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Dorothea Hürlimann (the author's great-grandmother) with Dora (author's grandmother), Rudolf, and Elise, ca1895.

Women, Divorce, Tobacco, and Outplacements of Children: Uncovering Family Secrets in Switzerland

*by Tito Craige**

From early in the nineteenth century until the 1950s, tens of thousands of Swiss children were taken from their homes and placed with foster families or sold at auction. The mothers of the outplaced children were usually poor and divorced; some were alleged to be prostitutes. One of these mothers was the author's great-grandmother,

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Dorothea Hürlimann. In 1895, because she was divorced and managed a tobacco store in Geneva's red-light district, her three children were sent to live with foster families. The middle child, Dora, was four years old when she was placed with a family in Winterthur and began her life as a servant. In 1914, Dora immigrated to the United States, married a German immigrant, and, in 1921, gave birth to the author's mother, Hazel Fischer. For over a century, Dorothea Hürlimann's descendants, including the author's grandmother and her Swiss relatives, were silent about why the children were outplaced with foster families and how the outplacements affected the mother and her children.

In 1987, the author and his Swiss cousin, Urs Arcon, discussed their belief that the family secrets were hiding the truth. To find the true story about Dorothea and the fate of her children, the author and Arcon spent 2018-2019 examining Swiss archives and interviewing relatives on both sides of the Atlantic.

The research revealed that Dorothea's husband was an alcoholic who had abandoned his family, that Dorothea obtained a divorce and that she was forced to outplace her three children. Dorothea re-married, and, after a decade apart, she and her children were reunited. Daughter Dora and her siblings survived their lives as *Verdingkinder* (contract children), but they decided to cover up the facts of their mother's struggles. The true story of Dorothea Hürlimann includes both tragedy and triumph; it is also a tale of resilience in the face of shame and failure.

Contract Children, Apologies and Compensation

Until the mid-twentieth century, much of Switzerland's economy was based on farming.¹ Since there was almost no mechanization, planting, weeding, and harvesting were done by manual labor. Many farmers needed extra workers to cultivate crops and manage

¹ <https://www.swissinfo.ch/ger/dienstleistungssektor/28990352> May 12, 2016. "In the course of the twentieth century, Switzerland had developed from an agrarian country into an industrial country with a rich tradition of craftsmanship." (Last accessed Aug. 2, 2022).

Keywords: Divorce, *Verdingkinder*, tobacco stores, foster children, Switzerland

the animals. To meet the labor shortage, village authorities seized poor children and placed them with farming families. The outplaced children are called *Verdingkinder*, a word that has been variously translated as “contract children,” “discarded children,” “indentured children” or even “slave children.”

Starting in 2004, revelations about the *Verdingkinder* started to appear in the media and many Swiss were horrified by the size and duration of the child labor system. A BBC article by Kavita Puri was one of many that shocked many Swiss citizens. Titled “Switzerland’s shame: The children used as cheap farm labour,” it concluded that, “Since the 1850s, hundreds of thousands of Swiss children were taken from their parents and sent to farms to work—a practice that continued well into the twentieth century . . . the extent to which these children were treated as commodities is demonstrated by the fact that there are cases even in the early twentieth century where they were herded into a village square and sold at public auction.”²

The authorities’ rationale was that children of immoral mothers deserved better opportunities, so they had to be removed from their homes and placed where they could learn a skill. Proper child rearing, the thinking went, required that parents be married, the husband have respectable work, and the family have a well-built house. Convinced that these women were unable to raise their offspring properly, officials either seized the children or forced the mothers to place them with foster families. In “Thousands of Swiss Children Sold into Slavery,” Kim Wilshire described how the system worked:

Many of the child workers, known as *Verdingkinder* (discarded children), ended up being beaten and sexually abused after passing under the auctioneer’s hammer in Swiss provincial towns. They were handed to farmers or

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-29765623> October 29, 2014.

factory owners, who were paid a fee by local authorities to feed and house them. Although the children were supposed to be paid a basic wage for their work, in practice many were treated as slaves. Historians estimate that as many as 12,000 children of poor families, some of them infants and many with unmarried or divorced mothers, were given away or sold during the 1930s alone. The trade finally ended only in the decade after the Second World War, when increased farm mechanisation (*sic*) meant less need for youthful labour.”

