

Children in the Shoah. A German-Israeli Youth Project.

German and Israeli youths explore fates of Jewish children.

Jule Henninger, Tübingen

In October last year, the Gäu-Neckar-Alb memorial network started a new project with its young guides: "Pieces of Memory – Children in the Shoah and us". It is an exchange project with Israeli teenagers and young adults who are also doing memorial work. We meet in video conferences and develop an online exhibition about Jewish children in the Shoah and about the memorial work of young people in both countries. The initial planning for the project and the cooperation with the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum and the Western Galilee College in Israel had already begun before the pandemic, and at that time we had imagined things a little differently.

What happened previously

In December 2019, when we had no inkling of the pandemic, Dr. Martin Ulmer and I visited the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum in Kibbutz Lohamei Hageta'ot, in northern Israel. There we met Anat An-Eli, supervisor of the youth guides at Yad LaYeled. Yad LaYeled is Hebrew and literally means "hand for the child." It is a museum and memorial dedicated to the commemorating the lives of Jewish children in the Shoah and is also primarily aimed at children and young people. Every day, school classes are guided through the museum by youth guides or employed staff. Afterwards, the children are often given the opportunity to express their impressions and emotions by painting. The Yad LaYeled Museum is part of the larger Beit Lohamei Hageta'ot – "The Ghetto Fighters' House". It was founded in 1949 by survivors of the Shoah and former underground fighters. It was the first museum in Israel to commemorate the Shoah and in particular the Jewish resistance. The two museums are located next to each other in Kibbutz Lohamei Hageta'ot, in the north of Israel between the cities of Akko and Nahariya on the coast, not far from the settlement of Shavei Zion from Swabian roots. Some of the



Israeli young guides supervise young visitors at the Yad LaYeled Shoah Museum, which is especially designed for children and teens ages 10 and up. Photo: Beit Lohamei Hageta'ot.

young guides in Yad LaYeled study Shoah Studies at the Western Galilee College in Akko. We also visited the college and met the director of the institute, Dr. Boaz Cohen.

Together we thought about how we could cooperate and found the idea appealing to bring the Israeli and German young guides together and make an exchange possible. There are differences in the German and Israeli cultures of remembrance as well as similarities, and we were sure that an exchange would be enriching for everyone involved. We set to work, applied for funding from the State Agency for Civic Education Baden-Württemberg and received support to create a small online exhibition about children from the Gäu-Neckar-Alb region during the Nazi era. We were

even able to invite the Israeli youth guides with Anat for a return visit to Germany. We prepared everything, planned a visit program and looked forward to the first meeting in May 2020.

This could not take place because of the pandemic, which we all had not expected.

In March 2020, with a heavy heart, we had to cancel the visit of the Israelis and realized the small exhibition project on our own. We kept the theme of Jewish children in the Shoah, as this thematically connects us to the Yad LaYeled Museum. The exhibition in German language can be viewed on the homepage of the memorial network in the category "Jugendguides" under "Online Exhibition".

Pieces of Memory – Children in the Shoah and us

But that was not enough for us: We now had the chance to organize a German-Israeli exchange project for young people, and we did not want to let the pandemic take that away from us. So we applied for a new grant for a larger project at the Foundation EVZ "Remembrance, Responsibility, Future", which is supported by the German Federal Foreign Office. The cooperation partners are the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, the Western Galilee College and the archive in Shavei Zion.

Together we found a title and designed a logo for our new project "Pieces of Memory – Children in the Shoah and us". In October 2020, we started the work. We are planning mutual visits of several days in Germany and Israel to meet up, to exchange and to get to know each other. We will film interviews with us youth guides, and show them in our upcoming online exhibition. There we will also present people who had to experience the Shoah as children.



Our project logo symbolizes how something new can arise from fragments of memory.

In Germany, the young guides have received documents and pictures from the member initiatives of the memorial network about persecuted children and their families from the Gäu-Neckar-Alb region during the Nazi era. They are doing further research and develop narrations of several life stories. They will be shown on an own homepage in January 2022, as picture stories with short texts. They will be supplemented by eyewitness interviews with some survivors.

In Israel, the youth guides have interviewed eleven men and women

in recent months who experienced and survived the Shoah as children. Some of these interviews were recorded by a professional film crew for our online exhibition.

Even before the presentation of our online exhibition, you can find out about our project on an ongoing basis. We report on its progress on Instagram and Facebook. There, traditional media of memorial work meet with young, fast-moving media. We began selecting historical photos, researching their backgrounds and taking scenic shots of Rexingen, Tübingen and Hechingen. On Instagram, we also show photos of the young guides' interviews with Shoah survivors, introduce the individual young guides, and post screenshots of our Zoom conferences, which currently replace physical visits.

In these, we meet regularly and report to each other on our progress and problems. We speak English, all of us are non-native speakers, so sometimes we run into minor communication problems, which we solve with humor and translations into German and Hebrew.

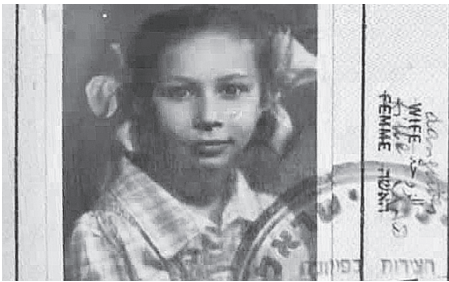
We get input from guests we



In regular Zoom conferences, we exchange information about the progress of our project across thousands of kilometres and discuss content-related questions. Sometimes we also invite experts who can give us basic information on particular aspects. Photo: Jule Henninger



Neriya Sofer and Natali Illouz visited Tami Levi, who told them about her childhood in Poland and her escape to Israel.



