

Hitler  
Ascent 1889-1939 Volker Ullrich  
Young Hitler

"I have no idea when it comes to my family history," Hitler remarked in August 1942 in one of his countless monologues at his Wolfsschanze headquarters. "I am the most limited person in the world in this area. I am a fully non-familial being, someone who by his very nature isn't focused on relationships. It's not in me. I belong to my ethnic community." The German dictator had good reason to declare his lack of interest in family history. Several obscure bits of his family story had already begun to occasion rumours and speculation when Hitler began his political career in the early 1920s. They have made historians rack their brains ever since and even today not all of the questions surrounding Hitler's origins have been cleared up.

Hitler's family biography takes us to Waldviertel, an agricultural region of northern Austria that borders on Bohemia in what is now the Czech Republic. On 17 June 1837, in a village called Strones, an unmarried daughter of a small farmer, named Marie Anna Schickelgruber gave birth to a son she named Alois. Children born out of wedlock were nothing unusual - that sort of thing happened all the time in the countryside. But at the age of almost 42, the mother was extraordinarily old for the times. Nonetheless, five years later she married the 50-year-old miller's assistant, Johann Georg Hiedler, from the village of Spital. The couple apparently lived in poverty, and as far as we know, even before Marie Anna's death in 1847 the child was entrusted to Johann Georg's younger brother Johann Nepomuk, who was one of the wealthier farmers in Spital. The younger Hiedler brother - who spelled his last name Huttler - raised his foster son as his own. Alois grew up in a sheltered environment with Hiedler's three daughters. He went to a vocational Volksschule and then learned the cobbler trade in Vienna.

For a young man of such humble origins and limited education, Alois Schickelgruber had a remarkable professional career. In 1855 at the age of 19, he decided to give up his trade and get a job in the financial administration of the Austrian monarchy. A shining example of both ambition and devotion to duty, he climbed the social ladder rung by rung. By 1875 he had become a customs official in the town of Braunau, a rank in the Austrian civil service normally reserved for people who had attended a university-track academy or Gymnasium. But then, one year later, something strange happened. In early 1876 Johann Nepomuk and three witnesses turned up at the office of notary Josef Penker in the town of Weitra, not far from Spital, and declared that Alois Schickelgruber was actually the biological son of his brother Johann Georg Hiedler who had died nineteen years previously. In the protocol drawn up by the notary and signed by the three witnesses, the name was recorded as "Hitler" - in those days the spelling of names seems to have been considered relatively unimportant. One day later the pastor in the township of Dollersheim where Strones is located amended the parish register, adding "Georg Hitler" as Alois's father, striking the name "Schickelgruber" and replacing "illegitimate" with "legitimate."

Historians have always been puzzled why the legal identity of Alois's father was determined, and his name changed, so late. If Johann Georg Hiedler was truly Alois's father, as became the orthodoxy in the Third Reich, why had he not acknowledged his son when he married Marie Anna in 1842? And why had he let his brother raise the boy? Was Johann

Hitler  
Ascent 1889-1939 Volker Ullrich  
Young Hitler

Nepomuk as some have speculated, perhaps the true father? The fact that Johann Nepomuk, and not Alois himself initiated the name change would seem to speak for that scenario. But why then did Johann Nepomuk not admit that he was Alois's natural father, preferring instead to hide behind his long-deceased brother? Was he trying to head off a family scandal? Or did he just want to free his foster son whose social rise had greatly impressed him from the stigma of his illegitimate birth? The late date of Johann Nepomuk's trip to the notary would argue against this: the circumstances of Alois Schickelgruber's birth do not seem to have harmed his career prospects all those years. There is considerable evidence that the farmer, who was as sly as he was wealthy, wanted to shield his inheritance from the Austrian tax authorities. Alois was Johann Nepomuk's main heir, and as an officially acknowledged blood relation he had to pay less tax on what he inherited.

Whatever the truth may be, the identity of Adolf Hitler's paternal grandfather remains uncertain. It is hard to overlook the irony that the man who would later demand that all Germans prove their "Aryan origins" was himself incapable of demonstrating his own - no matter how much the Fuhrer's official genealogy tried to convey the contrary impression. On 12 March 1932, one day before the election that pitted Hitler against Hindenburg for the office of Reich president. The Bayerischer Kurier newspaper remarked how strange it was that "the talkative Adolf Hitler is so silent about his ancestors and about how far back his family name goes." A short while before the Viennese newspaper the Wiener Sonn - und Montagszeitung had sensationally revealed that Hitler's father had actually been called "Schickelgruber" (sic) and that the name had been changed for inheritance purposes."