In 2004, historian Marco Leuenberger expressed the shock that many must have felt as they read about slavery: “We estimate that between five and ten per cent of all Swiss children may have been sold or sent away by their families to work in the countryside between 1850 and 1950. . . . It’s astonishing that these slave auctions were allowed to happen in Switzerland. . . . One explanation is that at the time it was a poor agricultural country and there was a desperate need for cheap labour.”

Another historian, Loretta Seglias, concluded that “hundreds of thousands of such children were placed. The exact population of children sent to foster homes or auctioned will probably never be known, since there is little agreement about when the practice started and ended. In addition, each canton had a different archival system, and there is no federal record of foster care in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”³

Although there is no *federal* record, it seems likely that there were municipal records. Now and in the past, the tracking of short-term visitors, long-term visa holders, permanent residents and citizens has been extremely well regulated in Switzerland. To the author, it seems possible that municipal and cantonal authorities purged their records, and the truth about many *Verdingkinder* will remain a se-

³ Loretta Seglias, April 30, 2019, quoted in <https://worldcrunch.com/amp/switzerland39s-39contract-children39-abused-exploited-forgotten-2654532001> (Last accessed July 18, 2022).

cret. Only in 2019, did revelations by the few surviving *Verdingkinder* prompt the federal government to offer an apology and compensation.

It seems likely that, during the *Verdingkinder* era, there were lists of those who were poor, divorced, engaged in prostitution and/or operating places like tobacco stores. Journalists Corinna Guthknecht and Josef Wirnshofer describe how, in Switzerland, the dominant cultural belief of that era was that (1) poor people impoverished themselves due to bad behavior, and (2) such people might threaten society: “At the time, poverty was not a problem of the state, but *misconduct of the individual*. It was also considered a *danger to the common good*. Poor mothers and fathers, it was thought, would affect the children negatively. Illegitimate children or children of separated parents were especially affected.”⁴

Some children, like Dorothea’s, were voluntarily outplaced, but others were seized and sold to the lowest bidder: “If a child became orphaned, a parent was unmarried, there was fear of neglect, or you had the misfortune to be poor, the communities would intervene. Authorities tried to find the cheapest way to look after these children, so they took them out of their families and placed them in foster families.”⁵ “Public auctions for the child workers were still being held in some Swiss towns and villages as late as the 1930s.”⁶

During the decades of forced child labor, the *Verdingkinder* had no political or economic clout and most toiled in utter obscurity. However, in 2019, after 15 years of media coverage and interviews with survivors, the government admitted that the child outplacements constituted a “dark period of Swiss history.”

⁴ Corinna Guthknecht and Josef Wirnshofer, Apr. 30, 2019, quoted in “Switzerland’s ‘Contract Children’ — Abused, Exploited, Forgotten” by Irene Caselli in <https://worldcrunch.com/amp/switzerland39s-39contract-children39-abused-exploited-forgotten-2654532001> (Last accessed July 18, 2022).

⁵ Kavita Puri, Oct. 29, 2014. “Switzerland’s Shame: The children used as cheap farm labour” in <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-29765623> (Last accessed July 8, 2022).

⁶ Renat Kunzi, Feb. 29, 2004. “Historian reveals tragedy of Swiss child trade.” <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/historian-reveals-tragedy-of-swiss-child-trade/3791220> (Last accessed July 8, 2022).

The (Swiss) Federal Office of Justice (FOJ) has processed some 6,000 claims for victims of forced labour and abuse. . . . The aim is to deal with all the claims, totaling more than 9,000, by the end of the year. The Swiss government has agreed to pay up to CHF 25,000 (\$24,800) in compensation to people who, as children, were victims of forced labour policies or placed in institutions, often suffering abuse or neglect. The “*Verdingkinder*” (slave children) practice continued until 1981. Around 12,000-15,000 victims are still alive, the FOJ estimates. The government announced the CHF 300 million compensation scheme in September 2016, and it was launched in December of that year. The authorities had earlier offered official apologies to the survivors of this dark period of Swiss history.⁷

Rationale and Methodology

The spark for this research study originated with Urs Arcon, a Swiss great-grandchild of Dorothea Hürlimann. In 1987, Arcon, then a clothing designer and resident of Winterthur, sent a letter to the author in North Carolina. Arcon, aware that he and his cousins shared the same Swiss great-grandparents, wrote that, “there are family myths, and truth is covered by a veil of silence.” He spoke about how his parents never discussed his great-grandparents, and that he sensed there were secrets worth investigating. He and the author knew that Dorothea’s children were placed with foster families, but they did not know why or for how long. The author described his motivation: “I wondered why my grandmother was taken from her mother, who she lived with and why she left Switzerland. Urs urged me to move to Switzerland, but the Swiss Embassy turned me down since neither parent was Swiss. I appealed by saying I planned to write an article describing my Swiss American connections, and, within days the Embassy granted me a visa. Starting in the summer of 2018, Urs

