

In Touch

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE
JEWISH MUSEUM HOHENEMS, INC.

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Letter from the President

CLAUDE A. ROLLIN, ESQ.

Dear Friends and Supporters of AFJMH:

The Board of Trustees recently asked me to once again serve as president of the AFJMH, upon the resignation of **Tim Hanford**, who served so ably as president during the last few years (Thanks, Tim!). I told the board that it would be my distinct honor and privilege to do so. After all, it's a great organization with a wonderful mission that my late father helped found more than a quarter century ago.

In this issue of the newsletter, there are several fascinating pieces, including two that detail the harrowing escape of the Kreutner family from Austria to Switzerland after an elderly member of the family was brutally beaten by the Nazis. There is also a letter, written in the fall of 1942, by 22 Swiss school girls to the Swiss Federal Council protesting the fact that a Jewish family who managed to escape from Nazi Germany was subsequently apprehended and sent back across the border to certain death.

There are several additional interesting articles in the newsletter including one about the Museum's current featured exhibition, entitled "*History, Presence and Future of Jewish Museums – 'Taxidermied Jews?'*" which is running through **April 2023**. It also refers to several previous JMH exhibitions now on display in other museums throughout Europe, a testament to the quality of our Museum's exhibitions!

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the Museum and its Director, **Hanno Loewy**, on receiving the 2022 Austrian Museum Award from the Museum Advisory Board of the Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sports in Austria. The Jewish Museum Hohenems received this award once before and is, apparently, the first museum in all of Austria to receive this award twice! That is quite an honor, indeed, and you can read the statement that was submitted for the award in this newsletter.

As this year concludes, I am sure there are many demands on your time and resources. However, I encourage you to take the time to read the articles in this newsletter. They will remind you of our shared history. I also trust you will consider making a tax-deductible contribution to the AFJMH (over and above the annual dues) so that we may continue to provide additional financial support to the Museum.

Finally, I want to acknowledge and thank **Uri Taenzer** and **Sue Shimer** for all their efforts to keep our organization going strong and for handling the many matters that have required our attention. Along with our Board and members, I am especially thankful to **Jennifer Shimer Piper** for her dedication and outstanding work in putting together this excellent newsletter.

I wish all of you a happy, healthy and prosperous 2023!

Sincerely,
Claude Rollin
President

A Letter from the Director to Friends

DR. HANNO LOEWY

Dear friends of the Jewish Museum!

In 1991, the year of its opening, our museum was honored by the Austrian Museums Award. Now we are the first museum to receive this precious award for the second time. This means a lot to us and is a great encouragement for the whole team. Please read the statement of the jury of experts that decided to present the Austrian museum award to us in this newsletter.

After two and a half years of the pandemic our visitors are back, including the school kids and students, who joined us this summer for the summer university again. The museum is reaching out to new levels of cooperation both with locals and the international museum community.

While we enjoy this regained public attendance and the immediate communication with our more and more diverse audiences, we know that difficult times are waiting for all of us.

Russia brought the war back to Europe and the economic and social crisis that hit the whole world poses uncomfortable questions. And it's exactly those questions that we are asking our visitors in our exhibitions and programs. Hoping for better answers than those we might be able to give ourselves in these challenging times.

Please stay in touch with us. Your support is the most valuable of all and your trust and interest in our work is the most encouraging resource we have.

The Jewish Museum Hohenems receives the Austrian Museum Award 2022

The statement of the Museum Advisory Board of the Austrian Ministry of Culture for the Jewish Museum Hohenems as Museum Laureate 2022 reads as follows:

"The Jewish Museum Hohenems is a small historical museum in a small community in the far west of Austria. However, the significance of the museum extends far beyond the town or region.

The museum tells the story of a diaspora community, but does not remain in the past; instead, its exhibitions address current issues and questions that should be asked even in far-flung places.

The location and its setting: The Jewish Museum Hohenems is entered through a small garden in the heart of the city. This garden is used as a space for conversation and dwelling - the museum is designed as an open institution that invites travelers as well as local residents. The house itself, a 19th-century villa, remains as a lounge, a space for discourse, and a place for development. The museum's educational programs, its engagement with the public, and its interaction with the residents of the city and the region are central to the museum's activities.

Under the direction of Hanno Loewy, he and his team have succeeded in establishing the museum as a place in the midst of a European network of other museum and cultural institutions and have maintained it for many years. In doing so, Hanno Loewy is both host and enabler when it comes to bringing together, with great dedication, both intellectual potential and

the funding necessary for its operation. Thus, he has not only succeeded in attracting sponsors (international as well as from the region), but also in bringing Felicitas Heimann Jelinek, who as curator is one of the country's weightiest voices, to the house again and again at defining moments.

Last but not least, the debate about the institution of the museum itself finds an anchor point in Hanno Loewy. With the initiative "museum denken" (think museum), a current and essential process of discussion and definition of museological and museum-political questions began at the Jewish Museum Hohenems last year.

The Museum Hohenems is a courageous museum that does not mince its words, likes to bring provocative questions into the field, and is open to discourse with all interested parties. The importance of the Jewish Museum Hohenems for the Austrian museum landscape is undisputed.

The Museum Advisory Board of the Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Public Service and Sport therefore recommends the Jewish Museum Hohenems as the winner of the Austrian Museum Award in 2022."



Museum Director **Hanno Loewy** receives 2022 Austrian Museum Award

News from the Museum: Exhibitions and Projects

Our exhibition about the History, Presence and Future of Jewish Museums – “*Taxidermied Jews?*” – is **running through April 2023** and will move to Dresden after that. This will be shown in the city that in 1734 saw the installation of a so called “Jews Cabinet” by the Prince of Saxonia, August the Strong, who included “things Jewish” in his “Wunderkammer”, his chamber of curiosities. The wunderkammer included a “stuffed rabbi” as the writer of a travelog. Jewish Museums are spaces of ambivalence, whether they are constructed and interpreted by Jews or non-Jews, representing stereotypes or more sophisticated views of their subject, allowing diversity and contradictions. In one way or the other, they result from conflicting fantasies of “what is Jewish,” “what it means to be Jewish”, and not least, what Judaism means for the rest of the world. In the end all these conflicting ideas are represented in those artifacts that we collect and install in exhibitions, shown to audiences around the world.

