

## CITY

## And 40 years ago in Vienna there was a girl...



WAYNE CUDDINGTON, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Gabi Kaindl, mother of five now living in Ottawa, wears a traditional special-occasion Austrian dirndl-style dress. As a young woman, she attended balls in Vienna wearing similar dresses.

BY JENNI LEE CAMPBELL

They are people who love to dress up and dance. They embrace a culture where staying up late to celebrate is, well, celebrated.

She's been in Canada for five years, but the influences of Gabi Kaindl's Austrian upbringing are still with her.

The Kanata mother of four and part-time German instructor made her "debut" at a ball in Vienna as a 17-year-old. That thrill will return tonight when she walks through the doors at the National Gallery for her first Viennese Winter Ball in Ottawa.

The chance for people to dress in all their finery and waltz the night away comes only once a year to our snowy capital, but the balls Mrs. Kaindl attended as a young woman were anything but few and far between.

During ball season in Vienna there are more than 300 balls in the city, some of them drawing as many as 5,000 people. Performing the polonaise is practically a rite of passage for many teens, who start taking ballroom dancing lessons at 15 or 16.

Mrs. Kaindl can recall the excitement of her first ball, a black tie event to which she wore a chiffon and taffeta dress with a full skirt. Her older sister, who studied fashion design, made it for her.

She had passed her dancing test and knew all the steps, and now it was her first time being allowed to stay up all night with her friends. North American balls usually last only until midnight, but Viennese balls go until 5 or 6 a.m.

As a debutante, Mrs. Kaindl performed quadrilles, waltzes and, of course, the polonaise, seven or eight times more that year at various other balls.

On a November day several years later, she met her husband in a small town outside Vienna. She was 24 and running

youth groups for the Catholic Church. He was a few years younger, and a great dancer. By ball season a month later, they were inseparable and attended balls together every weekend for the whole winter.

The frigid months between Christmas and Lent — called Carnival — are when almost all Viennese balls take place, Mrs. Kaindl says. It stems from a long tradition of preparing for the austerity of Lent, so it's no surprise that the revelry goes late, the champagne flows and the food is rich.

Balls were historically a way for aristocrats and nobility to introduce their sheltered daughters into society. The tradition, if not the intention behind it, lives on at Ottawa's Viennese Winter Ball.

Two of Mrs. Kaindl's sons are partnered with debutantes who will wear white ballgowns and together perform the first dance of the night. Though normally more interested in Metallica than Strauss, her sons are enjoying the experience. Her young daughters have heard all the stories and can't wait until they're old enough to go.

Mrs. Kaindl is proud her children are carrying on a long tradition. Born on a farm in Baden-Vienna, she can remember playing dress-up with her mother's ballgowns and high heels. In the post-war years, money for fabric was scarce, so her mother once attended a ball in a dress made out of curtains — visions of

*The Sound of Music* and the Von Trapp children.

At school, Mrs. Kaindl is excited about planning a Carnival celebration for her young students. She plays accordion and will teach them some basic dances.

She has also planned a buffet with a mixture of Canadian and traditional Austrian foods, including *faschingskräpfen*, an indulgent jelly doughnut popular during Carnival.