⁷ Swissinfo.com. May 20, 2019: Compensation so far paid to 6,000 Swiss ‘slave children.’ https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/forced-placements_compensation-paid-to-6-000--slave-children-/44976198 (Last accessed July 8, 2022).

and I pursued leads, translated German and French archival documents, and interviewed relatives, farmers, prostitutes, and surviving *Verdingkinder*.”⁸

Arcon and the author visited every address where Dorothea and her children are known to have lived. They met with members of ancestral Hürlimann clan in Walchwil, visited the red-light district and a tobacco store in Geneva and viewed the river where Dorothea’s husband fell to his death. Thanks to visits, interviews, and records, the truth can be told, and family myths laid to rest.

Dorothea Hürlimann

Dorothea Hürlimann, the author’s great-grandmother, was born on November 11, 1858, in Walchwil, Zug. Her parents were Michael Joseph Hürlimann (August 25, 1826-September 9, 1894) and Maria Elisabeth Ganz (April 13, 1826-September 4, 1889). Rudolf Albert Sommer, the author’s great-grandfather, was born on January 24, 1857, in Elsau, Zurich. He became a “cooper” and knew how to construct and repair wooden barrels for wine. Although the Sommer family had lived in Elsau for centuries, young Rudolf decided to break free from village life and booked passage to the United States. With a similar goal, Dorothea Hürlimann also emigrated to the U.S. They met in Philadelphia and were married on June 26, 1887. Their son, Rudolf Michael, was born on June 12, 1888, and the couple’s need for income increased. Although he was a skilled woodworker, Rudolf drank heavily and lost his job.

In early 1891, the couple gave up their dream of being Americans and took a ship back to Europe. As they crossed France, Dorothea went into labor, and Dora Suzanne Sommer, the author’s grandmother, was born in Paris on May 2, 1891. After the family of four settled in Geneva, a third child, Elise, was born on August 10, 1893.

⁸ Author’s notes, Apr. 15, 2019.

In Geneva, Rudolf's life disintegrated: he was jailed for insulting his wife, lost work and abandoned the family. Dorothea decided to seek a divorce, and, on November 8, 1895, a Geneva court heard her complaints. In Calvinist Geneva, divorce was extremely rare, but Dorothea's case must have been convincing, because the judge's decision was clear:

“From the first days of marriage, Mr. Sommer was abusive; he does not work; he was fired by bosses at several jobs, he said injurious things to his wife like calling her a whore; he was arrested for doing this in October 1894; he left his wife and three children this past April 10 and didn't give them any news.”⁹

Thus, on November 9, 1895, Dorothea was a divorced woman with three children, ages two, four and seven. Without a doubt, Dorothea knew that divorce reflected poorly on the wife, but she was so desperate that she was willing to risk the shame of being a mother without a husband.¹⁰ Her ex-husband provided no help, and, according to Swiss family members, he drowned in the Rhine River on October 10, 1904. No one knows if he intended to kill himself. Without funds, Dorothea took a job managing a tobacco store on 52 Rue de Monthoux, located in the district of Geneva known as Le Paquis.¹¹

In that era, divorced women who ran tobacco stores were condemned by the Calvinist elders. These businesses were thought to

⁹ Geneva Civil Tribunal Archives, Geneva, Apr. 10, 2019. Translation by Urs Arcon.

¹⁰ Myriam V. Thoma et. al., “Health, stress, and well-being in Swiss adult survivors of child welfare practices and child labor: Investigating the mediating role of socio-economic factors” <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0145213420304245#bib0100> (Last accessed July 14, 2022).