Rumours that there were Jews in Hitler's family have no proven foundation. They sprang up in the early 1920's and after the Second World War they seemed to be supported by a reliable source. In his memoirs written before the notorious general governor of occupied Poland was executed in Nuremberg in 1946, Hans Frank wrote that Hitler's paternal grandfather had been a Jewish merchant in Graz named Frankenberger, in whose household Marie Anna Schickelgruber had worked. But subsequent research revealed that no Jewish family by that name lived at the time in either Graz or indeed the entire Steiermark region. There is no evidence that Hitler ever took speculations about his supposed Jewish grandfather seriously - to say nothing of feeling threatened by them.

We could dismiss the 1876 name change as a rather bizarre tangential episode, if it had not had such momentous historical importance. "Nothing that the 'old man' did pleased Hitler more than that," the Fuhrer's childhood friend August Kubizek later recalled. "He thought 'Schickelgruber' was too coarse, too rural, too complicated and impractical. 'Hiedler' was too boring and soft for him. But 'Hitler' had a nice ring to it and was memorable." In fact there is every reason to doubt that someone named Schickelgruber would have never been able to play the role of political messiah. "Heil Schickelgruber!" would likely have elicited only laughter.

Hitler  
Ascent 1889-1939 Volker Ullrich  
Young Hitler

In public Alois Hitler wanted to be seen as an upstanding civil servant. A former colleague in Braunau described him as an unlikeable pedant who insisted on procedure above all else and lived a withdrawn life with little social contact. Photographs show him trying to look dignified in his official uniform, with its buttons spit-polished and a flashing saber at his side. But Alois Hitler's private life was less orderly and controlled. An internal restlessness led him to change addresses frequently and in his love life the seeming paragon of respectability was also remarkably fickle. Indeed, for the times and the moral conventions of his social circles he was positively debauched. He married three times. His first marriage came in 1873, at the age of 36, when he wedded Anna Glasl, a civil servant's daughter from Braunau who was fourteen years his senior; they were divorced seven years later. The customs official had begun a fling with a 19-year-old barmaid named Franziska ("Fanni") Matzelsberger, which could hardly fail to attract attention in a town of 3,000 inhabitants. In May 1883 one month after the death of his first wife, Alois married his lover who had borne him an illegitimate son, also named Alois, two years previously. Two weeks after their wedding ceremony. Fanni gave birth to their second child, a daughter named Angela.

But the family's fortunes took a downturn. That year, Fanni caught Tuberculosis, a common disease at the time. While she was wasting away, Alois began a relationship with Klara Polzl, a former house keeper whom he hired to look after his two children. Born in 1860 in Spital, Klara was twenty three years his junior. She was the daughter of a small farmer named Johann Baptist Polzl and his wife Johanna, who was herself the daughter of Johann Nepomuk Huttler. That means, if the notarized declaration of 1876 was correct that Alois and Klara were second cousins and if Johann Nepomuk was actually Alois's true father, Alois would have been Klara's half-uncle. In August 1884 Fanni died at the age of 23 and as Klara was already carrying his child, Alois decided to forgo the customary year of mourning and to marry her immediately. That was easier said than done, however; the local pastor refused to marry the two because they were so closely related. Alois Hitler thus had to petition the bishop's seat in Linz for special dispensation and after some back and forth, it was granted. On 7 January 1885, Alois and Klara were finally allowed to get married.

Klara Hitler gave birth to three children in quick succession-Gustav in 1885, Ida in 1886 and Otto in 1887- but all died young. This was not uncommon at a time of high child mortality. At around 6:30 p.m. on 20 April 1889, she brought her fourth child into the world on the second floor of an inn in Brannau where the Hitlers were living. The child was baptized Adolf on Easter Monday. His mother was 28: his father 51 years old.