Our exhibition about Holocaust witnesses and their testimonies, the “*end of testimony?*”, will open in **Vienna on January 26, 2023**, in the “Haus der Geschichte Österreichs” in the Hofburg, right next to the balcony from where Hitler in March 1938 announced the “Anschluss”. And as we did already in the presentations in Hohenems, Flossenbürg, Munich, Augsburg and Berlin we will

show (and interpret) interviews with survivors with connections to the place, in this case to Vienna.

The crisis of Europe, caught in a limbo between reemerging nationalism, xenophobia and a war that collectively challenge its foundations – is at the heart of our exhibition “*The Last Europeans. Jewish Perspectives on the Crises of an Idea*”. After Hohenems and Vienna the exhibition now resides in the Jewish Museum of Munich till **May 21, 2023**. A book accompanying the show was released just recently by the “*Europäische Verlagsanstalt*”, the publishing house founded in 1946 in Hamburg to foster European ideas. It was among the first to publish books about Jewish history and thought in Germany after the Holocaust.

The founders of the “*European publishing house*” happened to be close friends of **Hilda Monte**, one of the many Jewish refugees and resistance fighters, prisoners of war and forced laborers who tried to cross the border between Vorarlberg and Switzerland between 1938 and 1945. Hilda Monte, a Jewish socialist who was on a dangerous resistance mission in Vorarlberg right before the end of the war, was shot to death in April 1945, close to Feldkirch and only two weeks before the allied troops reached Hohenems and the region. Others had better luck, and made it into Switzerland, often with the help of courageous escape helpers.

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New Publications

“Ausgestopfte Juden?”

Geschichte, Gegenwart und Zukunft Jüdischer Museen (“*Taxidermied Jews?*” History, Present and Future of Jewish Museums)

Ed. Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek and Hannes Sulzenbacher

Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen 2022 | 448 pages | 120 illustrations 32,00 € | ISBN 978-3-8353-5259-9

When the then chairman of the Jewish Community of Vienna, Paul Grosz, was asked many years ago what he thought of the founding of a Jewish Museum, he asked a bitter counter-question. Whether Jews should be marveled at there “*like stuffed Indians?*”

Today, there are over 120 Jewish museums worldwide. However, even the definition of their designating adjective is by no means uniform. There are those to whom the institution itself is a Jewish one, to others the institution’s topic is Judaism – from the most diverse perspectives. For some, the adjective “Jewish” is unambiguous, for others, it is not just ambiguous but even full of contradictions. The question of definitions and perspectives are decisive for content and practices of museums – and thus also on the sovereignty of interpretation of what is “Jewish” in a social public sphere. The exhibition illuminates the history and present of the institution “Jewish Museum,” its collections and its canon – and thus reflects the urgent question of its role in society in the future.

With contributions by:

Iskandar Ahmed Abdalla, Avril Alba, Inka Bertz, Micha Brumlik, Gottfried Fliedl, Olga Gershenson, Reesa Greenberg, Alina Gromova, Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek, Shelley Hornstein, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Martin Kohlbauer, Cilly Kugelman, Hanno Loewy, Léontine Meijer-van Mensch, Duygu Özkan, Daniela Schmid, Emile Schrijver, Jeffrey Shandler, Barbara Staudinger, Hannes Sulzenbacher, Vladimir Vertlib, Liliane Weissberg, Melissa Yaverbaum, Mirjam Zadoff.



Catalog accompanying the exhibition in the Jewish Museum Hohenems from June 26, 2022 until March 19, 2023 in cooperation with the Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, Dresden und Herrnhut.

Die letzten Europäer.

Jüdische Perspektiven auf die Krisen einer Idee (The Last Europeans. Jewish Perspectives on the Crises of an Idea)

Edited by Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek, Michaela Feurstein-Prasser, and Hanno Loewy

Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 2022 220 pages | 16,80€



What has become of the European idea?

And what Jewish experiences were behind the European project? Seventy-five years after the end of World War II, the Jewish Museum Hohenems, together with the Volkskundemuseum Wien and the Jewish Museum Munich, opened a debate space on the state of Europe – In the wake of new nationalism growing everywhere, which lately also pits the fantasy of a “Christian-Jewish Occident” against migrants. While populist egoism threatens the “peace project” of Europe, there is at the same time a struggle for European solidarity. This volume revolves around key figures of the European idea, attempts to realize it and its threatening dismantling, experiences of catastrophe and political initiatives, tells of its protagonists and antagonists – and shows a Europe that was and is not least a Jewish space of possibility.

With contributions and interviews by (among others):

Aleida Assmann, Ariel Brunner, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Liliana Feierstein, Ulrike Guérot, Brian Klug, Gerald Knaus, Cilly Kugelman, Michael Miller, Rainer Münz, Andrea Pető and Doron Rabinovici.



Jonathan Kreutner

(Secretary General of the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities)

My paternal grandparents, Jakob and Ida Kreutner, crossed the Old Rhine near Diepoldsau into Switzerland almost forty years to the day before I was born, on November 29, 1938. They saved themselves and my father from Nazi persecution.

They only escaped certain death thanks to the courageous intervention of a regional customs officer and the order of Police Captain Paul Grüninger. They had to leave my great-grandfather behind in Vienna. He did not survive. That was now almost 85 years ago.

My grandparents are no longer alive today. My father is 85 years old today, but he was a baby then and has no memories of the escape. Unfortunately, he cannot be here today. The journey here would have been too arduous for him, both mentally and physically. Therefore, only photos, stories and memories remain.

Escape from Vienna to Hohenems

My grandparents Jakob and Ida, both born in 1912, fled with their young son when they were 26 years old. There was no longer a home for the three of them in Vienna after they had been forced to leave behind their belongings in Vienna's Rembrandt Strasse in the second district. My grandfather Jakob had been brutally beaten by the Gestapo in front of his apartment and left unconscious. Only because the henchmen thought my grandfather was dead, they left him alone. Mother and child hid in the closet at home and were miraculously not discovered. It was the evening of November 9, 1938.

