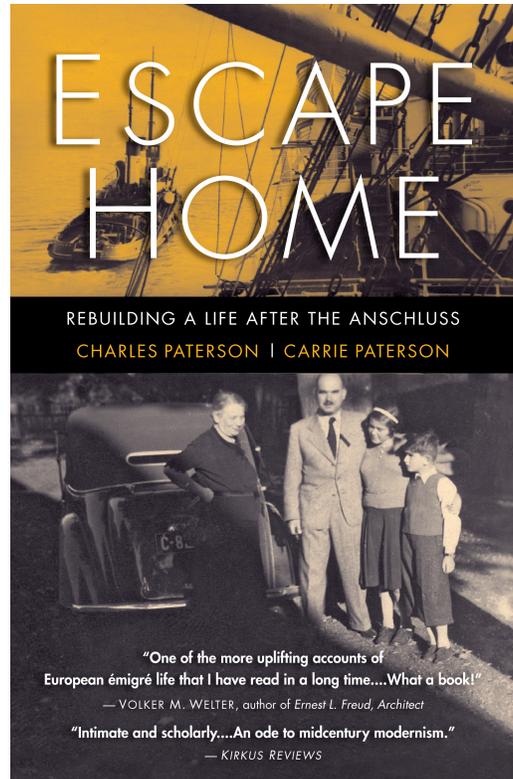
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Introduction

Escape Home is the memoir of architectural designer and Frank Lloyd Wright apprentice Charles Paterson (born Karl Schanzer), written with his daughter, Carrie Paterson. A riveting tale of discovery, the book tells of a family coming to terms with a past that casts a long shadow.

Paterson was nine years old when the Nazis invaded Vienna in March 1938. Fleeing Austria for Czechoslovakia just months later, only to witness the invasion of Hitler for a second time in Prague, the author and his sister Doris escaped to Paris to rejoin their refugee father Stefan before being adopted in Australia.

When the Schanzer/Paterson family reunites in America in the late 1940's, the story takes a different turn. Connecting family history with movements in Central European Modern architecture through Adolf Loos, the author's uncle, and the American Modernism of Frank Lloyd Wright, *Escape Home* examines how architecture is a reflection of perseverance and how it can give form to the struggle of the spirit that quests simultaneously for freedom and security.



Escape Home is also the biography of a father written by his son and granddaughter with a background of family history and personal reflection. The Patersons' loving portrait of Stefan Schanzer, who shepherded his family through tribulations with grace amidst sorrow and loss, is a story to be savored and shared.

Reviews

This jewel should not be called a book but a museum.

– Will Semler, Melbourne, Australia

Intimate and scholarly. ... An encyclopedic and epistolary family history, a eulogy for pre-Reich Vienna and an ode to midcentury modernism.

– *Kirkus Reviews*

An invaluable addition to the literature on the birth of modern Aspen... In a life filled with more optimism and achievement than bitterness, “Escape Home” is the capping effort at finding meaning in a life that has included hardship, heartache, success and home.

– Stewart Oksenhorn, *Aspen Times Weekly*

A remarkable multi-faceted story of a [Viennese] family who survives through the Holocaust, exile, war-time prison camp, and all the other vagaries of life.... One of the most amazing stories I ever read about escaping from Nazi-occupied France.

– Jill Meyer, five stars, Amazon Vine Top 500 Reviewer

One of the more uplifting accounts of European émigré life that I have read in a long time. At the same time, it is a deeply nostalgic book about the domestic qualities of architecture ... about making for oneself a home, even under the most adverse circumstances. ... If you consider architecture primarily as an art form, a monetary investment, or some abstract political act, then you will miss the relevance of this book. If, however, you think and feel architecture is about making a home for man—us, humans—on earth, then you will appreciate these tours de force of father and son.... It will touch you to tears right away, regardless of how many accounts of similar fates you believe to have studied and understood.... What a book!

– Volker M. Welter, author of *Ernest L. Freud, Architect* and *Biopolis: Patrick Geddes and the City of Life*

What is the measure of a life well lived? Rare is the person who does not look back on a lifetime with some sense of marvel. ... Some people live lives so large they seem to pack many existences into their brief time on this planet. Longtime Aspen resident Charles Paterson is one such person.

– Karina Wetherbee, *Summit Daily*

About the Authors

Charles Paterson was born Karl Schanzer in Vienna, Austria in 1929 and now lives in Aspen, Colorado. An architectural designer, Paterson was one of the last apprentices to train under Frank Lloyd Wright. His coauthor and daughter Carrie Paterson is an artist, writer, and editor. She lives in Los Angeles.

Reading Group Questions

1. Discuss how being suddenly and repeatedly displaced (Austria to Czechoslovakia to France to Australia and finally to USA) affected the Schanzer children. How did being forced to adapt to new cultures, learn new languages, and make new homes for themselves change them?
2. What role did the author's female relatives play in his life? For example, his older sister Doris. Discuss the loss of their mother Eva and the decades until reconstruction of her complete story for Paterson.
3. What were your impressions of Stefan Schanzer? How did Schanzer's Siberian prisoner of war experience in the First World War contribute to his second escape through occupied France in WW II?
4. What role did religion have in the lives of the Schanzer/Paterson family? Discuss their father's decision to have the children baptized in Paris. Did you agree with it? Discuss the effects of Roman Catholic schooling and religion in Australia. Has architecture assumed a function of religion for Paterson?
5. Discuss the author's experience of feeling like a "foreigner." How did he treat the challenge of integrating into Australian, and then American society? What role did anti-semitism play in his experiences?
6. Paterson's relationship to architecture changed and developed throughout his life. Discuss the episodes in his life that were most significant to this evolution.
7. How did being an apprentice at Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin affect the author's life?
8. The author's father never returned to Vienna or Austria after he fled the Anschluss, and Paterson only went back after nearly 60 years. Discuss their reasons for not returning and the differences between being an adult and being a child when being forced to flee the land of your birth.
9. What contributed to Schanzer's courage and foresight to leave Vienna? Would you be able to give up your children for adoption and send them away to an unknown future to save their lives?
10. Why did the children decide to rejoin their father in New York after the end of World War II? Why did they spend eight years in Australia? Why was there an urgency to leave Australia after the war?
11. A refugee child has to grow up quickly and often leaves their childhood suddenly behind. How did this happen to Paterson and his sister Doris, and how did they deal with that loss in the choices they made in their lives?
12. How did Paterson find the Rocky Mountains and what characteristics did he bring to the young ski resort of Aspen, Colorado that impacted its growth and development?
13. What is the definition of home for Paterson? How does one create and rebuild home, and what lessons can be learned from someone who, time and time again, had to remake not only his physical home, but also his idea of it, both as a child and as an adult?

14. Discuss the connections between storytelling, travel, weaving, cooking, building and skiing found in the book. What loss or losses do they stand in for that the author tries to reclaim throughout his life?
15. How did this book make you reflect on your own family history? On your relationship to your parents? Your ancestors?
16. How did the inclusion of footnotes, maps, and drawings add to the author's story? Did they make the story more real for you? What are the limits to what can be told in a book, and what remains uncontained, or spills over into other places?
17. Why are there so many footnotes and images, maps and drawings, and what did those do for you as a reader?
18. What are the threads of Jewish history and culture presented in the book? Discuss any similarities to other stories you know or have heard.

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