¹¹ Author's notes: Urs Arcon and I visited Le Paquis in May 2019. To Swiss, “Le Paquis” is still synonymous with “red-light district.” In the twenty-first century, women from Africa and Latin America walk the streets, many with mini-skirts and low-cut tops. I overheard some women speaking Spanish and said, “Buenos días” to them. Josefina, a woman from Colombia, said, “Come on in to get a massage!” I explained that I was researching my ancestors and not there for a massage. She laughed and said, “Are you really looking for someone from a hundred years ago?”

be fronts for prostitution, and sexual trysts supposedly took place in the back rooms. A 2004 exhibition in Zurich depicted prostitution and tobacco stores: “Covering 1875 to 1925, (the exhibition) tells in graphic detail the story of an often-sordid aspect of the Belle Epoque, when it was considered normal for well-to-do men to visit brothels. . . . After the official closure of brothels in 1898, many of the women found jobs in cigar shops. Each shop had an adjoining backroom where it was possible to buy more than cheroots and other tobacco products.”¹²

Critical of her divorce, poverty, and job, officials required Dorothea to outplace her children. To avoid the auction block, Dorothea voluntarily sent them to live in Elsau and Winterthur. After 1895, there are no photos of Dorothea with her children until they were in their teens, so it seems likely that the mother and children were apart for at least a decade. Paula Craige, one of Dorothea’s great-grandchildren, reflected on the dilemma faced by divorced women: “Dorothea managed to survive by whatever means necessary in a repressive Calvinist society where options to earn a living for a single mother were few.”¹³

Three years after her children were sent away, Dorothea married Rémy Maul, a Swiss-French man. The couple had one child, Robert, and left Le Paquis. Around 1910, Dorothea was reunited with her children, and the three teenagers met their step-father, also known as “Papa Maul.” Dorothea died on October 17, 1924.

Dorothea’s eldest child, Rudolf, worked on a dairy farm in Elsau, a municipality in the canton of Zurich. After his foster placement ended, he took a job with Sulzer, an engineering company based in Winterthur, became a pipefitter, and helped construct a water tunnel for the Amsteg power station in the Reuss Valley. Later, Sulzer sent him to work on projects in Finland, Spain, and Russia. On July 28, 1914, the

¹² Richard Dawson, May 3, 2004. “Exhibition looks back at prostitution in Zurich.” <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/exhibition-looks-back-at-prostitution-in-zurich/3792732> (Last accessed July 8, 2022).

¹³ Paula Craige, Dec. 19, 2021, interview with the author.

day the Russian Empire entered World War I, he fled St. Petersburg and moved to Winterthur. It was there that he met his wife, Emma Wiesendanger, and raised their children, Emmy, Lilly and Ruedi. In 1920, Emmy married Angelo Arcon and one of their children is the author's colleague and cousin, Urs. Ruedi married Marie Donner and they had three children, Eliane, Adrian and Bernard, all of whom live near Aarberg.

One day in 1914, while working as a nanny in Winterthur, Dorothea's oldest daughter, Dora, met two Americans, Rector Thomas Wells and his wife, Annie, from Minneapolis, Minnesota. The couple, who founded the Wells Settlement House,¹⁴ imagined that Dora would be a fine companion for their daughter, Mary, and invited her to come with them to the United States. After years of foster care, little income, and no home, Dora imagined she would find success and happiness. Such was not the case; in fact, her setbacks mirrored what her mother, Dorothea, suffered.

Dora's son, Rudy, described what happened: "It may have been her language facility . . . that brought her to the attention of the Wells, a wealthy American family then on a grand tour of Europe with their rather spoiled and willful children, in that first decade of the twentieth century. They hired (Dora) as governess and primarily companion for their daughter, Mary, close to Nana's age, and promptly and without too much difficulty prevailed on her to sail off to the United States in their company."¹⁵ At age 24, Dora boarded the *Kaiserin Auguste Victoria* in Hamburg and, on May 30, 1914, she landed on Ellis Island in New York. In Minneapolis, she suffered "frequent spells of homesickness for her beloved Swiss Alps," and, when the Wells returned to Switzerland a year later, Dora decided to "(terminate) her services . . . without reluctance." Her son, Rudy, wrote that she had "no intention of visiting the United States ever again."¹⁶

¹⁴ "It All Began with a Sewing Machine." <https://wellsfound.org/additional-pages/> (Last accessed Aug. 5, 2022).

¹⁵ Rudy W. Fischer, Apr. 1983, "Tito Craige's Testimonial to NANA, Addendum and Errata," (p. 1).

¹⁶ Fischer, op. cit. (p. 2).

