

**MEETING OF SIX FORMER DP CAMP CHILDREN ON  
MAY 11 – 13, 2012 IN HOFGEISMAR**  
(by Julia Drinnenberg)



They were born as the children of Jewish refugees after WWII in the DP-camp Hofgeismar. From left: Lucja Segal-Seiden (Canada), Lea Abiodun (USA), Hynda Halpren (Canada), Loretta Weingel-Fidel (USA), Jack Schneider (USA) und Sarah Zukerman (Israel)

“These three days in Hofgeismar seemed to me like three weeks“. This feeling expressed by Lea Abiodun was confirmed by all the participants.

For the Opening of the Photography Exhibition “Ein Leben aufs Neu“ they arrived from Canada, the USA and Israel. They were interested in seeing their birthplace and curious to meet the other “babies“, who like them, were born in the Displaced Persons Camp in Hofgeismar.

Who were our guests and how did we find these six out of the close to 500 babies who were born in the Camp in Hofgeismar? Three of them had already contacted the Stadtmuseum Hofgeismar long before the Exhibition was planned.

There was **Hynda Halpren**, from Toronto, accompanied by her friend Barbara Shinehoft. Hynda had been the first to send a request to Hofgeismar asking for information about her mother`s grave, located in the Jewish Cemetery in Hofgeismar. Hynda`s mother died in 1947, shortly after giving birth to Hynda.

**Lucja Segal-Seiden**, also from Toronto, interested in her birthplace, had visited Hofgeismar two years before the current Exhibition.

**Loretta Weingel-Fidel**, along with her husband, Gary Fidel, came from New York. She, too, had contacted the Stadtmuseum previously, trying to find Emme Müller, the woman, who had been her nanny for the first three years of her life in the Camp. Emme and Loretta`s mother had become friends and wrote to one another long after the family moved to America. Loretta und Gary were joined by Loretta`s cousin Ruth Katz and her partner David Radtke, who were both traveling through Germany.

Only three days before the Opening of the Exhibition, we were surprised by a call from **Lea Abiodun**, another Camp baby, who lives in Massachusetts. She had just discovered information, over the internet, about the Exhibition and the meeting in Hofgeismar. Without hesitation, she bought an airline ticket and arranged to meet Loretta and Hynda upon their arrival at Frankfurt Airport. Together, with their companions, they took a car service for the three hour ride to Hofgeismar. While she spent the first night at *Hotel Köpenick*, apart from the others, Lea was able to join them the next day when she checked into *Altes Brauhaus*.



Shaking their heads in disbelief at the coincidence: Sarah Zukerman and Jack Schneider talking to Lucja Segal Seiden, Hynda Halpren and Loretta Weingel-Fidel

Then came a surprise no one could have anticipated: at the Exhibit Opening, two other Camp babies arrived in Hofgeismar purely by coincidence and totally unaware of the already planned events. These included **Sarah Zukerman**, accompanied by her husband Haim and her daughter, Liat, Sarah's brother Shmuel Tagfogel (Tal) and his daughter, Roni, and, the final member of the party, **Jack Schneider**, Sarah and Shmuel's cousin from San Francisco. These additions brought the number of Camp babies now in attendance up to six. Sarah and her family were passing through Germany on their way to Poland, where they planned to visit the places their parents and other ancestors lived before the Nazis extinguished Jewish life in these places during World War Two.



## Friday - Arrival Day

Our guests, who had travelled all night, could only relax a short time before the official welcome at the Town Hall in Hofgeismar. We witnessed a particular moving moment for Loretta and Emme Müller, her former nanny from Hofgeismar. They saw and held each other once again after so many years. They were able to communicate because Loretta remembered some of her first language, German, from her early years in Hofgeismar.



Reunion after more than sixty years: Emme Müller and Loretta Weingel-Fidel met each other in the Town Hall.

Mayor Mr. Sattler gave a warm welcome speech to the former Camp children. There were also beautiful flowers and gifts. He pointed out that he was born not many years later and not that far from the Camp. He expressed how joyful it was that now, sixty-six years later, this nearly forgotten chapter in Hofgeismar's history, as well as the individual fates of the Jewish refugees who lived there, was receiving the focus and interest of so many people. After the war people in Hofgeismar had been busy with their own everyday lives and did not give that much attention to what was going on in the Camp.



During the entry into the Golden Book of Hofgeismar. From left, standing: Emme Müller, Mayor Henner Sattler, Lucja Segal-Seiden, Julia Drinnenberg, Hynda Halpren, Loretta Weingel-Fidel, Helmut Burmeister. Sitting in front: Lea Abiodun

## SATURDAY MORNING



From left: Hynda, Gary, David, Barbara and Lea standing next to the graves of the Displaced Persons

At 10:00 o'clock we went, by car, to the Jewish Cemetery. On the Sabbath no religious Jew would enter a Jewish cemetery. Non-Jews, too, have to respect this rule. But in our case there was no choice; Hynda had to leave Hofgeismar very early Sunday morning and there would be no other time to visit her mother's grave. Everyone agreed to make our visit the exception to the rule. In the Cemetery there are nineteen gravestones of Jewish Displaced

Persons who died between 1945 and 1949, however, more than nineteen died in the Camp. There were several children who were stillborn, who died during birth or shortly thereafter. They were buried without a gravestone.



