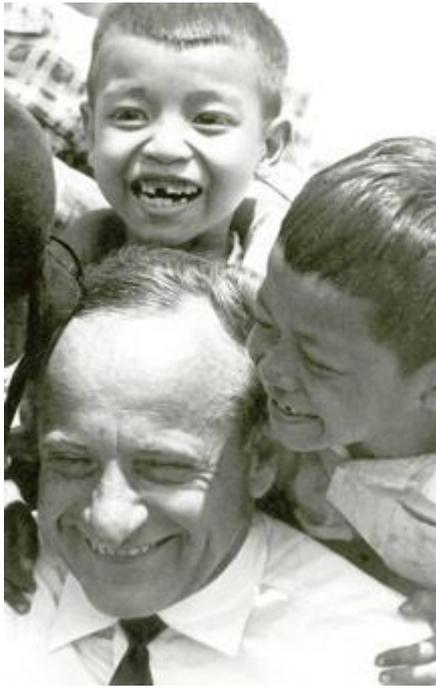




**SOS
KINDERDORF
INTERNATIONAL**

CURRICULUM VITAE

Hermann Gmeiner, founder of SOS Children's Villages



Hermann Gmeiner, 1968 in Saigon/Vietnam

Photo: SOS Archives

Hermann Gmeiner was born to a big family of farmers in Vorarlberg (Austria) on 23 June 1919. His mother died while he was still a young boy, and his eldest sister Elsa took on the task of caring for the smallest of the children. He was a talented child and won a scholarship to attend grammar school.

Having experienced the horrors of war himself as a soldier in Russia, he was then confronted with the isolation and suffering of the many war orphans and homeless children as a child welfare worker after the end of the Second World War. In his unswerving conviction that help can never be effective as long as the children have to grow up without a home of their own, he set about implementing his idea for SOS Children's Villages.

With just 600 Austrian Schillings (approx. 40 US Dollars) in his pocket Hermann Gmeiner established the SOS Children's Village Association in 1949, and in the same year the foundation stone was laid for the first SOS Children's Village in Imst, in the Austrian Tyrol.

His work with the children and development of the SOS Children's Village organisation kept Hermann Gmeiner so busy that he finally decided to discontinue his medical degree course.

In the following decades his life was inseparably linked with his commitment to a family-centred child-welfare concept based on the four pillars of a mother, a house, brothers and sisters, and a village. Given his exclusive focus on the need to help abandoned children, the rest of his biography reads like the history of SOS Children's Villages themselves. He served as village director in Imst, organised the construction of further SOS Children's Villages in Austria, and helped to set up SOS Children's Villages in many other countries of Europe.

In 1960, SOS-Kinderdorf International was established in Strasbourg as the umbrella organisation for SOS Children's Villages with Hermann Gmeiner as the first president.



In the following years the activities of SOS Children's Villages spread beyond Europe. The sensational "grain of rice" campaign raised enough funds to permit the first non-European SOS Children's Village to be built in Daegu, Korea in 1963, and SOS Children's Villages on the American and African continents followed.

At the SOS Children's Village Poá in Brazil

Photo: A. Gabriel

By 1985 the result of Hermann Gmeiner's work was a total of 233 SOS Children's Villages in 85 countries. In recognition of his services to orphaned and abandoned children he received numerous awards. However, he was always at pains to stress that it was only thanks to the support of millions of people that it had been possible to achieve the goal of providing abandoned children with a permanent home, and that still applies today.

Hermann Gmeiner died in Innsbruck in 1986. He is buried at the SOS Children's Village in Imst.