In Nazi Germany and Nazi-occupied Austria, synagogues and Jewish businesses were burning. Jews were being beaten up indiscriminately just because they were Jews. On that day, my grandparents realized that they were no longer Austrians, they were no longer tolerated as Jews in this country. On that fateful dark and cold night, they decided to leave the country in which they had grown up, whose culture they had internalized and to which they had always been loyal, without saying goodbye to their family. They left everything behind, but above all their past.

BORDER EXPERIENCES THROUGH NATIONAL SOCIALISM EXPULSION AND AN ATTEMPT AT RETURN

Speech at the opening of "Across the Border" on July 3, 2022 in Hohenems

My grandparents first fled by train to Feldkirch. They managed the 16 kilometers to Hohenems on foot, injured and with the baby, and then on to the Old Rhine, where they tried in vain several times to cross the ice-cold river. Finally, on the fourth occasion, they succeeded in crossing. That was on November 29, 1938, three weeks after their escape.

But a border policeman discovered the family and intended to send them back. My grandmother courageously confronted him and said:

"If you send me back, you'd better shoot us right here."

This sentence was burned into my memory as a child. It was told over and over again.

A Farewell Without Return

The border policeman took pity on the young woman with the baby and the seriously injured man, took them to his home and asked his boss Paul Grüninger in St. Gallen for permission to accommodate the family illegally in Switzerland according to the law of the time.

Paul Grüninger gave the border policeman Alphons Eigenmann permission. Thus my father survived with his parents, first in a labor camp, later as a stateless refugee in Zurich, until he was granted Swiss citizenship in 1955. At that time, my grandparents allegedly turned down an offer to regain Austrian citizenship, as well as an invitation to visit their old homeland again.

It was only in the 1990s, in the course of a documentary film about the flight stories on the Old Rhine, exactly 60 years after their rescue, that they were at all willing to talk about it. At that time, I also learned for the first time the scope of their fate.

Both died more than 20 years ago without ever having seen their old homeland again.

When they crossed the national border between Switzerland and Austria in the winter of 1938, they left their memories behind. For them, the border experience meant both closure and a new beginning in more ways than one.

With the border experience of Diepoldsau, my grandparents left their past behind. The last piece of Austria they were ever to see was the countryside around Hohenems. Although they lived so close to their old homeland in Zurich, they kept away from it for decades.

A Chance for the New Austria?

My story with my grandparents' Austria began here in Hohenems. To the day, almost 18 years ago, I found myself here in the Schlosspark as part of a student program.

By coincidence, I was brought closer to the country of origin of my grandparents. It was the origin of my personal examination of my own history.

In the estate of my grandparents I found certificates of origin and documents. Again and again the story was unraveled, only a few years ago again when I discovered by chance that the story of my grandparents' escape was documented in the feature film "Akte Grüninger - Die Geschichte eines Grenzgängers". Presumably, my father is the last living person to be portrayed in this film.

Finally, this year, a circle was closed. I have no direct personal experience with this country, with this Austria. But my grandparents and my father were denaturalized and expropriated here on Austrian soil. They were Austrians until that fateful day when they crossed the border here and became stateless.

85 years later, I have now decided to give the new Austria a chance. I wanted to bring back for my two young children the justice that had been denied to their great-grandparents.

One may, without forgetting the past, dare to look into the future.

In this sense, a few months ago I dared to take a central mental step for the whole family back across the border when, in accordance with the latest legal situation in Austria, I took the opportunity to obtain Austrian citizenship as a descendant of victims of the Nazi dictatorship. Since a few months I am an Austrian now, my children are as well. Almost 85 years later, history is still catching up with us. It is about late justice. But it is also about more.

My young daughter wanted to know what she had to do with Austria, and I had to explain to her that she became Austrian because her great-grandparents were no longer allowed to be.

As a young student, I dedicated an essay to the book "Weiter leben" ("Living on") by the author Ruth Klüger. It made me realize once again the annihilation of European Jewry, but also the reminder that we must never forget those who survived. We, the descendants of those who escaped the horror, testify by our continued life that the extermination could not be completed.

The Holocaust ended the lives of my great-grandparents, greatly changed those of my grandparents, shaped those of my parents for a lifetime, and left me with question marks. These questions are still with me today. They do not let me go and will probably never let me go.

You can cross borders, but you can also return to them. Boundary experiences have a longer effect, even over generations.

News from the Museum: Exhibitions and Projects (Cont'd)

Über die Grenze – Crossing the Border

The stories of refugees and their helpers (and their adversaries as well) are now represented by symbolic border stones along the bike route that leads from Bregenz into the mountains of the Silvretta. The Jewish Museum Hohenems realized this huge project together with many partners and municipalities in the region, both in Austria and Switzerland. An audio trail and a website invite people to listen to their stories, present images and documents and allow an intense confrontation with their quest for freedom or even more basically their attempt to save their lives.

On July 3, 2022, we celebrated the opening of this 100 Kilometer long memorial to the courage of refugees and their helpers on both sides of the border. Jonathan Kreutner, son and grandson of refugees who made it through Hohenems into Switzerland in 1938 (and general secretary of the Swiss Jewish Federation today) gave in his speech a moving account of the impact this story has had on his whole family until today. Please read his touching speech in this newsletter.

Stefan Keller spoke about the long road to recognition for the helpers, like Paul Grüninger, and the difficult acceptance of the refugees in Switzerland. Gabriel Heim spoke about the fate of his grandmother, who did not succeed to cross the border at Hohenems in 1942 - and died in a concentration camp. Simone Prodolliet, long time president of the immigration

committee in Switzerland, spoke about Ernest Prodolliet, her grand uncle, who as Vice Consul of Switzerland in Bregenz participated in helping refugees across the border with false papers and visa. Gerald Knaus, one of the leading European experts on Migration and the situation of refugees today, closed the round of speakers with critical remarks on the present situation of European Refugee Policy.