There are few reliable eyewitness accounts of Adolf Hitler's earliest years. What Hitler himself wrote about his childhood in *Mein Kampf* is a calculated mixture of half-truths and legends which the leader of the 1923 putsch imprisoned in Landsberg Castle hoped would put him in a good light and help him become the Fuhrer of a new greater German empire. After 1933, Hitler arranged for the confiscation of all private documents that might have revealed information about his childhood and youth. In April 1945, a few

Hitler  
Ascent 1889-1939 Volker Ullrich  
Young Hitler

days before his suicide in his Berlin bunker, Hitler had his adjutant Julius Schaub destroy these records. Most of the information we do have therefore is secondhand tidbits and contemporaries later sketches which must be taken with a grain of salt since they were informed by knowledge of Hitler's subsequent life.

"Today I consider it a lucky twist of fate that Providence deemed I would be born in Brannau am Inn," Hitler wrote in the first lines of *Mein Kampf*. "For this small town is located on the border between those two German states whose reunification must be at least for those of us who are young, a lifelong goal to be achieved with any and all means."

But Brannau did not actually play much of a role in Hitler's childhood. In 1892 his father, who had been promoted to senior customs official was transferred to Passau on the German side of the border. It was here that Hitler acquired the Bavarian accent which he would retain throughout his life and which would help make him such an effective rabble-rouser in the Munich beer halls of the early 1920's."

In later years Hitler liked to imply that he had grown up in humble circumstances, but this was far from the case. As a senior customs official Alois Hitler earned an annual salary of 2,600 crowns-roughly the same as what a school principal would have made. Even when he retired in 1895 at the age of 59, he received a pension of 2200 crowns and would not have had to make many cutbacks. The Hitlers were comfortably middle class. The household consisted of Alois, Klara and Alois's two children from his second marriage Alois Jr. and Angela; and of Adolf, his brother Edmund (who was born in 1894 but died in 1900 of rubella) and his sister Paula, who was born in 1896. Also residing in the Hitlers apartment was Klara's younger, unmarried sister Johanna Polzl, who helped out with the family. Aunt "Hanni" had a hunchback and apparently mild learning difficulties.

Alois Hitler was a strict, short-tempered patriarch who demanded unquestioning respect and obedience from his children and used the switch whenever his expectations were not met. His oldest son Alois Jr. suffered particularly from his temper and left home at the age of 14. Adolf who was seven years younger also came in for the odd beating. but his sister Paula was probably exaggerating when she claimed during an interrogation in 1946 that he had received "a good thrashing" every day. The senior customs official was not all that concerned about his children. He devoted most of his free time to his hobby, beekeeping, and enjoyed going to taverns to drink a few glasses of beer and discuss the state of the world with acquaintances. We should also be skeptical about Hitler's later claims that his father's alcohol consumption was excessive and that he had once had to carry him home drunk from the tavern." Hitler tended to depict his father negatively to cast his mother in a more favorable light. After a conversation with the Fuhrer in August 1932, Goebbels noted in his diary, "Hitler endured almost an identical childhood to mine, his father a domestic tyrant, his mother a source of goodness and love."

Klara Hitler was a quiet, modest, obedient woman who patiently bore her husband's self-important airs and protected her children as best she could from his outbreaks of rage.

Hitler  
Ascent 1889-1939 Volker Ullrich  
Young Hitler

The early death of her first three children was an enormous loss, and she was all more determined to shower her fourth child Adolf with maternal care. He was the coddled favorite, while Klara's stepchildren, Alois and Angela often felt neglected. "He was spoiled from early morning to late at night, opined William Patrick Hitler, Alois Jr.'s son in New York in 1943. "The stepchildren were forced to listen to endless stories about how wonderful Adolf was." For the young Hitler, maternal affection compensated for excessive paternal strictness. "Without exception he always spoke of his mother with profound love," August Kubizek recalled. Even late in life Hitler carried a small photo of Klara in his breast pocket, and an oil portrait of his mother was one of the few personal possessions that he kept in his bedroom right up until his death.

