

In cooperation with: City of Frankfurt, Hessian Ministry of Education,

"I am a Frankfurter"

Meetings with the descendants of persecuted former Frankfurt citizens

From 12 till 19, June 2019, a group of ex-Frankfurters and their children and grandchildren visited the former homeland or ancestral home as guests of the city.

Since 1980, the city has been inviting former citizens, who were persecuted and expelled during the National Socialist era on account of their origin, their religion or their political views, to stay here. In 2012, their children have been invited to participate in this program. They know the former hometown of the ancestors especially through stories of their parents and grandparents. The invitation from the city gave them the opportunity to visit the places of childhood and youth of (grand) parents: the house, the living environment, the former schools and the graves of relatives.

For many of the guests, the visit of the Philanthropin, the Jewish school, was of the utmost importance, since their parents or they themselves went to this school. Werner Rothschild, born in Frankfurt in 1928, was a student there until he had to flee Germany in 1939. His parents also taught in the Philanthropin, so did Max Seelig, grandfather of Lois Gilman, another visitor.



The association *Projekt Jüdisches Leben in Frankfurt (Project Jewish Life in Frankfurt)* supports the research of visitors in their ancestral home since the mid-1980s. So the visitors are able to research the history of families. Members of the project help to establish contacts with archives or local initiatives and accompany the visitors to the addresses or places of origin of parents or grandparents throughout Hesse and beyond. The volunteers of the project group, who organize and accompany these encounters, work closely together with the city of Frankfurt to prepare the meetings.

Tracing the Past

It was important for David Hirsch and his daughter Rebecca to go to Mannheim, where the father /



grandfather grew up and worked as a cantor. Under the expert guidance of Susanne Reber and accompanied by Angelika Rieber, they visited the home addresses of the family, the location of the former synagogue, where Erwin Hirsch worked as a cantor, and the Cafe Herrdegen, a source for "Monnemer Dreck", a cult pastry from Mannheim. Above all, David understood after the visit, why his father had always raved about the Mannheim Water Tower, which is visible everywhere in the city.

Denise Resnik and her son James went together with Angelika Rieber to trace her family's roots in Bruchsal and Heidelberg. From there came the large family of grandfather / great-



grandfather, the Griesheimers. Dedicated and competent, Inge Schmidt and Rolf Schmitt led the visitors to the places linked to the family history and to the graves of their ancestors.

For Jill Enfield and her siblings Richard and Gwen, a visit to Wetzlar was on the program, supported by the association *Wetzlar Erinnert (Wetzlar Remembers)*. There they met Oliver Nass, great-grandson of Ernst Leitz. The background of this visit was the role of the company during the Nazi era. The Ehrenfelds once had a department store on the Zeil. In the 1920s, the F.Ehrenfeld department store entered the wireless business and played a leading role in the radio business. Also, the two brothers Hans and Gustav Ehrenfeld set up a special department for photos and had a photo lab.



In 1938 they had to witness how the warehouse was invaded and devastated on 10 November ("the warehouse was a pile of rubble"). The two brothers were arrested and taken to Buchenwald and released after a few weeks of imprisonment. Under duress, they had to sell their company. Via England, the Ehrenfelds managed 1939 to flee to the United States. There, thanks to the help of the Leitz company, they were able to rebuild their lives. They Americanized their name and called themselves Enfield.

<https://www.wetzlar-erinnert.de/gedenken/juedisches-leben/spurensuche.html#zeitungsbericht-wnz-vom-19062019>

Werner Rothschild came to Frankfurt with his children Amy Manheim, Dori Fishbin and Gary Rothschild. As the oldest participant and true Frankfurter, he still speaks fluent German. He was very touched by the experiences of his second visit to Frankfurt. The city's program of visits and contact with the Jewish community were much appreciated by the family.

Werner Rothschild was particularly pleased with the opportunity to see the old apartment in the Eschenheimer Anlage 31a. Mrs. Poletti, director of St. Catherine's and Whitewomen's Monastery, led the Rothschilds and Brigitte Hofacker, who had prepared this visit, through the original rooms. The Monastery is now the owner of the house. Walking through the neighborhood and passing the first apartment in Oederweg 7, Werner Rothschild gladly recalled the visits to Café Falk on the corner of Eschenheimer Anlage / Oederweg, where they enjoyed delicious cakes.