The audio trail was celebrated with music by Willy Geber, a Viennese composer who also crossed the border at Hohenems and with a performance of a new ensemble including refugees from Syria and other musicians experimenting with Mediterranean music traditions.

A bike rally along the trail from various locations in Vorarlberg and Switzerland brought together hundreds of people from the region, all meeting in Hohenems for the opening ceremony. Over the whole summer the Jewish Museum together with various partners offered different bike tours and theatrical hiking tours along the lake, the river and in the mountains. A program to be continued next year.

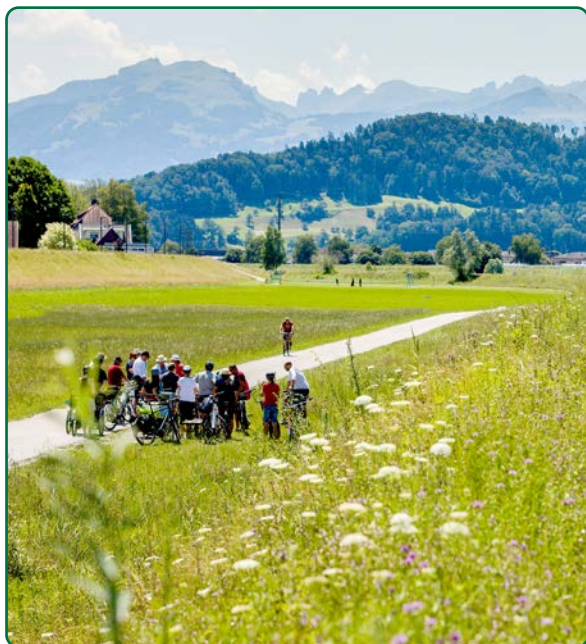
The website www.ueber-die-grenze.at / www.crossing-the-border.info will soon be online in English too and allows access also from a distance. Some of the refugee stories we are now presenting also in this newsletter and its upcoming editions.

Stay tuned for more.



Opening of "crossing-the-border" on July 3, 2022; Photo/ Dietmar Walser

News from the Museum: *(Cont'd)*



“WHEN I VISITED THE JEWISH CEMETERY, MANY THOUGHTS CAME TO ME...”

KARLA GALINDO-BARTH



Photo Courtesy of Dietmar Walser/Hohenems

Death is the most unexplainable concept that we face in life. How did my ancestors die and under what circumstances? Why did G-d choose one person to live longer than the other? Why did the person have to suffer before his or her death?

For many generations, Jews have been evoking the blessing of “Blessed is the true judge” in response to death and tragedy. The blessing is as follows: Blessed are You, L-rd our Gd, king of the universe, the True Judge.

In Judaism one may have also heard people responding to generally unpleasant news with the phrase, “This is also for the good.”

Why is a tragedy also for the good? Let me explain with a story of the Talmud:

The great Sage, Rabbi Akiva, once upon a time arrived in a city. Immediately, he looked for a place to rest; however, he did not find one. He said, “All that G-d does, He does for the good!” and he went to sleep in a field.

In the field he had with him a rooster, a donkey and one lamp.

A wind came and blew out the candle. Later a cat came and ate the rooster. And finally a lion came and ate the donkey.

Rabbi Akiva said, “All that G-d does, He does for the good!”

It turned out that marauders came and captured the residents of the city. Rabbi Akiva was saved because he did not find a

place to stay and camped outside the city and had neither candle nor rooster that would have attracted attention to him. (Talmud, Berachot 60b.)

This story illustrates how negative occurrences happen for a reason, even if that reason is not obvious, as it was in the end for Rabbi Akiva. Because of this truth, explained in this story, our sages said that we should always thank G-d for the not-so-good happenings in our life, just as we thank G-d for the good in our life.

In my case, I was not aware of my Jewish roots, I had no idea of how many of my ancestors lived in Hohenems. I always

remember with joy the stories of my grandfather in Tyrol, but I didn't know he was persecuted by the Gestapo. All this sweet and sour new data “is just for the good”; today my Jewish identity is stronger, I earned a postgraduate degree in the Holocaust and with the help of Dr. Hanno Loewy my family applied for citizenship restitution as descendants of a victim of Nazi persecution and most of us are getting our Austrian citizenship back.



August Rosenthal

My Great-great-great-grandfather
Photo Courtesy of Dietmar Walser/Hohenems



Fanny Löwenberg

My Great-great-great-grandmother
Photo Courtesy of Dietmar Walser/Hohenems

News from the Education Department: "Digital Storytelling" with young apprentices

A new project format of our education department

There is excitement in the seminar room. Six young workers in vocational training at the Collini company in Hohenems are each producing a short film on the theme of "Roots and Family". First they completed the texts and are now involved in several phases of film production. One of them is recording the sound and others are working on the visual material. In addition to the textual level, the storyboard provides the visual representation with musical accompaniment, their own photos and drawings or pictures from the internet. Care must be taken to ensure that photo and music rights are taken into account in order to legally secure a possible publication. Texts are written, photos are taken, lively discussions take place, people feel at ease.

The young people worked on "Digital Storytelling" for 5 days in May 2022. The history of their family and their very personal identity was the topic, "roots" in the broadest sense. The permanent exhibition of the museum offered an examination of a Jewish family history, and questions about origin, family, migration, identity, etc. were raised. Six volunteers signed up to take part in the workshop.

The Collini company enables its apprentices to engage in a cultural discourse during their on-the-job training. This means that they are given time off during working hours to do theatrical performances, to sing, to dance, to write, to be creative, to meet with artists and museum staff. This support of personal development has a tradition

in the company, whose founder came from Italy as a labor migrant in the 19th century and was able to gain a foothold in Hohenems, and whose descendants to this day consciously emphasize this origin in the company's history.