Most psychologists assume that the first years of an individual's life determine how his personality develops, and few historians (and even fewer psychological historians) have been able to withstand the temptation to find traces of the monster in the young Hitler. The violence he suffered at his father's hand has often been cited as a source of the murderous policies he pursued as a dictator. But biographers should be careful about drawing far-reaching conclusions from Hitler's early childhood. Physical punishment was an accepted method of childrearing in those days, and it was hardly uncommon for turn-of-the-century middle-class families to feature an authoritarian, punitive father on the one hand and a loving mother on the other. From all we know, Hitler seems to have had a fairly normal childhood. In any case there are no obvious indications of an abnormal personality development to which Hitler's later crimes can be attributed. If Hitler had a problem, it was an overabundance rather than a paucity of motherly love. That may have contributed to his exaggerated self-confidence, his tendency towards being a know-it-all and his disinclination to exert himself in areas he found unpleasant. These characteristics were already evident during Hitler's schooldays.

In 1895, the year he retired, Alois Hitler acquired a farm in Hafeld, an area of the town of Fischlham. There that May, the 6-year-old Hitler started attending the one-room schoolhouse. "When I was in the first grade, I listened in on the pupils from the second and later the third and the fourth," Hitler later said. In 1897, Alois sold the farm and rented an apartment in the nearby market town of Lambach, where Hitler continued his schooling and was briefly a member of the boys' choir at the local Benedictine monastery. In the autumn of 1898, the family moved yet again, this time to the village of Leonding near Linz, where Alois Hitler had purchased a house right next to the town cemetery. It would later become a site for Nazi pilgrimages after the Anschluss between Germany and Austria in 1938. "Very small and primitive," Goebbels remarked after visiting Hitler's boyhood home in March 1938. "I was led into the room that was his empire ... This was where a genius was made. I was overcome by a feeling of solemn significance."

Adolf Hitler was a lively pupil who easily mastered the challenges of the village school and got excellent marks. "The laughably easy task of learning at school left me so much free time that I saw more of the sun than of my room," Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf*. He played soldiers with the other village youngsters and enjoyed taking command. "The

Hitler  
Ascent 1889-1939 Volker Ullrich  
Young Hitler

Boer War was going on," recalled one of Hitler's classmates. "The kids from Leonding under Hitler's leadership were the Boers while the kids from [nearby] Untergamberg were the English. Things often got pretty heated afterwards at the Hitlers' house as well, because our commander Adolf left his father waiting for so long for the tobacco he was supposed to buy."

In the evening, like many boys his age, he devoured the Westerns of novelist Karl May. He read them," by candlelight and, with the help of a magnifying glass, by moonlight", Hitler recalled in a February 1942 monologue at the Wolfsschanze. During the Second World War, especially at difficult times, Hitler would frequently take out a book by May and praise the Native American character Winnetou as "the embodiment of a company leader." Hitler saw himself as "the leader of a little gang" of his Leonding schoolmates and a class photo supports that idea. The 10-year-old occupies the middle of the top row with his arms crossed and his face slightly overexposed, "in a pose of demonstrative superiority." The young boy was obviously not plagued by self-doubt.

But in September 1900 the transition from a village primary to an urban secondary school in Linz brought an abrupt end to Hitler's sunny childhood. Hitler, now 11, had to walk an hour to and from school, and he was no longer the indisputable leader of the class. He was just one of many pupils and he also carried the stigma, in the eyes of his well-heeled Linz classmates, of being a country yokel. Hitler had a hard time submitting to a more regimented school routine, and he no longer effortlessly got good grades as he had before. Already in his first year he failed math and natural science and had to repeat a grade. In the years that followed, he barely progressed. In 1924, his former teacher Eduard Huemer remembered him as a, "gaunt, pale youth" who was "definitely talented" but "not diligent." Considering his "undeniable gifts," Huemer said, Hitler "should have done far better." With his teachers, Hitler was "rebellious, independent, dogmatic and hot-tempered," often reacting to their corrections and admonitions with a scarcely concealed distaste. As he entered puberty, the lively, curious young boy became an introverted, moody adolescent who positioned himself as an outsider.

In *Mein Kampf* Hitler characterized his poor school performance as an act of rebellion not so much against his teachers as against his father. His father, he claimed, badly wanted to force him down the path towards a career as a civil servant, which ran completely contrary to his nature. "I never wanted to become a civil servant, no. no. no," Hitler wrote. "The thought of being trapped in an office, of no longer being me master of my own time but rather being compelled to devote my entire life to filling out forms made me yawningly nauseous." There are good reasons to doubt Hitler's depiction, however. If his father had truly intended for him to enter the civil service, he would have sent him to a classical *Gymnasium* and not to a *Realschule*, which steered pupils towards technical and mercantile jobs." Hitler's talent for drawing was recognized at an early age, and this seems to have been the reason for Alois's decision. But contrary to what he wrote in *Mein Kampf*, this does not mean that Hitler decided at the age of 12 to devote himself to art rather than

Hitler  
Ascent 1889-1939 Volker Ullrich  
Young Hitler

become a civil servant. His father's embittered rejection of Hitler's artistic ambitions- "Artistic painter, never, over my dead body!" -is most likely the stuff of legend."