An invitation from Romola de Pulszky, the wife of ballet dancer Vaslav Nijinsky, was sufficient for Dora to re-consider her vow and, in 1915, she returned to New York. She worked as an attendant for the Nijinskys' daughter, Kyra, and apparently enjoyed her life with the famous couple. As the Nijinskys prepared for a U.S. tour, Dora met a bellhop named Paul Emil Fischer (December 28, 1890-April 1950), a German immigrant who had arrived in New York on June 10, 1914. Paul and Dora were married in Jersey City, New Jersey, on December 23, 1916. They had two children, Rudy Warner (b. Nov. 27, 1917) and the author's mother, Hazel (b. Sept. 25, 1921). Dora became a naturalized U.S. citizen on July 7, 1921.

Paul Fischer's job required him to be absent for months at a time. When he returned home, "he was abusive of (Dora), mentally and physically, complaining bitterly of household bills, lack of freedom, etc."¹⁷ The family followed Paul to Detroit, Cincinnati, and Minneapolis, but, when he announced a move to Dallas, Dora filed for and obtained a divorce. Soon thereafter, she was so desperate for support that she remarried him, only to divorce once again. She raised her two children, both of whom graduated from the University of Minnesota. Rudy later went to law school and Hazel became a registered nurse and enlisted as an Army nurse. Hazel was ordered to duty in Denver, where she met her future husband, Dr. Ernest Craig. By 1951, they had four children, the eldest of whom is the author.

In the mid-1960s, Dora moved to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where her daughter and four grandchildren lived. The author can recall his grandmother's Swiss pastries, stories of the Alps, and the admonition "to have more butter and a little bit of meat. I don't want you to die of TB!" The grandchildren were impressed that Dora could name every mountain on a Swiss calendar, her favorites being the Jungfrau and the Matterhorn. One evening, she sang a song which went something like this: "Lovers meet on Alpine peaks because mountains never share their secrets." Sarah Craig recalled how Dora

¹⁷ Fischer, *op. cit.* (p. 9).

“would make delicious dishes in her apartment, bragging about how much butter was included. She thought it was good to have some plumpness to ward off sickness. She would tell us stories of Switzerland that we loved to listen to, but her voice and accent were so melodious that it was impossible not to doze off.”¹⁸

Dora never mentioned her mother, her siblings, the tobacco store, Le Paquis, the foster home or her husband, Paul. Towards the end of her life, however, she shared an incident that occurred after she was reunited with her mother:

My mother married Rémy Maul. His last name rhymed with ‘pole.’ We loved him very much and I called him ‘Papa.’ Mother was strict, so I was glad to have a Papa. The two of them bought a piano with ‘Mozart’ carved into it. Papa hired a handsome Italian music teacher who gave me lessons in the back room of the restaurant. Papa would sit near the door to observe, but sometimes the door was shut. One day we were supposed to be practicing the scales. The teacher, as was often the case, joked with me about the small size of my fingers and how they were not able to reach the keys. ‘I will have to stretch them,’ he said, and he held my fingers and pulled on them. On this day, he reached over and kissed me. Just then Papa opened the door and said, ‘Get out! That’s not what we paid you for!’ The man was paid but did not come again. Mother asked me why I didn’t push him away. I said it was not my fault, since I was too young and didn’t want to do anything. As a result, they did not trust me alone. They would not send me to music school and went with me when I went outside.”¹⁹

The author recalled dinners: “There was no dining room table in her apartment in Chapel Hill, so we would roll out her circular folding table, all the while singing: ‘Roll out the barrel, we’ll have

¹⁸ Sarah Craige, Dec. 1, 2021, interview by the author.

¹⁹ Interview notes by the author.

a barrel of fun . . .’ We dined on buttery roesti potatoes and lemon squares while marveling at (her) sweet disposition. She was a perfect grandmother, almost an angel. Many years later, as her health declined, she despaired because cans of food were out of date, grasshoppers lived in her oven, and slugs covered her stoop. I tossed out the cans, dealt with the slugs and grasshoppers and took her in my Plymouth Valiant through the countryside. One time I drove into a ditch, and she exclaimed, ‘Don’t worry one bit! It doesn’t matter at all!’²⁰

Paula Craige recalled her grandmother’s skill with handwork and how she accompanied Dora as she passed from life to death:

When Nana arrived from Minneapolis with her old-timey, purple suitcase, she brought us chocolates with pictures of Switzerland. Nana was a fantastic knitter, making mittens, sweaters and Afghan blankets that are enjoyed today. Her tatting (lace making), cross stitching and embroidery were superfine. She listened to opera every Sunday on the radio. Her handwriting was exquisite. As she got weaker, I would climb into her bed and lay down next to her. Since she was tired and forgetful, she would say a sentence and repeat it. Over and over, this sentence became her mantra of dying and good-bye. Nana said, ‘I love you.’ I said, ‘I love you.’ Nana looked at me and said: ‘I love you.’ ‘I love you,’ I said.’ She died in my arms.’²¹

Dora Fischer died in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, on August 16, 1980, at age 89.