The JMh sees itself as a place of encounter where young people and young adults who no longer come to the museum by way of education are welcome. The cooperation with apprentices and trainers opens up new perspectives. The Collini company has been a partner and sponsor of the JMh for a long time. Apprenticeship projects are also funded by the Ministry of Education under the name K3-PROJEKTE. Kulturvermittlung mit Lehrlingen (Cultural Education with Apprentices).

The very personalized short films were shown to invited guests at the museum immediately after the intensive workshop and drew a lot of admiration.

"It was really fun", "We got to know our colleagues better", "We had a great time", "We got to know something new away from the daily work routine", "The openness that developed in the group was amazing", "I was surprised myself at how much we managed to achieve in the course of the days".....

These were just a few of the comments from the young people who were happy to come back!



Photo Courtesy: Jewish Museum Hohenems

The six apprentices **Dennis, Emilie, Muhammet Ali, Sarina, Valeria and Umurcan** with the workshop leaders **Stefanie van Felten, Sonja Wessel** and **Frank Feiner**.



Photo Courtesy: Jewish Museum Hohenems

“SUCH THINGS REMAIN IN MEMORY”—BEATEN UP IN VIENNA AND TURNED BACK SEVERAL TIMES AT THE BORDER.

The escape of the Kreutner family

“Due to blood loss, I started feeling dizzy. I collapsed, unconscious, half unconscious. My wife was inside the house, and the boy screamed since he had terrible earaches. ... And I collapsed and can still remember, half-dazed, as someone was saying: ‘Come on, let’s give him another...’ —I say this precisely the way I remember—‘We could give him another kick in the gut with the boot!’ Then one of them said: ‘No need for this. He’s no longer uttering a peep anymore.’ I’d say this was good luck. They left me alone, unconscious on the ground and bleeding, and vanished. Thinking that nothing could be done with this one anymore, impossible to take him along. ... And, ultimately, this taking along would mean concentration camp. Whether I’d still be alive today, I don’t know, but I doubt it. Then they left, and my wife came out with the boy—the boy, barely a year and a half, in her arms.”

In 1997, Jakob Kreutner told Swiss Television how Nazi thugs had maltreated him on the “Night of Broken Glass” in Vienna. Shortly after the attack, the family decided to flee to Switzerland. Several times they were turned away at the border and tried again and again.

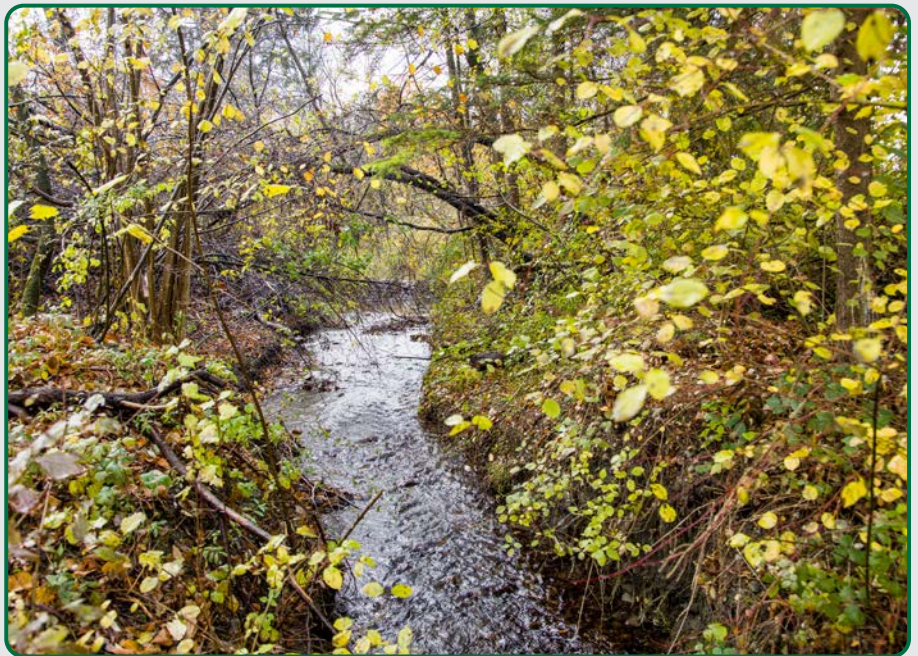
“Such things stick in one’s memory. It was snowing, the Rhine in flood, and we had to step on rocks. I don’t know, were these smuggling paths? And suddenly the boy together with the guide—he had taken the boy since the boy had screamed—slipped and then all hell broke loose. He screamed so much that it was definitely audible—ironically speaking—all the way to St. Gall. And then he says: ‘You have to go up here!’ There is a hill like almost everywhere along the border or let’s say: an embankment, and he says: ‘Go, it’s up to you now.’ And disappears. I want to stress, the man who guided us was an Austrian. From Lustenau... No, Hohenems. And he was gone. And then we went up, and the border guards were there, the Swiss border guards with capes, their weapons at the ready. Obviously, they had their instructions. And so they asked my wife—she hasn’t mentioned this in all the excitement—they asked her: ‘Where are you going?’

Then my wife replied: ‘If you send me back, then you better shoot us right here.’”

Finally, a border guard took the family with him. It was Alfons Eigenmann, whose wife insisted on taking care of the drenched people. Eigenmann himself publicized the case in a letter that appeared anonymously in Swiss newspapers. For a long time to come, the family had to fight to be allowed to stay in Switzerland. In 1948, the police told them that they could immigrate to the newly founded state of Israel. But the Kreutners stayed – and became Swiss.



The Kreutner family in 1938;
Kreutner Family Archives - JMH



At the old Rhine; Photo/ Dietmar Walser



Ida Kreutner in Vienna, before 1938
Archive of the JMH



Swiss and German Border Police at the Hohenems border post, after 1938; JMH

TWENTY-TWO RORSCHACH SCHOOLGIRLS PROTEST AGAINST SWISS REFUGEE POLICY

Rorschach, September 7, 1942

August 1942, the Swiss Federal Council finally closed the borders to Jewish refugees. The Swiss federal authorities had known since 1941 that Jews in the German Reich and in the occupied territories were being systematically murdered.

