

Rosita Dienst-Demuth

Foreword

In 2004, Richard Levi was invited back to his original homeland – for the first time since his enforced exile. He was among 17 honorary guests we welcomed, who had returned to witness the unveiling of the memorial plaque on the wall of the Lessing-Realschule in Freiburg. As a result of this ceremony, which took place during a week of “meeting and remembering”, the mandatory school for Jewish children began to be rescued from oblivion.

Since that time, the history-workshop has kept in contact with Richard Levi and has developed a friendship with him. From the time of his exile, he had received and saved many letters from his parents and relatives. He entrusted them to me on my first visit to him in Ashford/England. In publishing a selection of these letters, we remember all victims of the Holocaust: Those who were deported to Gurs, as well as the children who were saved by children’s transports. At a time when there are ever fewer survivors to bear witness, important documents such as these 98 letters translated into English attest, to the incomparable crimes of humanity, and serve both as public reminders of what happened as well as a warning against rightwing radicalism and anti-Semitism.

Heidi Beck-Braach has transcribed these letters and compiled an index of places, persons and subjects. With her research on individual and family biographies, her additional genealogical research, and her analysis of all 98 letters, Mrs. Beck-Braach has shed new light on what had been irretrievably lost - Jewish life in rural areas of Baden.

I first came in contact with Renate Haberer-Krauss, a cousin of Richard Levi, through Eva Cohn-Mendelsson, another of the former students of the mandatory school. Renate now lives in Chicago. Renate Haberer-Krauss helped us to find Richard Levi. Therefore, we are very happy that it was Renate who translated his important letters into English. It was miraculous that the whole Haberer family (two daughters, the parents and the grandmother) survived: The internment camps of Gurs and Rivesaltes, the father’s dangerous involvement with the Resistance, children’s homes in the south of France, and the daughters’ escape to Switzerland. In the letters, the young girl Renate Haberer-Krauss is often mentioned. Contrary to Richard Levi’s English-speaking, Christian surroundings, in his land of exile, the Haberers still spoke German after their emigration to the USA in 1947. Renate Haberer-Krauss was the ideal translator for this project. We are deeply grateful to her.

This publication became possible through nine years of research by the History-Workshop of the Lessing-Realschule in Freiburg. The analysis of all the letters by Heidi Beck-Braach and my preparation for teaching purposes contributed to the effort of using rich material for the work of remembrance. Richard Levi is no longer alone with his letters!

In 2001, the process began of researching and commemorating the mandatory school for Jewish children. In 2006 and in 2008, through exchange programs for students from Israel and the Ukraine, we expanded our concerns to present issues. Thus, with today's student involvement, we have come full circle. Their knowledge of past events sharpens their attention to questions of the present and the future in our own country and elsewhere. We hope that looking at both past history and current events will help to lay the foundation for a better future.

For this book English translations were only partially possible. We hope that English speakers will benefit from these translations ... especially Richard Levi's family; also the KTA, the Kindertransport Association (established in 1990 in the UK), the Association of Jewish Refugees and the Center for German Jewish Studies at the University of Sussex, UK.

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Rosita Dienst-Demuth
Head of the history-workshop of Lessing-Realschule in Freiburg
"Mandatory school for Jewish children 1936 to 1940"

We are grateful for the financial support. We want to name especially:

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Introduction, Rosita Dienst-Demuth

Don` t forget! –

The Mandatory School for Jewish Children in Freiburg 1936 until 1940.

A project description of the History Workshop at the Lessing-Realschule Freiburg, 2001 until 2010

Richard Levi and the work of the History-Workshop

Since the Fall of 2001, students of the Lessing-Realschule in Freiburg have been doing research on the forgotten “Jewish school”. Some of the former students were visiting Breisach and revealed that they had been forced to attend the Lessingschule in Freiburg as a measure of the national socialist policy of racial separation. From October 21, 1936 to November 10, 1938, the mandatory school for Jewish children was installed in two classrooms of the Lessing-school. For 60 years, the Jewish children and their teachers at the Lessing-Realschule had been forgotten. Some interested students in the history workshop, took on the project of documenting their histories. They wanted to know what had happened to the students and the teachers both then and now. They started out by searching for the names of the former students and teachers. The search for their names was very difficult as the municipal archive was not able to provide any names of former Jewish students. The lists of students remained missing. It took a presentation in New York City’s Stephen Wise Free Synagogue, as well as two advertisements in the “Aufbau” on the work of the history-workshop, to create trust and to accelerate the success of this research.

Today, we are in contact with survivors all over the world. We are doing research on life paths of former students. Four documentations on the fates of particular families have already been compiled and are constantly being supplemented. Additionally, three movies have been produced on the work of the history-workshop.

