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Plan Early for Greatness

'A man who has been the indisputable favourite of his mother keeps for life the feeling of a conqueror, that confidence of success that often induces real success.'

SIGMUND FREUD, 1917

Sigismund Schlomo Freud was born on 6 May 1856 in the city of Freiberg, Moravia, in what was then part of Austria-Hungary (Freiberg is now called Příbor and lies within the Czech Republic). He was the first child of the marriage of Jacob Freud, a moderately successful wool merchant, and Amalia Nathansohn. Jacob was considerably older than his wife, having been previously married. Already a father of two, he would go on to have six further children with Amalia.

A year after Sigi (as the family called him) was born, a brother (named Julius) came along. Julius invoked feelings of jealousy and resentment in his older brother and Julius' death in 1858 would cause Sigi lingering feelings of guilt in years to come. Nonetheless, Freud came to regard his early years in Freiberg as, overall, a period of tranquillity and happiness. Writing in 1931, he said of Freiberg, 'Of one thing I am certain: deep within me, although overlaid, there continues to live the happy child from Freiberg, the first-born son of a youthful mother, the boy who received from this air, from this soil, the first indelible impressions.'

Plan Early for Greatness

However, this time in paradise was to be short-lived. With Jacob's business faltering, the family moved to Leipzig in 1859 and to Vienna the following year, when Sigi was four years old. Vienna was one of the great capitals of Europe and then at the peak of its power, yet Freud found it dismal and unwelcoming. In particular, he came to resent the undercurrent of anti-Semitism that was building a head of steam at the time. Although his parents were largely non-observant, Freud experienced for the first time the animosity of strangers towards his Jewish heritage. As we shall see, it would have a huge impact on the rest of his life, both professionally and personally.

His feelings towards Vienna were also coloured by the fact that the Freuds spent a large period of their stay living in stifling poverty. Yet for all that, the young Sigi enjoyed a standard of life superior to that of his siblings, on account of his being the favourite of his mother. She took to calling him 'My golden Sigi', and he enjoyed the best of the little that there was. By 1866, for example, when there were two adults and seven children to accommodate, Sigi was the only one to have his own room, and where the other children had to make do with candles, he was allowed a gas lamp.

This was in part because he was already emerging as an extraordinary scholar. After initially being schooled at home, he entered the Leopoldstadter Communal Gymnasium (a German grammar school) and sat at the