We can safely assume, though that the tension between father and son was increasing at this time. Alois Hitler must have sensed that his adolescent son was becoming more independent and rebellious. But what likely angered him most was not some disagreement about his son's future career, but rather Adolf's demonstrative unwillingness to put in the work needed to get into a better school. Born out of wedlock in the rural provinces, Alois had laboured hard to climb the social ladder, and he expected his son, who had enjoyed a far better start in life, to be diligent and determined about securing his status in society. In the best of all worlds, his son would have climbed a few rungs in the social hierarchy to a level that Alois's humble origins and lack of education had put beyond his reach. Instead, the adolescent Adolf was surprisingly lazy and intractable. This no doubt enraged his ambitious father.

But on 3 January 1903 before the conflict could truly come to the boil, Alois Hitler suddenly died at the age of 65 while having a morning drink in the Wiesinger Inn in Leonding. This unexpected event "plunged us all into the deepest sorrow." Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf*. In truth, the sudden passing of the patriarchal tyrant probably came as a relief to Alois's wife and even more so to his children. The family was provided for: Klara Hitler received a widow's pension sufficient to maintain a comfortable existence." Usually she spent her summers with Adolf and Paula at her sister's home in Weitra. His cousins would later recall that Hitler had played with them occasionally but preferred to go off on his own and paint, draw or read one of the books he had brought along."

Hitler's grades did not improve. In 1903-4 he was only promoted after taking a supplementary test and agreeing to transfer to a different school. His mother enrolled him in another *Realschule* in Steyr, eighty kilometers away from Linz, where he lived with foster parents. For the first time Adolf was separated from his mother, and he was apparently quite homesick. Even as Reich chancellor, he still complained about how he had been filled with yearning and resentment when his mother sent him to Steyr. One of his teachers there recalled a "medium-sized, somewhat pale pupil" who "acted somewhat shy and cowed, probably because it was the first time he had been away from home." But Hitler did not stay in Steyr very long. In the autumn of 1905, with his grades remaining poor, he faked an illness and convinced his mother to take him out of school. He would retain a deep hatred of schools and teachers for the rest of his life. "Teachers-I can't stand them," he once remarked. "The ones who are any good are the exceptions to the rule." Among the few good ones in Hitler's eyes was his history teacher in Linz, Leopold Poetsch, whom he singled out for praise in *Mein Kampf*. Poetsch, Hitler wrote, had known how "not just to captivate but to motivate when he spoke."

By the time the drop-out Hitler returned to his family. Klara had already sold their house in Leonding. In June 1905 she rented an apartment in Humboldtstrasse 31 in Linz. Her stepdaughter Angela had just moved in with her new husband, a civil servant named

Hitler  
Ascent 1889-1939 Volker Ullrich  
Young Hitler

Leo Raubal, so only four people lived in the apartment: Klara, Adolf, Paula and Hanni. For a while a boarder, a pupil named Wilhelm Hagmueller, also ate lunch with the Hitlers.

Linz, the provincial capital of Upper Austria, had some 60,000 inhabitants around 1900, many of whom like the Hitlers originally came from the countryside. Thanks to its location on the right bank of the Danube, the city had become an important railway crossing, and its main attraction was its central train station, which was a stopping point for the express trains that connected Munich and Vienna. For a provincial capital, Linz had a lot of culture on offer. During Hitler's time there, the director of the Linz conservatory, August Goellerich developed an impressive repertoire of operas and established a reputation as a leading interpreter of Liszt, Wagner, and Bruckner.

In retrospect, Hitler described the two years he spent in Linz before moving to Vienna as "almost a beautiful dream." His life was one of comfortable idleness. Hitler had no intention of starting an apprenticeship. At the age of 16, he spent most of his days in his room drawing, painting and reading. He also took long walks along Linz's main boulevard, which led from the train station to the bridge over the Danube; he was always nearly attired, affecting the airs of a dandified university student, swinging a black walking stick with a delicate ivory handle. In the evenings, he attended the operas in Linz's *Landstheater*. It is presumably here that he met his friend August Kubizek, the son of a decorator and upholsterer, in 1905.

