

LAYING THE 'STUMBLING STONES' IN HEILBRONN

Eugene resident and longtime art jeweler
Hannah Goldrich examines her
Jewish heritage through *Stolpersteine*

BY DAN BUCKWALTER

It is a home set off from street traffic by a large yard. You might miss it as you drive by. That yard fronts a rustic looking house with a spacious and inviting porch in a leafy southeast Eugene neighborhood that even has a bamboo forest on the street corner.

Hannah Goldrich and her husband, Daniel, have called it home for more than 50 years and have had four children, eight grandchildren and three great grandchildren grace its rooms and hallways. The interior has a comfortable, lived-in air to it with art from the couple's many travels, especially to Mexico, and the backyard is dotted with flowers that she tends to.

"It's kind of a funky house," Hannah Goldrich says.

Goldrich long ago made a name for herself as a jeweler with exhibits throughout the Pacific Northwest. She often sees the jewelry she made adorning the ears of strangers, and she has taught extensively at Maude Kerns Art Center. It's been a gratifying life, and the days now usually end for Goldrich with *The New York Times* and a game of Wordle.

Her life almost never happened.

How Hannah Goldrich and her Jewish family made it from Heilbronn, Germany, to the United States is a remarkable four-year story that starts in 1937 and includes fortuitous timing at almost every step of the way.

The Victor family — father Max, mother Trude, older sister Ursula and Hannah — fled persecution in Germany, where strict anti-Semitism legislation such as the "Nuremberg Laws" were becoming entrenched and just ahead of *Kristallnacht* (the "Night of Broken Glass") in 1938 as well as the opening of concentration camps. They made stops in Switzerland, Holland and England. From England the family journeyed to Cuba in 1940, just a year after the "Voyage of the Damned," a ship full of Jews seeking to escape Germany, was turned away in Havana, and after two weeks' detention in a camp on that island nation, the Victor family moved to the Dominican Republic for nine months before, finally, landing in New York City in 1941.

Hannah Victor was only two years old when the family fled Heilbronn and began this odyssey. She first returned to her birthplace with her family as Hannah Goldrich in 1985 for *Begegnungswoche*, a week of intensive dialogue and tours of their former community, at the invitation of the people of Heilbronn. She returned again June 29 for a *Stolpersteine* ceremony, the laying of brass plaques honoring victims of Nazi persecution in front of the house where she was born and in a community where Goldrich can trace family lineage to the 1800s.

"I felt really good about it," she says from the dining room of her Eugene home. "I have felt different about Germany. A lot of places in Germany make sure you don't forget. That's gratifying to me."

THE STOLPERSTEINE PROJECT

Without memory, there is no culture, and *Stolpersteine* is just one of many memorials to victims of the Holo-

caust. The project began in Germany in 1992, and now exists in 20 languages and 24 countries.

The grassroots project, started by German artist Gunter Demnig, honors the victims of the Nazis by placing a small brass stone, inscribed with the name and life details of a victim, in front of the victim's last known residence. The stones measure 10 by 10 centimeters.

The name *Stolpersteine* translates to "stumbling stones" — and they are intended to be stumbled upon, serving as a reminder of the suffering and loss.

Europeana, a web portal created by the European Union that is dedicated to digitizing and promoting European history, notes that the *Stolpersteine* project also serves as a way to educate the public about the horrors of the Holocaust. Many of the victims eternalized by the stones were ordinary people, the website explains, and while the majority of *Stolpersteine* commemorate Jewish victims of the Holocaust, others have been placed on behalf of victims that include the Romani, the LGBTQ+ community, people with disabilities, Blacks and people who were persecuted for their religious, political and social beliefs.

It is the commemorating of ordinary people — victims of atrocities — that is vital, says Rabbi Ruhi Sophia of Eugene's Temple Beth Israel.

"It's really important to memorialize the fact that they were a part of society," she says.

Demnig placed the first *Stolperstein* on Dec. 16, 1992, in front of the Cologne City Hall, 50 years to the day

after an order was signed to begin the mass deportation of Jews and Roma from Germany. In recent years, the *Stolpersteine* project has expanded to honor men, women and children who were forced into exile before and during World War II. The Colegio Pestalozzi school in Buenos Aires, Argentina, founded in 1934, became the first site outside Europe to host one in 2017, honoring in this case the hundreds of German Jewish children who found refuge there in exile.

And it was the inclusion of exiles that prompted Lewis Santer, a nephew of Goldrich, into action, and to work with Goldrich to have the Victor family remembered with a *Stolperstein* on the sidewalk in front of the family home in Heilbronn. Often, it is local groups, residents of a particular street or school children who come together to research the biographies of local victims and raise the roughly \$130 it costs to install each stone.

On June 29, Hannah Goldrich proudly stood by the four stones honoring her family and delivered prepared remarks, in front of the house in Heilbronn that somehow survived ferocious Allied bombing in 1944, bombing that destroyed much of the rest of the city.

THE JOURNEY

"I was born in the house we are standing before, Wartburgstrasse 50, on March 31, 1935. It was an easy birth at home since my Jewish family was no longer allowed in the hospitals."



HANNAH GOLDRICH IN THE FLOWER GARDEN SHE TENDS Photo by Todd Cooper