Many survivors have become active participants in to the project. On May 24, 2002, Alice Dreifuss-Goldstein (Kenzingen/USA) was the first visitor we welcomed to her former school. On October 21, 2002, Dr. Kurt Maier (Kippenheim/USA), gave an extensive presentation to 5 classes of Lessing-Realschule. In March 2003 we had meetings in the USA with Ralph Eisemann (former Jewish student), Lauren Leese (daughter of Carl Jaburg) and with Harry Kaufmann (son of the Jewish teacher Alfred Kaufmann). The former students Wiltrude Hene-Lavelle (Eichstetten/Spain) and Carl Jaburg (Ihringen/Freiburg/USA) came to visit us in 2003 with their children and grandchildren when “stumbling stones” were set for their murdered grandmothers Rosa Regina Bloch and Jette Judas. Later on, more visitors came: Ralph Eisemann (Breisach/USA), Eva Cohn Mendelsson (Offenburg/ Great Britain), Henry Alpern (Freiburg/Great Britain),

Kurt Judas (Ihringen/USA), Renate Haberer-Krauss (Offenburg/USA), Ralph and Louis Zivi (Müllheim/USA) and Eugen Moser (Haslach, Kinzigtal/USA).

In October 2004, a plaque commemorating the “Zwangsschule für jüdische Kinder”, (the mandatory school for Jewish children), was developed by the History-Workshop, with the assistance of Dr. phil. Cornelia Frenkel-Le Chuiton. In 2006, a second and a third plaque were created, with the names of more than 60 Jewish students and their teachers.

Present at the unveiling of the memorial plaque was Richard Levi, born in Friesenheim. He was one of the 17 honorary guests who had come from 6 countries. For Richard, this was the first time since 1939, that he had been invited to return to his former homeland. Other honorary guests were: Ilse Wyler-Weil (Breisach/Switzerland), Else Geimar-Pripis (Emmendingen/Israel), Susi Grelet-Greilsheimer (Offenburg/ France), Herta Weil-Cohn and her sister Katie Sondheim (Emmendingen/USA), Margot Weil-Heymann (Emmendingen/Basel), Christa Rösch, the daughter of Nelly Heilbrunner (Freiburg/survived and died in Freiburg), Esther Tenen-Schaerf and her brother Manfred Schaerf (Freiurg/Israel) and Milton Matz, the widower of Anneliese Judas (Ihringen/USA).

Texture of the memorial plaque on the building of Lessing-Realschule Freiburg – a translation:

Remembrance and Commemoration

The Mandatory School for Jewish Children

In this building, Jewish children from Freiburg and the region were taught. Due to racial laws, they were no longer allowed to attend regular schools. These students, their families and teachers suffered under the National Socialist policies of persecution and destruction. Thanks to the courageous people from the resistance, many of these people were able to survive. Their families and friends were not.

Those who saved these children are an example to all of us of tolerance and courage. We grieve with the survivors for those who were murdered.

From October 21st 1936 until the pogrom of November 10th 1938, the mandatory school was housed in this building. From March 1939 until the deportation on October 22nd 1940 to Gurs in southwest France, schooling took place in the Jewish community house next to the destroyed synagogue on Wertmannplatz.

October 2004

This selection of letters to Richard Levi is part of a collection of 98 letters and postcards sent to him in England by his parents and relatives between the years 1939 and 1942. In the spring of 1939 Richard Levi, then 11 years old, was one of 10 000 children who were

saved from the Holocaust by Kindertransport trains. In the beginning the letters came from his parents in Friesenheim, his relatives in Freiburg, Offenburg and New York, and from his grandmother Fanni in Haigerloch. Then suddenly letters came from Gurs, the internment camp in southern France where all Jews from Baden and Saarpfalz to were deported on October 22nd 1940. Later the letters arrived from the Camp de Rivesaltes. The very last letter came in September 1942 mentioning the deportation to the East. For Richard there was now only uncertainty, fear and silent despair.

It started with a letter

The Freiburg Project “Nazi Terror against Youth” made it possible for the History Workshop to research 5 additional biographies of former Jewish students of the Lessingschool. For the planned exhibition and for the very first time in his life Richard Levi wrote a letter to the History Workshop about his memories of the sad destiny of his family. This letter laid the foundation for the creation of four banners, which were part of a two month project exhibition at the Catholic Academy of Freiburg in 2008.

15th December 2007, Letter from Richard Levi to the History Workshop, title added by the History Workshop:

At the station in Offenburg I saw my parents for the last time

“Dedicated to my children Susan Ruth and Mark Robert”

“My name is Richard Levi, and I am the son of Alfred and Brunhilde Levi. We lived at Hauptstrasse 89, Friesenheim, a little village in Germany. I was born in Freiburg/Breisgau on April 9, 1927. I attended the village school in Friesenheim until the National Socialist government enacted a law that forbade all Jewish children to attend a normal state school. After that, I attended the Lessingschule in Freiburg, where Jewish children were taught in two classrooms, until 10 November 1938. During that time I lived during the school week, with my aunt Lydia and uncle Friederich Bloch, at Eschholzstraße 84 in Freiburg.

My parents realized that life in Germany was no longer safe. With great sorrow, they let me travel to England on a children’s transport. Altogether, 10, 000 children were saved in this way. The children’s transport was organized by private British citizens as well as organizations, which payed all costs, including room and board, and had to guarantee that the children would not be a burden to the state.