On September 7, 1942, 22 pupils from class 2c of the girls' secondary school in Rorschach wrote a letter to the Swiss Federal Council. The schoolgirls had just learned from the Ostschweizer Tagblatt that a Jewish family had managed to escape from Nazi Germany via the Jura into western Switzerland, but was subsequently apprehended and sent back across the border to certain death.

"Rorschach, September 7, 1942.

Dear Federal Councillors!

We cannot refrain from informing you that we in the schools are highly indignant that the refugees are being so heartlessly pushed back into misery. Have they actually completely forgotten that Jesus said: 'Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me'? We would never have dreamed that Switzerland, the island of peace, which wants to be merciful, would throw these shivering, freezing wretched people across the border like animals.

Will we not be like the rich man who did not see poor Lazarus. What use is it to us if we can say: Yes, in the last world war Switzerland still did something, could we only mention what good Switzerland has already done in this war, especially to the emigrants. Didn't all these people put all their hopes in our country, and what a cruel, terrible disappointment it must be to be pushed back again from where they came to meet certain death. If this goes on, we can be sure that we will still be punished. It may well be that you have received orders not to receive Jews, but it is certainly not the will of God, yet we have to obey Him more than men. Where we were called upon to collect, we did it very gladly for our homeland and willingly sacrificed our free time, so we take the liberty of asking for the admission of these poorest homeless people!

With respect and patriotic solidarity greetings:

Secondary school class 2c"¹

The Federal Council reacted. But in a different way than the students had imagined. The government obviously sensed a politically controlled revolt. Minister of Justice Eduard von Steiger personally ordered a strict investigation and interrogation of the students. On 23 October 1942, the children were questioned for two and a half hours in the presence of the president of the school board. The investigator began with **Heidi Weber**, who wrote the first draft of the letter.



The Rorschach girl's class 2c of 1942,
Photographer unknown; JMH

TWENTY-TWO RORSCHACH SCHOOLGIRLS PROTEST AGAINST SWISS REFUGEE POLICY (Cont'd)

Question: "Who wrote the letter?"

Answer: "I did"

Question: "Did anyone help you write it?"

Answer: "No, that is, my mother only told me what kind of ending to make, because I had no knowledge of how to do that with federal councillors."

Question: "Did your mother read the letter?"

Answer: "Yes"

Question: "Did she agree with its contents?"

Answer: "The mother said nothing about what was written, only that it was right that we wrote."

Question: "Did you show the letter to anyone before you shipped it; a teacher or any other adult?"

Answer: "No, we found we wanted to do this all by ourselves, then no one would interfere with us."

(...)

Question: "Is there nothing in the letter that could be an insult to the Federal Council?"

Answer: "No, I don't think so. And the Federal Council will probably have received more letters like that."

Question: "So you did want to reproach him?"

Answer: "No, no (...) Yes, why, did the Federal Council complain?"

Question: "Yes, a complaint was received and we have to investigate what you wanted with the letter."

The president of the school council reads out a passage: "It may well be that they have received orders not to accept any more Jews, but it is certainly not the will of God..."

Question: "Don't you know the serious meaning of this sentence?"

Answer: "I wanted to say with this sentence that we understand if the Federal Council took the Germans into consideration, just as it had to take them into consideration when introducing the blackout, because it would not have been necessary for Switzerland itself to black out."

Interrogator: "How do you know that?"

Answer: "Yes, they say that everywhere."

The president of the school board intervenes again: "Then I will tell you what this sentence means: the Federal Council would have stopped the flow of refugees due to foreign pressure. That means that the Federal Council is no longer its own lord and master, it can no longer do what it thinks is right, it is no longer free, but has to do what the Germans tell it to do. This is an insult to the Federal Council, which it rightly complains about. For it is a strong piece of work that a few young, inexperienced girls, who hardly know what is necessary for life at all, believe they have to teach the Federal Councillor in Bern."²

The teacher of the class, Richard Grünberger, was also interrogated, under the suspicion that he may have given the impetus for the letter. In the end, the pupils are strictly admonished.

¹ Letter from the Rorschacher schoolgirls of September 7th, 1942, Diplomatic documents of Switzerland, <https://dodis.ch/12054>, accessed on June 13th, 2022.

² Investigation protocol from October 23, 1942, Diplomatic documents of Switzerland, <https://dodis.ch/35365>, accessed on June 13, 2022.



Willy Gerber marker stone — Photo/ Dietmar Walser-2022



Willy Geber, about 1920;
Family Archive Geber, Gabrielle Gottlieb,
Pacific Palisades

“ADMIRIED BY THE EXTREMELY KIND ENTIRE POPULATION OF HOHENEMS”

The song writer Willy Geber flees from Vienna to St. Gall

Hohenems – Lustenau, August 17, 1938

Willy Geber, a young songwriter and composer from Vienna, had managed to escape across the border near Hohenems to St. Gall. The following day, he wrote to his wife in Vienna:

“We made it! Hope you're all well! And everything in order. Now my report:

The Gestapo came to Bludenz for the first time. Very friendly. When they asked where we were going, we said Switzerland; which border? ‘Feldkirch’, the Gestapo man replied: ‘out of the question’.

We got off the train in Feldkirch and were told that nothing could be done here. (...) At the station we met some fellow sufferers who advised us to interrupt our journey in Hohenems because something could be done from there. We did so. At the station, we were met by the ‘SS’ with the words: ‘Come with us’. We thought we were arrested and in Dachau. On the way to the ‘prison’ I ‘befriended’ an SS who told me: ‘You’ll get across the border, we’ll see for it’. Great joy. We were led to an inn where about 50 emigrants were already ‘sitting’. Among them were also some women and girls. After we were given the opportunity to visit the place, we were led in groups of 10 to a separate room where we were examined for the second time (...). Anyone who had already been examined was not allowed to leave the room or come into contact with anyone who had not yet been examined. After the examination we were taken to the garden of the inn, which, guarded by the SS, was our ‘prison’ for the time being. (...) At about 8 a.m., we were ordered to report for duty. There were about 70 of us. Flanked by SS cyclists and infantrymen, we were led through the town in three rows, admired by the extremely kind entire population of Hohenems. It got dark, we marched for about 2 hours and were then divided into 2 groups. The SS told us that they would now take us to the border and then deal with our further conduct. It was already pitch dark. We were in the open. Now, an SS man gave a speech in which he asked us not to engage in atrocity propaganda. The Führer does not approve of atrocities, etc. Now he described the path we had to take. The first 10 men set off. We had to find the big Rhine bridge, about ¾ hour away, and if we were over it, we would be halfway to safety.”



