

## Deportieren

(The Jews from Volkmarsen, September, 1942)

On January 28, 1948, a plane containing 28 Mexican farm workers, who were being deported, and a crew of 4 Americans, crashed in Los Gatos canyon, California. Everyone aboard was killed. Woody Guthrie wrote a poem about the crash, "Plane Wreck at Los Gatos," also called "Deportee." It contained the lines, "Who are all of these dear friends all scattered like dry leaves? The radio said they were just deportees." Later, with a melody by Martin Goodman, a Brooklyn schoolteacher, this became one of Woody's most famous songs. He used both Spanish and English in the chorus: "Goodbye to my Juan, goodbye, Rosalita/ Adios mis amigos, Jesus y Maria/ You won't have a name when you ride the big airplane/ And all they will call you will be "'deportee.'"

In September, 1942, all the Jews from a small part of the state of Hessen, Germany, were deported by train from the town of Volkmarsen to the Nazi concentration camps. The official line was that they were being "relocated" to other towns further east. No one wrote them a song. The deportees included two members of my wife, Carol's family: Beate, and Johanna Frankenthal, her grand aunt and great grandmother. After hearing a speech by Ernst Klein of Volkmarsen in 2012 at an event commemorating the 70th anniversary of the deportation, and being struck by a question he asked, "Hat niemand bemerkt dass niemand zurück kam?" (Did no one notice that no one came back?) I went back to the house of Karl Heinz and Birgit Stadtler, where Carol and I were guests, and, using Günter Maier's "second best guitar," I wrote a commemorative song in the format of Woody Guthrie's and Martin Goodman's song. (Günter Maier is Vöhl's retired Lutheran minister.) The verses are in English and the chorus in German. I subsequently performed the song in a local high school in the class of Kurt Willi Julius and in the Synagogue in Vöhl, which was the hometown of Carol's great grandparents. The central figure in both the high school class and synagogue program on those two days was my wife, Carol, who gave a talk about what happened to her family in the Holocaust. The Synagogue has been restored, largely by Karl Heinz and Kurt Willi and is now used for meetings, art exhibits, and concerts, since there are no Jews left in Vöhl. Tragically, Kurt Willi died in his sleep ten years ago. In the foyer of the Synagogue there is a large plaque listing all the former Jews of Vöhl and what happened to them. The Moritz and Anna you will hear in my song, are on the plaque but were not Carol's relatives.