In the autumn of 1953, three years before his death, Kubizek published his recollections of the "friend from his youth". They are significant in so far as they are the only substantial account of Hitler's Linz years, but they must be read critically since they are based on an earlier shorter manuscript that Kubizek had written for the Nazi Parry archives in 1943 at the behest of Hitler's secretary Martin Bormann. Not surprisingly, Kubizek's recollections are full of admiration for the later Fuhrer. Nonetheless although he embellished the odd incident post-war and his memory occasionally failed him, Kubizek's memoirs remain a credible source.

Kubizek is the author of the only description of Hitler as a young man, and it is worth quoting extensively:

Hitler was of medium build and thin. Even then he was a bit taller than his mother. He didn't seem all that strong. On the contrary, he was somewhat gangly and slight ... His nose was straight and well proportioned, nothing unusual. He had a high forehead that sloped back slightly, and I found it unfortunate that he was already in the habit of brushing his hair as deeply as possible over it ... In my entire life. I haven't never met a person... whose eyes dominated his face as much as my friend's. He had his mother's light-coloured eyes and a greatly intensified version of her penetrating stare ... It was uncanny how... his eyes changed their expression, especially when Adolf spoke. Adolf

Hitler  
Ascent 1889-1939 Volker Ullrich  
Young Hitler

literally spoke with his eyes ... When he visited me at home for the first time and I introduced him to my mother, she said to me that night before going to bed: "Your friend has such remarkable eyes!" I remember that all too well. There was more fear than admiration in her voice.

Hitler's eyes would always be described as his most extraordinary feature. Many people thought they were the secret of his attractiveness to women.

The two young friends could hardly have differed more in personality. "While I was a quiet, somewhat dreamy boy, sensitive, adaptable and conciliatory," Kubizek wrote, "Hitler was very wild and temperamental. Harmless things, like a couple of hasty words, could make him explode with anger." Although he was a year younger than Kubizek, Hitler dominated their relationship, doing most of the talking. "He felt compelled to speak and needed someone to listen," Kubizek recalled. It was in early life then that the egomaniacal Hitler developed the habit of holding monologues that was to make life so hard for his entourage later on.

The bond between two such unequal young men was their joint passion for music, especially Richard Wagner. "My youthful enthusiasm for the master of Bayreuth knew no limits." Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf*. Such enthusiasm was common among many adults in both the Habsburg monarchy and the German Reich. Thomas Mann, for instance wrote in 1907 that people had to experience Wagner's art to understand anything about our age. Hitler read everything he could find on Wagner. Sometimes when out on an extended walk in Linz with his friend, he would suddenly stop and recite a passage from Wagner's correspondence or his diaries." *Lohengrin* always remained Hitler's favourite opera. The Hitlers' boarder Hagmueller recalled the young Adolf pacing his room in Humboldtstrasse singing, "Du Schwan zieh hin."

Kubizek described Hitler as being completely enraptured at a performance of the early Wagner opera *Rienzi*, which tells the story of the medieval Italian populist Cola di Rienzi, who freed Rome from tyranny but was ultimately betrayed by his people and died in the rubble of the burning Italian capital. For a long time, Kubizek recalled, Hitler was silent. Then he led his friend up to the top of the Freinberg hill, clasped his hands and the words began to spill out. "In grand, captivating images he told me about his future and the future of his people." Kubizek wrote. "He spoke of a special mission that would one day be his. I ... could hardly follow him. It took me many years to understand what these hours of otherworldly rapture had meant to my friend." While visiting the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth in August 1939, Hitler recalled that evening on Freinberg and turned to Winifred Wagner with the remark. "That was the hour everything started." Obviously, this account was driven by the desire to transform the *Rienzi* episode into a moment of profound political awakening: Kubizek's projection and Hitler's need for exaggerated self-importance dovetailed perfectly. But if we filter out the mythologizing, we can see the role the young Hitler's passion for Wagner played in his unstable psyche. It gave him the intoxicating

Hitler  
Ascent 1889-1939 Volker Ullrich  
Young Hitler

feeling of being much more important than he was. It helped him escape into a dream world, where his own future was not dark but bright and clear.