The Wiesenrain bridge over the Rhine,
from Lustenau to Widnau, 2021;
Photo/ Dietmar Walser

Willy Geber reached Switzerland in the late evening. The small group of refugees gathered the little money they were allowed to keep — 10 Reichsmark per head — to take a taxi to St. Gall. They know they have to get away from the border as quickly as possible. The very next day, Geber is in front of Grüniger, the St. Gall police captain, and is allowed to stay. In St. Gall he founds a pop band of emigrants, the KKK. And composes songs in honor of Paul Grüniger. Soon after, he also succeeds in emigrating to the USA, where he reunites with his family. But his career as a composer of pop songs in the USA came to nothing. He continued to write songs tirelessly, but none found their way onto a record. Geber died in the USA in 1969, impoverished and working in a supermarket.



The KKK Ensemble (Arts-Culture-Kreis-Ensemble) in St. Gallen
Geber family archives / Gabrielle Gottlieb, Pacific Palisades

Recommended reading:

Niko Hofinger, Maneks Listen. Innsbruck 2018



Hilda Monte, about 1940;
Archive of Social Democracy of the
Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation

Feldkirch, April 17, 1945

On April 18, 1945, the Innsbruck criminal police, branch office Feldkirch, reports to the Mayor of the City of Feldkirch:

“Concerning Schneider, Eva, office clerk, born June 30, 1913 in Bromberg, last address Berlin, Helmstetterstr. 24. Death by use of arms on April 17, 1945.

Reference: none

On April 17, 1945 around 6:30 a.m., the above-mentioned was so severely injured by the customs border guards of the Tisis border post following her earlier arrest at 3:45 a.m. in Rappenwald/Tisis due to attempted border crossing—as she was taking flight trying to escape toward the border of the Reich—from a shot in her right thigh that she soon passed away from internal bleeding. The corpse was carried to the Liebfrauenkirche {Church of Our Lady} in Feldkirch and examined there by the public medical officer Dr. Müller and the municipal physician Dr. Pontesegger and cleared by the Feldkirch public prosecutor’s office for interment following clarification of the facts of the case. A substantial amount of money was found in her possessions with which the burial costs can be defrayed. The Feldkirch registry office has received a death notice from our office.”

Eva Schneider, the woman who was shot while trying to escape across the border, was in fact the socialist resistance fighter Hilde Meisel-Olday. As an author of poems, novellas, but above all political essays, radio broadcasts and political

“THE UNITY OF EUROPE”

A few days before the end of the war, the resistance fighter Hilda Monte dies at the border crossing at Tisis



Barracks path at the Rappenwald in Feldkirch Tisis; Photo/ Dietmar Walser-2022

programs and books, she went by the name of Hilda Monte.

In 1914, she was born in Vienna into a Jewish family - but already in 1915 her parents moved with her and her older sister Margot to Berlin, where her father opened an import-export business. While still a teenager, she joined the International Socialist Fighting League (ISK). In 1929, she traveled to England for the first time to visit her uncle, the successful composer Edmund Meisel, whose film scores are legendary to this day. In 1932 she went to Paris. She regularly published analyses of the political and economic situation in England, France and Germany, Spain, and the colonies. She spent 1933 and 1934 in the German Reich before emigrating again to Paris in 1934 and to London in 1936. Several times thereafter she continued to travel illegally to the German Reich, helping to organize workers' resistance actions. In 1938, in order to prevent her expulsion from England, she entered into a marriage of convenience with the German-British cartoonist John Olday and thus became a British citizen.

During the war, she remained involved in a wide variety of resistance activities, whether as a courier for the International Transport Workers' Federation, or on behalf of Allied intelligence services. In 1940, her book *“How to conquer Hitler,”* co-authored with Fritz Eberhard, was published. She was involved in setting up the radio station *“of the European*



The Black Horse Forest near the border to Liechtenstein where Hilda Monte was caught in 1945; Photo/ Dietmar Walser-2022

Revolution,” and worked regularly for the BBC's German workers broadcasts. In 1942, she gave a shocking report on the radio about the mass extermination of Jews that had begun in occupied Poland. In 1943, her book *The Unity of Europe* was published, and in 1944 she went to occupied France on behalf of the American secret service OSS and Austrian socialists, then to Switzerland, and in April 1945 again illegally crossed the border to make contact with socialists in Vorarlberg.

Barely more than two weeks before French troops reached Feldkirch and the war in the Vorarlberg Rhine Valley was over, her life ended by force at the border near Tisis. Early the morning of April 17, 1945, she was apprehended in Rappenwald on the border with Liechtenstein.

For two hours she was held in the customs office, then in the early morning hours she tried to escape. That is when the fatal shot was fired. The dead woman was thought to be a Protestant and was buried in the Protestant cemetery.

After liberation, news of her death reached her friends in Switzerland and England - and her family in Palestine and Egypt. Austrian socialists placed a stone on her grave at the Protestant cemetery with the inscription: "Here rests our unforgettable comrade Hilde Monte-Olday. Born 31.7.1914 in Vienna. Died 17.4.1945 in Feldkirch. She lived and died in the service of the socialist idea".

“WE BLUDENZ CITIZENS... IT'S A GREAT STORY”

The Leopold family goes into hiding.