Picture on the right: It was the first time that Hynda could visit the grave of her mother who died from an infection after giving birth to Hynda.





Hynda and Barbara standing in front of the southern gate of the former Kaserne“. In the background is one of the buildings in which the DPs were accomodated.

After a short stop to enjoy the view of Hofgeismar from a nearby hill, we went to the area where the former barracks stood. Only a few of the old buildings of the “Kaserne“ remain. Today there is an elementary school, the police station and administrative district offices. Lea spotted a stopped bus with the destination “Krankenhaus Gesundbrunnen“.

That is where she and the other Camp babies, except Lucja, had been born. Lucja was born in the former “Hilfskrankenhaus“, which today is Hotel Köpenick.

On the right: these houses were confiscated for Jewish refugees. The Settlement „Echelberg“ was called “Wawel“ or “Ha Mizpe“ by the Jews because of the nice view from a hill.



So, the next stop on our town tour was a photo session at the Krankenhaus Gesundbrunnen, with a short detour to the Echelberg where the second, smaller camp, “Wawel“, had been established in confiscated houses.

On the left: Lucja, Loretta, Lea and Hynda Halpren in front of the Krankenhaus Gesundbrunnen where all, except Lucja, were born.



From left: Dr. Adamek und Ms. Susanne Selbert. Mayor Henner Sattler is the fourth from the left



The director of the museum Herr Burmeister welcomes the audience

## THE OPENING

After lunch, we all met at the Opening of the Exhibit in the Stadtmuseum. Seventy-eight people attended, among them the deputy District Administrator Susanne Selbert with Press Secretary Harald Kühlbörn. Hofgeismar Mayor, Henner Sattler, was present as well as Dr. Adamek, Chairwoman of the Hessian Society for History and Regional Studies. Director of the Museum, Herr Burmeister, welcomed everyone present, then turned the presentation over to Susanne Selbert, who was interested in the subject of Homeland, which is also the topic being addressed in an exhibition in a neighboring town. She expressed her admiration for those people in the DP Camp who, after years of persecution and misery, still found the courage and the strength to build a new life and a new home even during the long wait to emigrate to their ultimate destination.



Mayor Henner Sattler praised the numerous documents and pictures from the Camp in Hofgeismar. Describing the Camp from the viewpoint of the residents, makes it possible to understand their situation. This, according to the Mayor, is what makes the exhibition so important and valuable. He referred to one document, in particular, in which a camp resident is quoted saying to the Jewish Committee: "I am alone like a stone".

Julia Drinnenberg during her speech



Julia Drinnenberg spoke next about the major focal points of the Exhibition. For her it was an excellent opportunity to see how both Exhibitions – the photographs of DP Camps in Germany and the displays from Hofgeismar – complemented each other. The documentation of life in the DP Camp Hofgeismar focuses on the individual fates of people who were able to survive the Holocaust. It also informs viewers of the details of life in the Camp: the places, the self-government, how things were organized and the revival of Eastern-European, Yiddish culture.



Visitors being taken in by informations about the individual fates of Hynda's, Loretta's and Lucja's families during WWII

Another point of interest was the relationship between the Camp residents and Hofgeismarians; friendships but also problems with old prejudices against Jews. The touring exhibition of the Fritz-Bauer-Institut with photos by photographer Ephraim Robinson is an unique contemporary document, which shows us everyday life in the DP Camps. Considering the length of time people had suffered, the loss of relatives they endured, their individual hardships in the KZs, their years in hiding or far away in other countries, it is astonishing that among these completely exhausted people there were those who found the strength to continue, to build a self-organization in the Camp, to start a new life and to develop hope for a better future.



During the opening we met Sarah, Jack and their families for the first time. Two new Camp babies who were astonished to know about and meet the others. Jack was excited to find a picture of his father from the Yad Vashem Archives.

Jack and Roni finding Jack's father in a picture from Yad Vashem archive

Later, Julia took Jack Schneider, Sara Zukerman and Schmuel Tagfogel (Sarah's brother) to the Jewish Cemetery. They, too, had plans to leave for Poland very early the next morning. Only Roni and Liat waited in front of the Cemetery gate. As Orthodox Jews they refused to enter the Cemetery on the Sabbath.

On that same day, Julia Drinnenberg remembered something about Sarah's maiden name Tagfogel. She had seen it before, when she had been researching 'Tagfogel' in the database of names in the Archives of the International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen, Germany. There had been a stillborn child with the name Tagfogel in the Camp. Indeed, this was the sibling of Sarah and Shmuel. Julia had collected several Tagfogel documents in Bad Arolsen including the whereabouts of Sarah and Shmuel's parents during the war. That evening, during dinner, Julia shared her notes with the newly arrived guests. They shed many tears upon hearing of their stillborn sibling. They shook their heads in disbelief at the number of coincidences that led them to come to Hofgeismar on this particular weekend, when all of these activities just happened to be going on, and with some of the other Camp babies visiting as well. When Sarah and Shmuel learned that this stillborn sibling was buried in Hofgeismar, they wanted desperately to return to the Cemetery early the next morning, before their departure to Poland.