More than once Hitler announced that he felt an artistic calling and loathed any sort of middle-of-the-road "breadwinning" job. His friend Kubizek, who himself aspired to a career in music, admired Hitler for the apparent seriousness with which he pursued his ambitions. Hitler was constantly drawing and sketching, and he developed fantastical plans for remaking Linz that included a new gigantic Danube bridge and a new concert hall. "I felt as though I had entered an architect's office." Kubizek wrote, recalling the first time he visited Hitler's room. But the bold urban developer never seems to have asked himself whether the sketches he put on paper could ever be realized. He cocooned himself in a bizarre, alternative world somewhere between dream and reality.

The same is true for the 17-year-old Hitler's "first love. In Kubizek's more-than-ample account, the two friends encountered a beautiful blonde girl named Stefanie Isac in the spring of 1906 while out for an evening stroll through the centre of town. Hitler immediately developed a huge crush on her and could think of nothing else, although he never dared to introduce himself. For her part, Stefanie never noticed that she had a secret admirer. Kubizek explained his friend's unusual reticence with the idea that actually meeting the girl would have destroyed Hitler's ideal picture of her as the embodiment of everything feminine. No matter whether Kubizek's tale of young romance was true, it reflects Hitler's characteristic disinclination to let cold, hard reality get in the way of wishful thinking.

For two weeks in early May 1906, Hitler travelled to Vienna for the first time and was overwhelmed by the many sights the metropolis had to offer- the museums, the State Opera, the Austrian parliament, the town hall, the Ringstrasse-which reminded him of the "magic of *A Thousand and One Nights*". On two evenings, Hitler attended the opera to see productions of *Tristan* and *The Flying Dutchman* by Gustav Mahler and with sets designed by Alfred Roller. He sent four postcards back to Kubizek and these are the earliest surviving examples of Hitler's handwriting. His hand was full of verve and astonishingly adult, although the 17-year-old was no master of spelling, grammar and punctuation. The occasional grandiloquent, melodramatic tone presaged his later speeches and writings. Describing the State Opera on his second postcard, Hitler wrote:

The interior of the palace is not uplifting. Whereas the outside is full of powerful majesty that gives the Structure the gravity of a monument to art, the interior triggers admiration rather than makes one appreciate the dignity. Only when the powerful waves of sound flood the space and the rushing of the wind yields to those aural waves, does one feel sublimity and forget the gold and velvet with which the interior is burdened.

Even this brief postcard excerpt contained five spelling and grammatical errors.

Hitler  
Ascent 1889-1939 Volker Ullrich  
Young Hitler

The visit convinced Hitler that he had to move to the Austrian capital. "In his mind, he was no longer in Linz, but lived at the centre of Vienna," Kubizek recalled ... But then his mother suddenly fell seriously ill, disrupting his plans. In January 1907, Klara's Jewish family doctor, Eduard Bloch, diagnosed breast cancer. Thirty-four years later in American exile, Bloch described how the young Hitler had taken the terrible news: "His long, pale face twisted. Tears flowed from his eyes. Did his mother have no chance he asked." On 18 January, Klara Hitler was operated on in the Barmherzige Schwestern hospital in Linz. She was discharged on 5 February and seemed to be on the mend. Because she could not manage the flights of stairs up to the Hitlers' third floor apartment in Humboldtstrasse, the family moved to the borough of Urfahr on the other side of the Danube in mid-May 1907, where they occupied a small but bright apartment in the first floor of a new building on Blumenstrasse 3.

In early September 1907, with his mother's condition apparently stable, Hitler travelled again to Vienna to take the entrance test for the Academy of Fine Arts. One hundred and twelve candidates applied. Hitler made it past the first round, in which thirty-three candidates were weeded out, but he failed to clear the second one, in which only twenty-eight applicants got through. "Too few heads. Sample drawing unsatisfactory" was the admissions committee's verdict ... Hitler had gone to Vienna convinced that he would pass the exam with flying colours, so the rejection hit him all the harder-like "an abrupt blow from nowhere," as he would write in *Mein Kampf*. When he asked for an explanation, the academy director told him that his talent lay in architecture, not art. But he could not study architecture because he had not completed the Gymnasium. "Downtrodden, I left Theophil Hansen's marvelous building," Hitler later wrote. People have perennially speculated about how history might have turned out had Hitler passed that admissions test. Most likely not only his life story, but Germany's and the world's would have taken a different course.