Tami Levi's parents and brother were murdered in the Shoah. A woman pretended to be her mother and managed to bring Tami to Israel with this passport photo.



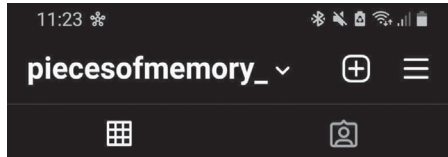
Dalia Gavish as a child with her mother in France after their liberation from concentration camp.



Natali Illouz and Ariel Koriat visited Esther Cohen at Kibbutz Metzuba in northwestern Israel. Esther Cohen was born in Hungary in 1926. She survived several concentration camps and has lived in Israel with her family since 1950.



Dalia Gavish was born in Haifa in 1937. Her parents came to Eretz Israel from Poland with the Fifth Aliyah (1931-1939). When Dalia was one and a half years old, her mother took her to visit family in Poland. The war began and they were stuck in Europe. Upon her return to Israel, Dalia's father gave her a doll for her eighth birthday.



On Instagram, you can follow the development of our project. Every week we tell short picture stories about people we meet or whose life story we are researching. But we also present ourselves, the young guides who participate in the project, the places where we live in Israel and Germany and our ideas and motivations. You can find us at: https://www.instagram.com/piecesofmemory_/



Or Kurt and Sharif Zin-El Din visited Dr. Yitzhak Hirsch at his home in Kiryat Chaim. Yitzhak Hirsch was born in Hungary and survived the Auschwitz death camp. He told them about his life in a film interview.



Wedding picture of Motke Berkowitz' parents. He was born in Romania in 1936. With his brother he arrived in Palestine by ship in 1947. The British Mandate authorities prohibited them from entering the country. The brothers had to wait three months in Cyprus until they were allowed to enter Israel in 1948. Today he lives in Shavei Zion.



This photo shows Vardit Meir and her mother. Vardit Meir was born in 1929 in Borken in northwestern Germany. She hid in fourteen different places during the war and came to Israel in 1948. Today she lives in Shavei Zion.

invited, like Madene Shahar from the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, who spoke to us about Jewish resistance in the Shoah. She told us that for a long time after World War II, only organized, militant resistance was remembered, and Shoah survivors who had not "resisted" in the literal sense were considered weak. She asked us what reasons there might have been that someone did not offer militant resistance, and we came to understand that resistance has multiple manifestations. If a person subjected to dehumanizing violence and stripped of everything that made up their life still remains human, still feels and hopes and loves, that is also resistance. Madene introduced us to the concept of spiritual resistance. She showed us the poem "Resistance Is..." by Chaim Guri and Monia Avrahami, in which resistance is mentioned in its different manifestations, increasing in intensity, but all valid.

Resistance is...

by Haim Guri and Monia Avrahami

To smuggle a loaf of bread – was to resist.

To gather information and distribute an underground newsletter – was to resist.

To cry out warning and shatter illusions – was to resist.

To rescue a Torah scroll – was to resist.

*To forge documents – was to resist.
To smuggle people across borders – was to resist.*

To chronicle events and conceal the records – was to resist.

To extend a helping hand to those in need – was to resist.

To dare to speak out, at the risk of one's life – was to resist.

To stand empty-handed against the killers – was to resist.

To reach the besieged, smuggling weapons and commands – was to resist.

To take up arms in streets, mountains and forests – was to resist.

To rebel in the death camps – was to resist.

*To rise up in the ghettos, amid tumbling walls,
in the most desperate revolt humanity has ever known...*



For us, it is very special when the elderly welcome us into their homes and tell us about their childhood and life. Daniel Roseman and Hila Shahar visited Asher Engel in Shavei Zion.

David Holinstat from the Jewish Community of Wuerttemberg (IRGW) participated in our last conference. He told us about the development of the Jewish communities in Württemberg after World War II until today and answered questions of the young guides. David is part of the encounter project „Meet a Jew“ of the Central Council of Jews in Germany. There are 350 volunteers there who give interested people the opportunity to get in touch with Jewish people and to talk to them. The goal is to combat anti-Semitic stereotypes. Especially in Germany, people are often surprised to meet a Jewish person, David told us, and he would like to see interaction with Jews in Germany become more natural. He himself comes from Los Angeles in the United States, where Judaism and Jews are seen and shown in a much more relaxed way as part of everyday culture.

In the upcoming Zoom conferences,

we want to deepen our personal exchange and continue working together on our online exhibition. Our project ends in early 2022 and we hope that mutual visits still be possible later this year. Until then, we will stay at home, at our laptops and with our books, and realize the exchange digitally.

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the author of this article, is project manager of the German-Israeli youth exchange „Pieces of Memory - Children in the Shoah and us“. She studied general rhetoric and empirical cultural studies in Tübingen, speaks English and Hebrew, and knows Israel from her own experience. Since 2018, she has been active in the Rexingen Synagogue Association and the network of memorial sites in Gäu-Neckar-Alb.