

## A Pilgrimage to Eugene Gendlin's Vienna

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The memorial plaque for Eugene Gendlin is fixed on the facade of the school where he attended, the *Erich Fried Realgymnasium* in Vienna. As Gene was *Ehrenzeichen der Stadt Wien* (Medal of Honor, Honorary citizen of Vienna) the unveiling of the plaque was attended by the Mayor of Vienna in May this year. Two months later, Lore Korbei organized a "Gendlin Walk" at the Conference of the World Association of Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy held at the University of Vienna. An international crew of 28 people signed up and attended the tour.



Eager to find out about Gene's life in Vienna, we stepped out of the metro Line U1 at *Shottenring* and exited onto the street. Just as our feet landed on ground level, Lore gestured us to look on to the left hand side. There, right in front of us at 25 Rossauer Lande in the 9th District was a magnificent-



looking building, the building where Gene lived until age 11. From a window inside this building, one would see the Donau Canal right in front, surrounded on both sides by beautiful parks. It reminded me of Gene's apartment on the West Side, New York City, where he later lived. His window there provided a splendid view of the Hudson River. Here in Vienna, many Jews lived here in the 9th District, and Lore commented that this was a *bourgeois* area. She said she

could detect a faint bourgeois-Jewish accent when Gene spoke in German.

We walked for a block on this street and turned away from the canal, and in a short while, we assembled in front of the gymnasium (high school) where Gene attended. We were joined by Dr. Urbaneck (historian) who taught history at this gymnasium. (Dr. Urbaneck [on bench] and Lore Korbei leading the tour.) In 1996, Gene returned to this gymnasium and talked to students in Dr. Urbaneck's 11th grade class.



Dr. Urbaneck showed us inside the gymnasium. On one of the walls inside, was a plate with many names. These students were suddenly "expelled" from the school in April 28th, 1938 when the Nazis came into control. Gene's name, "Eugen Gendelin" is found on this plate, and a picture of him hangs on top of another list, where the students are listed by class. We find Gene listed in "2 Klasse" as he was eleven years old at this time, in his second year at the gymnasium.



Lore recalls that after talking to 11th graders, Gene stopped Lore as they were at the stairway. The smell of the school suddenly awakened a felt sense in Gene. He said "everything just came back" and was flooded with memories. There were



tears in his eyes. On another occasion, Gene told Lore that he was not afraid of the people in Vienna, but he was afraid of the buildings. The buildings were almost the

same as they were in 1938, and so memories of those difficult times must have flashed back to him.

We left the school and walked about 20 minutes to *Bezirksmuseum Alsergrund* where there is a special exhibit of Gene until October this year. At this museum, Lore read Gene's biographical account about his flight from the Nazi controlled Austria ([https://www.focusing.org/gendlin/docs/gol\\_2181.html](https://www.focusing.org/gendlin/docs/gol_2181.html)). I had read this many times before, but hearing it here, the words seemed to take on a heavy sense of history. We left the museum and took the trolley to the *Schottentor* metro station, where this pilgrimage to Gene's Vienna came to an end. *Special thanks to Lore Korbei and Dr. Urbanek.*



EUGENE GENDLIN 1926 Wien -2017 New York. He was torn apart from his school mates in April 28th 1938 and went to the United States, where he became a prominent Austrian-American philosopher, psychologist and psychotherapist, he was co-founder of Client-Centered Therapy and founder of the Focusing Method.