

## **Commemoration ceremony with students from Tirat Carmel**

*Speech by the mayor of Monheim am Rhein, Daniel Zimmermann, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2010*

Dear students of Shifman High School and Otto-Hahn-Gymnasium,

Before we lay down the wreath in front of the memorial, I would like to commemorate the Jewish citizens, who lived in Monheim about eighty years ago.

In Monheim, there has never been a synagogue. The few Jewish citizens of Monheim, who lived their faith, had to go to Langenfeld if they wanted to go to a synagogue. Nevertheless, also here in Monheim, people have been intimidated, walls have been scrawled on, and the Jewish cemetery has been disgraced. Seventy-two years ago, Monheim was a small village. People knew each other. It was hard to imagine assaults like in the big cities - but they existed just the same.

Already on November the 8th in 1938, one day before the November Pogrom took place in other parts of Germany, unknown people ravaged the Jewish cemetery in Monheim. In these times, it was located far outside the town. Gravestones were knocked over and destroyed. On the very same day, three Jewish houses here in Monheim were scrawled on with tar and red paint.

The next evening, the party leaders of the Nazi party of Monheim met some supporters from the economy. They deliberated on the further procedure, especially how the few Jewish fellow citizens, who lived at this time in Monheim, could be intimidated and harassed.

Having drunk a lot of alcohol, the party went to the first of the three Jewish houses. The leaders probably stayed in the background, but incited the other Nazis. They threw stones through the windows, destroyed furniture, and threw closets, chinaware, lamps, and other things out onto the street. They beat the residents and went towards the next house.

The offenders were probably known in Monheim. As well as the victims, who had lived for decades, mainly all their lives, in this community. And the big majority of the other people from Monheim - although they may not have approved of these actions - have merely stood and stared, and have left their helpless neighbors and fellow citizens to the furious mob.

To remember the fate of the twelve citizens of Monheim, who were, because of their Jewish faith, first excluded and then killed, twelve stumbling blocks ('Stolpersteine') were embedded in the pavement six years ago.

Four of these blocks are not far away from here in the Graben Street fifty-four, where the Red Cross is located today. This house which functioned as the fire station after the war belonged originally to the Herz family. It was inhabited by the four siblings Johanna, Sara, Josef und Wilhelmine.

Three of the siblings, namely Johanna, Sara and Josef Herz, were deported to Theresienstadt in 1942. They were sixty-nine, seventy-four and seventy-six years old. In Theresienstadt, Josef Herz passed away - probably because of the conditions in this camp. His two sisters were deported once again - this time to death camps - where they were murdered.

The fourth Stolperstein in the Graben Street is dedicated to Wilhelmine Herz. From her twenty-eighths birthday on, she had lived in hospitals - probably because of a disability. In

February of 1942, aged seventy, she was taken from Langenfeld-Galkhausen to Grafenberg. From there, she was deported to an unknown destination, probably to the death camp Hadamar in Hessen.

The eldest brother of the four siblings who lived in the Graben Street, Emanuel Herz, lived with his two daughters Helene and Mathilde in the street that is called Franz-Boehm Street today. He, too, was deported to Theresienstadt in 1942, at the age of eighty-three. If he died there or in a death camp is not known.

His daughter Mathilde had already been deported by the Nazis in 1941. She was brought to Riga when she was fifty-two years old. Her younger sister Helene Herz was deported from Cologne to an unknown place where she was murdered.

In the Frohn Street, five other Stolpersteine keep further citizens of Monheim in memory who have lost their lives due to the crimes committed during the Nazi era. They are also members of the Herz family. The couple Goldina and Alfred Herz was deported to Riga in December of 1941. Both of them were aged fifty-nine. Where exactly they were murdered is not known. Their twenty-seven year old daughter Hedwig moved with her husband Felix Dahl to Cologne in 1935, they fled to France in 1939. There, they were traced and deported to Auschwitz in 1944. The second daughter of the Herz family, Irma, also moved with her husband to Cologne. From there, she was deported to Theresienstadt or Minsk in the summer of 1942 where she was murdered.

A whole family has been wiped out. We want to remember them and the other victims who have been harassed by citizens of Monheim and who have been murdered in concentration camps.

Of the over all sixteen Jewish people in Monheim, only four have survived the times of the Nazi-terror regime.

Among them are Artur and Marga Blumenfeld with their son Felix. They either recognized the imminent danger and emigrated in time to Palestine, or just joined the Zionist movement and started a new life on the grounds that are Israel today.

Even if it is unclear why they left; it is a fact that the three of them did leave Monheim between 1933 and 1935 and moved to Palestine. They turned their back on Monheim in time. That way, they were lucky like only a few other Jews at this time, because most of them stayed in Germany, looked at the Third Reich as a temporary episode in time and hoped for better days to come.

And why should these people have left Germany, their home country? Monheim was their home town, they lived here peacefully together with Catholics and Protestants. They felt at home and didn't have any other place to live in than this small village near the Rhine. That neighbors and friends could turn against them, that they could become disenfranchised in their own country, in their own town, even in their own village, only few of them foresaw.