Bludenz, September 16, 1944

“We enter the valley of the River Ill through a tunnel and the mountains of Bludenz appear. To the left is Hoher Fraßen, to the right Mondspitze, Schillerkopf, etc. In Bludenz there is bright sunshine. We hand in part of our luggage and go to the post office. We post the first greetings to friends and I phone the office of the Regional Councilor. Kühnl answers. We have been allocated to the Arlberger Hof Hotel and are well received and given a comfortable room. After a general clean-up we fetch the hand luggage at the station. After lunch at the Arlberger Hof I take my first afternoon nap in Bludenz. We take a short walk to a viewing point and Anneliese cries. After supper I fall into a deep sleep.”¹

No one suspects that Dr. Kurt Freiherr, the new tax official at the Bludenz district office, who arrived in town with his family on September 16, 1944, was actually a Jewish refugee. In December 1943, Walter Leopold had managed to forge a military service passport in Leipzig in the name of Kurt Freiherr. And to invent a new biography for himself step by step—as a bombed-out accountant from Mannheim, where, as he knew, not much was left of the city and its offices.

Together with his family, Walter



Walter and Hilda Leopold with their dog Mäuslein, around 1935
Les Leopold Private Archives, USA

Leopold had already been living underground for more than a year at this point, hidden by non-Jewish friends, or on the street. In November 1938, like thousands of Jewish men, he had been deported to Buchenwald, and as a decorated World War I participant, had been released again – probably in exchange for the assurance extorted from him that he would leave the country. He had stayed and continued to work in the administration of the Jewish community.

When he received orders in September 1942 to join his wife Hilda and five-year-old daughter Anneliese for deportation on September 19 to Theresienstadt, the Nazis' deceptive “showcase ghetto”, the Leopolds went into hiding.

But Walter Leopold, a left-wing socialist and self-confident Jew, possessed not only the will to survive but also wit and ingenuity. He sent applications to German authorities.

And in May 1944 he got his chance. The district office in Bludenz was looking for an experienced tax official. And who, if not he, was experienced enough for that. On May 25 he traveled to Bludenz, the place he knew from earlier holiday trips and hiking tours. He actually succeeded in winning the post for himself. And

this despite the fact that he freely admitted that he was not a party member. He knew exactly how much he could impute to the fictitious Dr. Freiherr. And which archives would still reveal his non-existence despite the destruction of the bombings. So he took up his duties on September 18. On the 27th he noted:

“The snow has gone from the heights, but it's raining hard. One freezes in the



Walter Leopold, around 1938
Les Leopold Private Archives, USA

office and one cannot see the mountains anymore. Never mind, we have no visitor's tax to pay like on our earlier visit, and don't throw our money out of window. For we live here, and after winter another spring will come. If we live to see it! We, the residents of Bludenz. My god, isn't that a great story.”²

Not only did he and his wife Hilda now have to play comedians. Their now seven-year-old daughter Anneliese, with whom they went on excursions to the Tschengla and the rest of the mountain world, had to also master her role as a Protestant in Catholic Bludenz and at school.

“Well, my... like I say, I don't remember any of the details mainly because my parents didn't let me in on the details. But I do remember, our trip to Austria, where the officials of course came and wanted to see the papers and I didn't know they were forged. (...) I mean I was just plain afraid because it was an official, you know, official to me was a Nazi. And probably could have been, I'm not sure. So we finally get to Austria and my father says to me: ‘Well, you know, we still cannot reveal our identity, but we're free, as far as that

“WE BLUDENZ CITIZENS... IT'S A GREAT STORY” (Cont'd)

goes. We don't have to worry about a Nazi is gonna come and try to shoot you or, uhm, we don't have to hide in one room.”³

First they are allocated a flat in Wichnerstraße above the Koch tyre shop, then they moved into the newly built Südtirolersiedlung, the quarter for relocated Southern Tyroleans.

“And I remember then Christmas, we had a Christmas tree, you know. And we had, uhm, because we had people that came to visit us, and we were Protestant, you know, of course you couldn't get away with, I mean, Protestants weren't so well liked to begin with, you know. Because it was predominantly Catholic. And, uhm, so, you know, I remember being very sacrilegious one day and we were eating some kind of a, not a hot dog, but some kind of... and I took the peel and hung it on the Christmas tree and mum says: ‘You don't do that!’, you know, I said: ‘We don't really need this Christmas tree.’”



Anneliese Leopold, Bludenz 1945
Les Leopold Private Archives, USA

The family kept up the game until the liberation in May 1945. Walter Leopold only succeeded with difficulty in convincing the French of his true identity. They didn't quite know how to deal with him. He lost his job at the district administration office. Although he would probably have liked to stay in Bludenz, the family received a spacious flat that had belonged to a high Nazi functionary. To their surprise, they found an imposing menorah there, with which they celebrated Hanukkah again for the first time in December.

Walter Leopold was visited by clergymen who tried to convince him to become a Catholic. Maybe then he could even become mayor. But converting was out of the question for him. Anneliese's grades at school were getting worse. Her classmates accused her the Jews killed Jesus. They don't belong here.

“You know, the traumatic experience that I had over there, ah, I don't think I ever really got over that. That was very hard for me to, you know, but the bombs and that I think I got over when we were in Austria. ... But Austria really was, if I had anything to say about my childhood, if I had any happy memories, they would have been of Austria. Even though the last part wasn't good.”

In 1950, the family emigrated to the USA and settled in Cincinnati. Leopold waited for a job at the university - and worked as a night watchman in a slaughterhouse, then in a textile factory. In 1952, he died of a heart attack.

“I always portray his death as, you know, like Moses led the people to the Promised Land but he couldn't enjoy it, you know. He died, he survived all this war and all these hardships, but once we were comfortable, you know, he died.”



Anneliese, Hilda and Walter Leopold, Bludenz, around 1945
Les Leopold Private Archives, USA

¹ Diary of Walter Leopold. Published in English translation: Walter Leopold (with Les Leopold), *Defiant German. Defiant Jew. A Holocaust Memoir From Inside the Third Reich*. Amsterdam 2020, p. 193.

² *Ibid.*, p. 210.

³ Interview with Anneliese Yosafat (née Leopold) by Joanne Centa, 18.12.1995; USC Shoah Foundation.



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