This evening together is one nobody will ever forget. Stories, experiences and addresses were exchanged. Similarities between the babies were found and discussed.

## SUNDAY 6:30 A.M.

For the memorial for Sarah and Schmuel's sibling, we decided to assemble around a young tree in the Cemetery. We did not know the exact place because stillborn babies and young children were buried at the edge of the Cemetery without a headstone. Shmuel said Kaddish. We all were in tears, but most of all Roni, Shmuel's daughter, who had been especially close to her grandmother, the mother of the stillborn infant. Deep mourning and an ocean of tears has been passed down to the Second and Third Generation of Holocaust survivors.

Roni reading the inscription of the memorial-stone from 1947 erected by the DPs:

*Here is hidden a piece of soap  
from the grease of six Millions of our  
brothers, sons of Israel,  
who perished for the sanctification of the  
divine name as martyrs,  
murdered by the Nazis in 1940 to 1945.  
Their souls shall be bound in the bundle of  
eternal life*







Auf Wiedersehen Hynda and Barbara

After Sarah, Jack and their family left for Poland on Sunday morning, it was time for Hynda and Barbara to say goodbye to the others. Julia and Lea took them to the Bahnhof Wilhelmshöhe in Kassel. They were very sorry that they had to go, but they were on a tight schedule.

The other babies met together in the Judaica Department of the Stadtmuseum at 10:00 o'clock. Under the guidance of Director Helmut Burmeister they viewed the collection, saw displays and learned about the life of the Jews in Hofgeismar, spanning some five hundred years from its beginning to the Second World War. In the Memorial Room for the murdered Jews of the district there was an intense discussion about the necessity for remembrance and the present day form that it may take.

## OUR EXCURSION TO SABABURG

After our lunch break, all the guests met Arnd Naundorf and Sabine Croll, who, like Julia, are volunteers at the Stadtmuseum. Together with Emme Müller, Loretta's nanny, everyone headed for Sababurg. On our way to Sababurg we stopped in Trendelburg. Here we met with Harald Schmidt, who showed us the medieval Mikvah, built in 1782 by Joseph Levi, a



Harald Schmidt explaining the water technology of the Mikvah to David

Jew who installed it in his cellar. Harald Schmidt explained to us the complicated technology for bringing fresh water through pipes into a house built on a high mountain. The size of the diving basin is 1 cubic meter and it is built out of sandstone. It is next to a fireplace with a chimney. Ever since it was discovered in 2001 the Mikvah has been open to the public.

Picture on the right:

Last row from the left: Arnd Naundorf, Ruth Katz, David Radtke, Julia Drinnenberg, Gary Fidel.

Front row: Lea Abiodun, Lucja Segal-Seiden, Loretta Weingel-Fidel, Emme Müller.





Trendelburg

Exactly at 15:00 o'clock, we were standing in the courtyard at Trendelburg waiting for the fairy tale character Rapunzel to let her hair down for the Prince.

The sun was bright when we headed to Sababurg. There we sat in the Tower Room, which we had all to ourselves, as we enjoyed delicious cake and coffee. Perhaps it was it the seclusion and the pleasant atmosphere of the room that led to an intense conversation:

We were born in Germany, but what citizenship did the children born in the Displaced Persons Camp have? Children born in Russia during the war were considered Russian citizens. Why weren't we German citizens?



Another question: Why are you - Julia, Sabine and Arnd - volunteering to do this memorial work? What is your individual motivation? We sat together in a circle, like a family, having a frank, open and very personal conversation.

For a long time we stood by the castle wall, basking in the sun and enjoying the fabulous views from Sleeping Beauty's Castel Sababurg.

Emme Müller with Loretta





Sababurg



Sabine Croll and Julia Drinnenberg

Sunday evening Loretta brought her nanny, Emme Müller, back to her home in the Hospitalstraße. Emme showed them the “Hospital“, a former monastery and church, that is now a retirement home. Then the time came to say goodbye, once more, to Emme.



On the left: As a gesture of respect, Lucja felt the necessity to go to the grave of Dr. Anneliese von Schlotheim and to place some candles and stones on the gravestone. In this way she said thank you for the last minute rescue when the doctor helped Lucja’s mother during Lucia’s birth in the Hilfskrankenhaus Hofgeismar.

Picture below: Ruth Katz and David Radke



David and Ruth were the first to leave Hofgeismar on an early train. Julia brought them to the station, wished them bon voyage, hoping to see them again one day. Their next stop was Wittenberg, the town of Martin Luther. The others were brought to Kassel Wilhelmshöhe by Arnd and Julia. Lea left for the long journey back to Massachusetts.

Lucja, Loretta and Gary went to Berlin. So finally we had to part. Will we meet again?

“Good bye – Auf Wiedersehen“