When Hitler returned to Linz in October, his mother's health had deteriorated, and he tended to her with great devotion. "Adolf read her every wish from her eyes and showed her the tenderest sort of care," Kubizek recalled. "I had never seen him be so solicitous and gentle." That account tallies with the observations of Dr. Bloch, who made daily house calls to ease his patient's pain. In the night of 20-21 December 1907, Klara Hitler died at the young age of 47. The doctor found her son the next morning at her death bed. "In almost forty years of practice. I have never seen a young man so utterly filled with pain and grief as the young Adolf Hitler," Bloch recalled in November 1938.

After his rejection by the Academy of Fine Arts, which he concealed from his family and friends, it was doubly difficult for Hitler to get over his mother's death. In her he likely lost the only person he ever loved. Yet there is no evidence that her doctor's Jewishness was at the root of his pathological hatred for Jews. On 23 December, the day of Klara Hitler's funeral, the 18-year-old Hitler appeared in Bloch's office and declared. "I will be forever grateful to you, Doctor." And he did not forget his gratitude in his later years. In 1938, when he celebrated Austria's incorporation into the German Reich with a triumphant

Hitler  
Ascent 1889-1939 Volker Ullrich  
Young Hitler

march into his "home city" of Linz, he is said to have asked: "Tell me, is good old Dr. Bloch still alive?" Alone among Linz's Jews, Bloch was put under the special protection of the Gestapo. In late 1940, he and his wife were able to flee to the United States via Portugal.

After New Year's Day 1908, Hitler visited his parents' graves in Leonding. "Adolf was very composed," wrote Kubizek. "I knew how deeply his mother's death had shaken him. I was astonished how calmly and dearly he spoke about it." There was nothing keeping Hitler in Linz now and he immediately started preparing his move to Vienna. Together with his sister Paula, he applied to the Linz authorities for orphans' pensions. They were each entitled to 25 crowns a month. The inheritance from their father of 625 crowns each was deposited in a closed account they could not access until they had reached the age of 24, but the two siblings could make use of an inheritance of 2,000 crowns from their mother. Hitler was by no means wealthy, as some have claimed, but the money was enough to live on in Vienna for a year without having to work regularly.

On 4 February, the owner of the house on Blütenstrasse, Magdalena Hanisch, asked her Viennese friend Johanna Motloch to try to convince the set designer Alfred Roller, who was also a professor at the Academy of Applied Arts to intervene on Hitler's behalf. "He's a serious, ambitious young man, very mature for his age of 19, from a completely respectable family," Hanisch wrote. Roller promptly answered: "Young Hitler should come see me and bring samples of his work so that I can see what they're like." Several days later, Hanisch described Hitler's reaction to her friend: "He read the letter silently word for word, with reverence and a happy smile on his face as though he wanted to memorize it." Could it be after his disappointment the preceding October that a door was opening to the son of artistic life he covered? In a letter to Johanna Motloch, Hitler expressed his "deepest gratitude for giving him "access to the great master of stage design.""" It is strange, therefore, that in Vienna he never took Roller up on his offer. If we believe Hitler's later explanations, the reason was shyness. In one of his table talks he claimed that he had been too nervous during his early days in Vienna to approach a person like Roller. That, he said, was as impossible for him "as speaking before five people."

On 12 February 1908, Hitler left for Vienna. His bags contained his books and a few important family documents such as letters from his mother, which he ordered to be burned in 1945. " He had convinced Kubizek, who brought him to the train station. to move to Vienna as well to get musical training at the conservatory. His sister Paula and aunt Hanni initially remained in the apartment in Urfahr, but Hanni soon moved back to Waldviertel to be near her relatives. Twelve-year-old Paula then went to live with her half-sister Angela Raubal." As he had done on his last visit in October, Hitler moved in with the unmarried seamstress Maria Zakrey in the courtyard of Stumpergasse 29 of the Viennese district of Mariahilf, an area for "little people." On 18 February, he sent a postcard to Kubizek that read: "I eagerly await news of your arrival ... All of Vienna is waiting. So come soon."