

Graduate Spotlight

Every year, the International School for Holocaust Studies holds hundreds of educational activities, in a dozen languages, for over 300,000 students and educators in Israel and around the world. Featured here is one of the School's graduates, and what she has achieved since:



Gertraud Hoheneder Austria

James McIntosh

■ Gertraud Hoheneder is an elementary school teacher at the Haid Elementary School near Linz, Austria, and a dedicated graduate of Yad Vashem's International School for Holocaust Studies seminars. "For many years, we teachers gathered a lot of information about the expulsion and the murder of the Jewish people during the Holocaust," Hoheneder says. "We also held political discussions, commemoration services and talked to surviving witnesses in Austria and Israel. As a result, National Socialism and the Holocaust has become a recurring topic in our schools. However, pupils of all age groups still only have fragmentary knowledge of this period of time, and it raises challenging questions, particularly in our elementary school classes."

Hoheneder has made several visits to Israel to learn more about the Holocaust and Judaism. During one extended stay in Jerusalem, she volunteered at the retirement home of Neveh Simcha. There she met Ilse Mass, a Holocaust survivor who was born in Linz. The Mauthausen concentration camp is located a mere 20 kilometers from Mass' hometown, and forms an unavoidable part of the landscape. Mass fled Austria with her parents as a child in 1938 and survived the war as a refugee in Shanghai, China. After the war, Mass made *aliyah* and built a new life in Jerusalem. The trauma that Mass experienced during the November 1938 *Kristallnacht* pogrom and the disruption of her childhood moved Hoheneder, motivating her and her colleagues to write a children's book about Mass' life journey.

The German Desk at the International School's European Department aided Hoheneder with its pedagogical expertise throughout the book's production. *Weg von hier... (Away from Here...)*, the fruit of their efforts, gives a human face to the Holocaust and models Yad Vashem's age-appropriate educational approach for teaching this difficult topic to children. By focusing on Ilse Mass' family, school experiences,

and move to a foreign place, Hoheneder encourages Austrian children to empathize with this Holocaust survivor's



■ Survivor Ilse Mass (left) with the author of her story, Gertraud Hoheneder

personal story. Illustrations and photographs from Mass's personal albums are interwoven throughout the book, beginning with her early years in prewar Linz. Colorful maps also help young readers trace Ilse's journey. The end of the book includes a glossary of terms about Judaism, the Holocaust and the Nazi regime written appropriately for younger-aged readers.

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The first few paragraphs describe a normal, typical childhood, introducing the readers to a young girl who goes to school, has a favorite doll and loves ballet dancing. After the *Anschluss* (Nazi Germany's annexation of Austria in March 1938), the atmosphere turned hostile and Mass's family fled to the Far East. Shanghai was one of the only cities in the world at that time that did not require an entry visa and approximately 18,000 Jews sought refuge there. However, even those who managed to reach Shanghai faced numerous difficulties along the way, including a very long voyage, culture shock, and the sudden transition from European citizenship

to becoming stateless refugees. The story ends with Ilse's immigration to Israel and the life she built there.

"*Weg von hier...* chronicles Ilse's life before, during and after the war, telling a tender story about the Holocaust without using graphic



■ Ilse Mass loved to dance, even from a young age

images," explains Hoheneder. "The narrative captivates the children's imagination, and spurs curiosity about what happened to others like her."

Hoheneder plans to hold a Holocaust-related teacher-training seminar at her school in 2014, and Yad Vashem has agreed to lend its support to the event. During the seminar, she will present the book to Austrian educators and explain how to use survivors' personal stories to teach the Holocaust to elementary school-aged children. "Teaching about the Holocaust through this book has been very successful," she states. "Yad Vashem's expert guidance showed me that one can create appropriate material for any age group, including our younger students."

The author works in the European Department, International School for Holocaust Studies.