Meetings with students

The conversations with the pupils of the Lessinggymnasium were of great importance to the whole family. Among other things, Werner Rothschild reported on his impressive experience in "Kristallnacht", the Kindertransport to England and the successful emigration with his parents and brother Ernst to the USA. Everybody was allowed to take 10 Reichsmarks with them for their departure; the furniture that was sent never arrived in their new home. For the young people in the Lessinggymnasium this was an impressive meeting as it became clear from the many questions after the interview in a small circle.



Robert Jesselson, music professor and cellist, attended the grammar school in Oberursel, which is known for its musical focus. "This is the story of families who were fully integrated into German society and have absolutely felt German," he told the youth.

<https://gymnasium-oberursel.de/downloads/pressemitteilungen/pressemitteilungen-inhalte/2019/zeitzeuge-zu-besuch.html>

The Gagerngymnasium invited Denise Resnik and her son James to a discussion with students, because it used to be the Samson Raphael Hirsch Schule, which had been where their mother / grandmother Dorothy Griesheimer had attended school. In July 1939, the girl arrived in London without her parents

with one of the last Kindertransports. Her parents were deported in May 1942. Until this day the death dates of Harry and Thekla Griesheimer are unknown, a painful fact for Dorothy Baer. "She has no closure," that is how Denise Resnik describes her mother's feelings. She found the



questions of the young people which she could not answer particularly challenging because they were giving her suggestions to think about. So, due to the student's questions this conversation will remain in her memory.

<https://hvvg.de/index.php?mode=article&id=3033&navid=>

<http://www.juedisches-leben->

[frankfurt.de/files/am_schuetzenbrunnen_13_ostend_188_bis_202_kl.pdf](http://www.juedisches-leben-frankfurt.de/files/am_schuetzenbrunnen_13_ostend_188_bis_202_kl.pdf)

<http://www.juedisches-leben-frankfurt.de/home/biographien-und-begegnungen/biographien-a-f/lee-edwards-geb-carlebach.html>

Save at Least the Children

The association *Projekt Jüdisches Leben in Frankfurt* has been dealing with the subject Kindertransports from Germany for many years. In collaboration with the association, a team of seven authors has documented 20 life stories of children and three biographies of helpers who have prepared, organized and accompanied Kindertransports, in the book: "Rettet wenigstens die Kinder" ("Save at least the children"). The unparalleled bailout of Jewish children especially touches young people today. Therefore, the association, inspired by Renata Harris, herself a participant in a Kindertransport, has taken initiative to build a memorial to commemorate the Kindertransports. Meanwhile, by order of the city, there is a coordination group for the realization of such a monument.

Werner Rothschild was one of the children sent to England by his parents with one of the Kindertransports, as well as Dorothy Baer.



Get-Together

The visiting program started with a get-together, a meeting during which the participants could present stories of their parents and grandparents. Soon they discovered how many connections there were between them. The mothers of David Hirsch and Lois Gilman once upon a time were classmates. They only met again in 1992 during the visiting program of the City of Frankfurt. In June 2019 their children were meeting in Frankfurt.

In the final get-together the guests of the city were exchanging their impressions and experiences with one another. Only a few will be able to address their parents by asking questions which have come up during the week. Many of the visitors said: "I would have loved to ask my parents now." The guests of the city were impressed and touched by contributions of the other participants and their openness. Only one fact was disappointing: they could not hear any "Frankfurterisch" in the international banking metropole. Nevertheless, a connection has been established to the former home of their parents or grandparents and to their inhabitants today. At the end of his visit to Mainhattan Gary Rothschild explained proudly: "I am a Frankfurter".

Images: Angelika Rieber, Wetzlarer Neue Zeitung, Brigitte Hofacker, Gymnasium Oberursel, Dorothy Baer

Angelika Rieber, July 2019