When in March, 1939 I travelled to England via Holland with lots of other children, I saw my parents for the last time at the Offenburg station.. The transport arrived at Harwich on March 19th.

From there, we went by train to the Liverpool Street Station in London where today a bronze memorial memorializes this rescue operation. Then we went by car to a Jewish home for boys on Woburn Road in West Croydon in the South of London. We were about 20 boys, cared for by Mr and Mrs Lehmann. We attended the Tavistock School – a

normal state school. When the British government saw the danger of war and the possible bombing of big cities such as London, it decided to evacuate all schoolchildren from Greater London into the country. We students of the Tavistock School were evacuated to Horsham in West Sussex – not far from the southern coast of England. I was assigned to Mr and Mrs Streeter on Gladstone Road in Horsham. The classes for the Tavistock students were supposed to be held in the local school on Oxford Road. However, there was not enough room there for all of the students. Therefore, for those of us “additional” students, there were only part-time classes, sometimes only in the morning, sometimes only in the afternoon. My school career continued in this matter for 2 years until I left school at the age of 14. I started working in the office of a construction firm. In the evening, I attended further training courses for typing, bookkeeping, shorthand, woodwork, and I also took dancing lessons. For a while, I was secretary of a debating club. In the dancing lessons, I got to know the woman who became my wife: Ella Dudley. Picture 73

We married on December 15th, 1956 and lived in Horsham until my firm transferred me to Ashford in Kent. During this time we had two children: Mark Robert, born on January 18th, 1962, and Susan Ruth, born on June 4th, 1965.

My parents Brunhilde and Alfred Levi went on to live at Hauptstrasse 89 in Friesenheim until they were forced to sell both their house and the neighbouring house nr. 87, which housed their hardware- and haberdashery-shop. The shop had been founded by my paternal grandfather, Benjamin Haberer. Therefore, his name was on the building. Both buildings were sold at the extremely low price of 8000,- Reichsmark. In a part of the haberdashery-shop, there was a separate business that had been doing well before. The buyers sold the whole property in 1953. Today, there is a modern apartment building standing on the premises.

Up until the present, I have not received compensation for the two houses and their contents. My first application to the “Amt fuer Wiedergutmachung” in London in September 2001 was rejected by the German authorities. The reason given was that the application had come too late. Why had I not applied earlier on? In the early 1950's, when I was a very young man, I was one of the few Jews of Friesenheim who had survived – and as a child without parents. This was well known in Friesenheim, but no one informed me about the possibility of applying, nor about my right to get compensation.

My father was deported to Dachau after “Kristallnacht” on November 10, 1938, along with three more men from Friesenheim. He was released on December 17, 1938. On October 22, 1940, 5617 Jews from Baden, my parents amongst them, were rounded up. In anywhere from 15 minutes to 2 hours at most, they had to pack their essentials. First, they were taken on German army-trucks, and then shipped on 5 deportation trains into the infamous camp of Gurs in the south of France. They were allowed to take only 50 kilos of luggage and 100 Reichsmarks with them.

Then, in August and September of 1942, the Jews were deported to Auschwitz from the internment camp of Gurs. In Auschwitz, they were murdered by those to whom the German government had assigned this task.

In September 2006, a memorial stone was unveiled in Friesenheim, which memorializes this heinous crime. With the help of a sculptor, a number of young people worked on this memorial project.

The children's transport to England was to mean the final separation for me and my parents. As for me, it saved my life. While I was working at adapting to my new life, my parents and other relatives wrote many postcards and letters to me. On September 1st of 1942 my parents wrote their very last letter from Camp de Rivesaltes before their deportation to the East – fearing the worst for their future.

Richard Levi, December 15th 2007“

For the banners we wanted to produce for the exhibit, we still needed the photos that Richard Levi was prepared to give us. However, there was no question of his sending the originals by mail. My visit in Ashford/England solved the problem and touched me in profound ways. As the first visitor he received from his former homeland that had banned him, and as a representative of the History-Workshop I was cordially welcomed. For two days, his wife Ella pampered me while Richard and I worked on old photos and documents, which I photographed. Richard Levi shared his memories, making it possible for me to more fully understand the pictures. Then, suddenly, Richard Levi told me about the many old letters, which he had carefully preserved. Although I felt that the responsibility for these special originals was too much for me, Richard Levi was determined that I was to take all the letters back to Baden where he believed they belonged.

How awfully lonely he must have felt for decades with these letters that in his surrounding nobody but himself was able to read? The letters eventually found a safe home in Kreisarchiv Offenburg, the regional archive, where they are now protected from oblivion and further decay. Before the letters were turned over, I made copies of them and had them bound in a book, which I presented to Richard Levi and of which he now says, “this is my bible”.

In the work we are now presenting, all the letters were analysed (part 1) and a selection was made up for teaching purposes (part 2). In addition to that, this selection from these treasured letters were translated into English and made accessible to English readers (part 3).