Discussion about Outplacement of Children

Why did governments take children from their mothers? What was the goal of the outplacements? How did the parents and children

²⁰ Author’s notes.

²¹ Craige, Paula. Interview by the author on Dec. 19, 2021.

survive the emotional burden of separation and loneliness?²² In 1989, the forced outplacement of a mother's children was condemned by Article 7 of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that a child has "the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents."²³ Prior to 1989, civil authorities in Switzerland, Canada, and the United States had declared that certain parents were morally, financially, or culturally incapable of raising their children and ordered them to be placed with foster families or in boarding schools. In Switzerland, "Swiss authorities . . . targeted the children of single mothers and others whom they considered to have fallen into 'moral destitution.'"²⁴ The policy was designed primarily to punish poor, divorced mothers and create a pool of labor. Canada's government authorities seized indigenous children, placed them in residential schools and attempted to erase their culture: "More than 150,000 children were sent to residential schools, which Canada's first prime minister supported to, in his words, 'sever children from the tribe' and 'civilize' them."²⁵ In the United States, authorities moved Native children to boarding schools and banned their tribal language. U.S. cavalry captain Richard Henry Pratt had "the mindset under which the U.S. forced tens of thousands of Native American children to attend 'assimilation' boarding schools in the late nineteenth century" and declared, "Kill the Indian in him and save the man."²⁶

²² Mothers who put children up for adoption do so *voluntarily*; adoption agencies confirm that the birth mother agrees and that the new home provides adequate financial and emotional support.

²³ United Nations General Assembly on Nov. 20, 1989, General Assembly Resolution 44/25. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

²⁴ Associate Press, "Swiss pay out \$4.9M to people taken from parents as children," July 9, 2015. <https://www.ksl.com/article/35423129/swiss-pay-out-49m-to-people-taken-from-parents-as-children> (Last accessed Aug. 5, 2022).

²⁵ Anderson Cooper, Feb. 6, 2022, "Canada's unmarked graves: How residential schools carried out 'cultural genocide' against indigenous children." See <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/canada-residential-schools-unmarked-graves-indigenous-children-60-minutes-2022-02-06/> (Last accessed Aug. 5, 2022).

²⁶ Becky Little. Updated Nov. 1, 2018, original Aug. 16, 2017. "How Boarding Schools Tried to "Kill the Indian" through Assimilation." <https://www.history.com/news/how-boarding-schools-tried-to-kill-the-indian-through-assimilation> (Last accessed Aug. 5, 2022).

Unfortunately, the practice of seizing children from birth parents seems not to have disappeared. A recent article in *Forbes* quoted Ukraine's Human Rights Commissioner, Lyudmila Denysova, who said that "more than 121,000 children have been forcibly deported to Russia over recent weeks . . ." ²⁷

Conclusions

The Hürlimann clan lived for centuries in Walchwil, Zug, but, in 1895, one member of the family, Dorothea, chose to move to Pennsylvania and later to Geneva. In Philadelphia, she and her husband failed to make a living as immigrants, so they returned to Europe. After their bitter divorce, city officials judged Dorothea to be an unfit mother, and she was forced to send her three children to foster homes. Though called a "whore" by her husband and condemned by a Calvinist government, she refused to give up. Ultimately, despite marital, cultural, and legal obstacles, she remarried, and her children prospered in Switzerland and the United States. Some of Dorothea's descendants judged her to be a failure, but, as we look at the larger picture of her country's history and culture, we can see that, despite all odds, she succeeded in re-building her family and leaving behind a beautiful legacy of tenacity and courage.

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²⁷ Ewelina U. Ochab, Apr. 10, 2022, "Ukrainian Children Forcibly Transferred and Subjected To Illegal Adoptions <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2022/04/10/ukrainian-children-forcibly-transferred-and-subjected-to-illegal-adoptions/?sh=3678544430e0> (Last accessed Aug. 5, 2022).

