

Obituary for Elvira Lorenzi-Ortner

March 10, 1941 - August 1, 2024

by Andreas Lorenzi (Son) / Vienna, August 19, 2024

My mother Elvira was born on March 10, 1941, in the midst of World War II, as the younger of two daughters of Rosa and Placido Lorenzi.

She spent her childhood away from the increasingly uncertain situation in the capital, staying with her grandmother in Gastein. She returned home to the 7th district to attend primary and secondary school, where her German and history lessons were taught, among others, by a young Dr. Helmut Zilk (*later to be Mayor of Vienna*).

Elvira's childhood dream was to one day stand on stage. She wanted to pursue this passion, but her prudent mother, Rosa, encouraged her to first train in the family's trades, commerce and cutlery, which were vital to their business. Thus, following in her mother's footsteps—who had continued to run the business and workshop as a widow after the early death of her husband Placido—Elvira became the second woman in her class to complete the cutlery apprenticeship.

It was during this time that she gained admirers, some of whom would later become very helpful in her second career.

As a newly certified retail and cutlery journeyman, my mother applied for the entrance exam at the Academy of Music and was promptly accepted into the vocal studies program. With this second qualification in hand, she followed her engagements to Innsbruck, Freiburg im Breisgau, and Bern. Always in close contact with her proud mother, she officially took over the family business in 1974, while still pursuing her singing career.

Rosa Lorenzi, suddenly faced with raising her two daughters, Rosita and Elvira, alone in a Vienna still bearing the scars of war, adopted a progressive mindset for that time: "I work like a man, so I live like one too!" she would say. She closed the business for two full months each year (May and September) and retreated to her chosen island, Ischia, for rest and recuperation.

It's no surprise that Rosa handed over the business to her daughter Elvira when she officially retired, although she continued to work for more than ten years.

A profound change in Elvira's life came with my birth, bringing her new happiness and fulfillment: I was born exactly on her 40th birthday. After three years of maternity leave, my mother left the world of operetta behind for good and dedicated herself to her second career, which many of you may be more familiar with.

While my grandmother had primarily run the small business out of the grinding workshop—like most others, we never had our own production—my mother gradually shifted the predominantly household goods and tableware inventory to focus on high-quality cutting tools.

Upon the recommendation of a longtime customer, she became aware of the emerging knife-making scene in the United States and began attending trade shows there in the early 1990s.

My mother introduced the first modern pocket knives from then-new companies Spyderco and Benchmade not only to Austria but to Europe as well. She was also inducted as an “Associate Member” into the American Knifemakers Guild.

As the business flourished, she brought on board Konrad Köchler and Alfred Bucik, the salespeople and sharpeners who are still with us today, in 1994 and 1995. A decade later, it was my turn, and in 2005, I had the honor of taking over the family business, which was already 170 years old at the time, into its sixth generation. But that is another story.

Fortunately, my mother was able to enjoy her nearly 20 years of retirement to the fullest and remained highly active:

First, with her late husband Peter, and later with a renewed dedication to music—she spent many years working with the “Live-Music-Now” association, mentoring young artists at performance venues for audiences who cannot attend concert halls.

In 2010, she remarried her youth acquaintance and lifelong love, Dieter. Together, they traveled to many countries—India even multiple times—and continued to enrich their lives through language and cultural studies until the very end. I am deeply grateful to my stepfather for his loving care and boundless affection for his “life student.”

I am pleased that my mother, with her joyful and vibrant spirit, was able to bring a smile to so many of your faces. This is exactly how we should all remember her!

*“Bright days, don't cry that they are over,
smile that they were.” (Confucius)*

In this difficult time, I would especially like to thank my wife Katharina, without whose selfless support we would not be where we are today, and our daughter Carolina, who has often had to go without us.

Two strong women before me—two strong women beside and behind me—what could possibly go wrong?

With love and gratitude,

Andreas Lorenzi & Family