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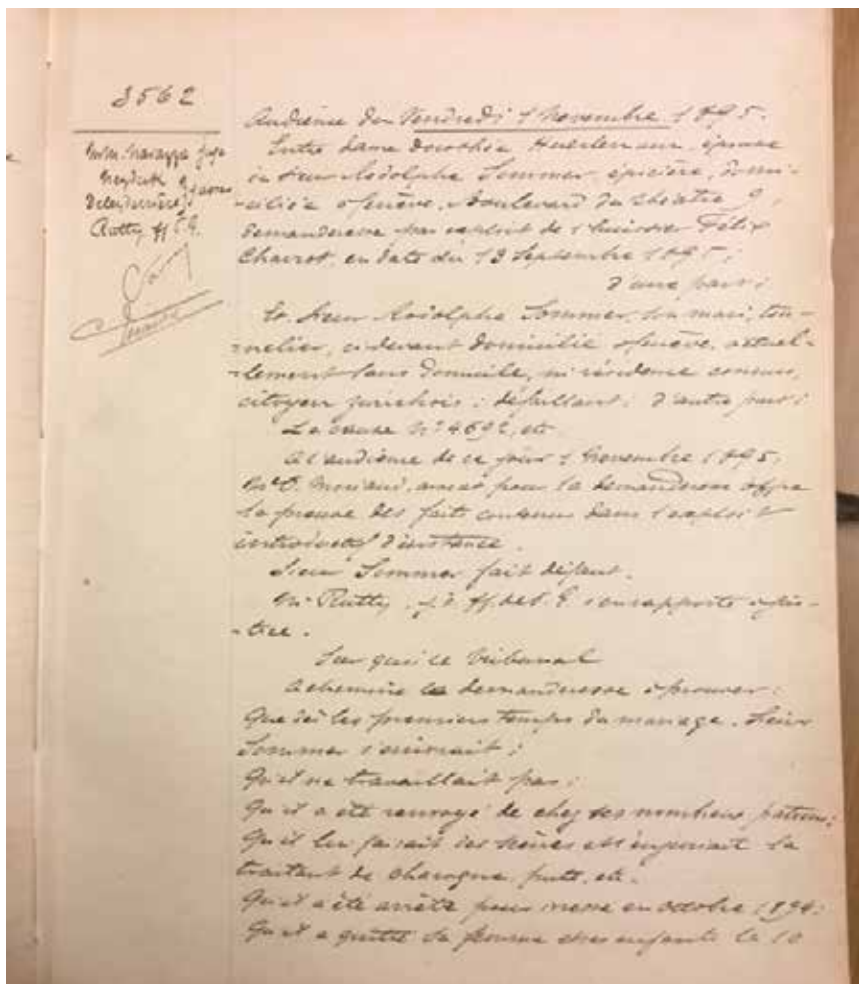
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1886 Wedding photo of Dorothea and first husband, Rudolf Sommer, in Philadelphia. Credit: in possession of the author.



Divorce decree, November 7, 1895, Geneva archives. Credit: Author.



Archivist searching for family records, Geneva. Credit: Author.



1907 Dora (in back) had been outplaced with the Heller family in Winterthur. Here she is working as a tutor with the Heller children and other students. Credit: In possession of the Author.



After more than ten years, Dorothea was reunited with Elise, Rudolf, and Dora, in Geneva—ca1909. Credit: In possession of the Author.



Dorothea and second husband, Rémy Maul, in Geneva, ca1920. Credit:

In possession of the Author.



1916 Engagement party of Dora Sommer and Paul Fischer, Jersey City, New Jersey. Credit: In possession of the Author.



Dora and Paul Fischer with children Rudy and Hazel, Minneapolis, Minnesota, ca1935. Credit: In possession of the Author.



1949 Dora with grandchild Burton and the author. Credit: In possession of the Author.



Hazel Fischer Craige with the author, Burton, Sarah, and Paula Craige, North Carolina, 1953. Credit: In possession of the Author.



Author at address of Dorothea's tobacco store, 52 Rue de Monthoux, Geneva, 2019. Credit: Photo by Urs Arcon, used with permission.



*Author's cousin, Urs Arcon, Locarno, 2019. Credit:
In possession of the Author.*



*2019 Walchwil genealogist Franz Hürlimann.
Credit: Kim Craige, used
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