

# Elizabeth Foote reports in Facebook in words and pictures about her stay in Vöhl exactly one year ago

**Tag 1: Mittwoch, 15. Juni 2019**

## **Arrival in Frankfurt – Drive to Vöhl – First View into the Synagogue**

I landed in Frankfurt, exhausted and exhilarated all at once. I wound my way through the airport, hoping I was going the right direction, and eventually found my way to the exit. The problem was, I didn't know where I was meeting Karl-Heinz! I turned around, saw him 20 feet away, watching the way I'd just come.



**Hello, Frankfurt indeed!**

Onto the autobahn, heading to Vöhl. The drive went quickly, and I couldn't take in the familiar scenery fast enough. Ah, Germany, how I've missed you through the years! Before long, there was a castle on a hill. I don't remember where we were, and my picture of it is lousy, but I was still excited.



**A castle on a hill. Which castle? I can't remember. I wanted to stop and go through it, but there wasn't time. That is the Landgrafenschloss in Marburg.**



**The Edersee, and the sign for Vöhl. We're getting close!**

I could think of nothing but sleep, longed for a nap, thought I was going to the Gasthaus, but Karl-Heinz said we were going to his house first. There I met the brothers Baird, Geoffrey and Daniel. And the delightful Birgit, Karl-Heinz' wife. She served "kaf-fee und kuchen", which I soon learned was a daily occurrence. Everything I ate over the next

few days was delicious, but the creations coming from her kitchen were magical.

After a lovely visit and nosh with the Stadtlers and Bairds, Karl-Heinz took me to nearby Asel, where I would be staying at Gasthaus Sauer, Asel, and where we'd have dinner. On the way, we reached a crossroads. With a gleam in his eye, Karl-Heinz asked if I wanted to see the Synagogue. YES!!!



**Synagogue Vöhl. The Förderkreis has done an amazing job restoring it. The sanctuary now has radiant heating in the walls and the floors, a decision made, I'm sure, during their first meeting on a chilly November day.**

I remember placing my hand on the door frame before entering. I remember staring in awe at the ceiling in the sanctuary. I remember feeling the spirits of all my Rothschild relatives surrounding me. It was moving and emotional and perfect.



My first view inside the sanctuary of [#SynagogeVoehl](#). LOVE the soft blue of the cupola



A washed-out view of the ceiling. The sun and the stars, set against that wonderful blue, make for a most interesting ceiling. As much of the original as possible was retained. The darker stars show where replacements were necessary.

At the gasthaus, I had time to unpack, shower, and relax for a few minutes before going downstairs to the dining room for dinner. Birgit and the Bairds sat at one end of the table, while Karl-Heinz sat at the other end of the table with a few other people, having a political strategy meeting. One of them, Karsten Kalhöfer, was running for Mayor (he won, by the way).

It was white asparagus season in Germany, and every restaurant we entered had a special "Spargelkarte", white asparagus menu. That night I ordered Schnitzel with asparagus and potatoes. The schnitzel was as big as my head, the vegetables came together in a large serving bowl, and there was enough to feed the whole table!!! Everyone else's meals were equally large, so no one wanted to share.

I was in bed by 10, asleep within minutes. "I'm here. I'm home."



## Tag 2: Donnerstag, 16. Juni 2019

### Walk through Asel - Visit to the national park center – At the “Polenkreuz” – Castle garden in Vöhl - Müller’s garden



Breakfast for one. Definitely won't go hungry!

So much happened [#On-eyearagotoday](#) that this make break down into more than one post. I woke up in Asel. The travel gods had smiled on me and I felt no jetlag whatsoever. After a breakfast of brötchen,

butter, jam, soft boiled egg, quark, two kinds of meat, cheese, orange juice, and a pot of hot chocolate, I went for a walk. Asel is so small that you can take your time, walk from one end to the other, stroll along the Fledermaus trail, visit with nice people along the way, and be back where you started in under 30 minutes. I meandered out past the edge of town, and turned in a slow circle. I could see castles on hilltops, rolling hills, old farm houses, trees, fields, and everything so green and lush. So, so peaceful.



A tranquil pond in Asel A tranquil pond in Asel This is the center of town. Very peaceful place to wait for your ride.



An old farmhouse or barn on the outskirts of town. Woodpiles were everywhere!



I used to teach Nordic Walking, so when I saw this sign, I just started laughing. [Greg Wozer](#), if you wondered where to find Nordic Walking Paradise, it's in the beautiful village of Asel.



All you ever wanted to know about the bats of Asel



I met this couple on my walk around Asel. Gisela and Udo Boetcher were in the process of moving their plants out of the winter greenhouse into the garden. They graciously invited me into their garden, showed me all their plants. I emailed this picture to them after I got home, and we've been emailing back and forth since then.





**This is the first thing you see when you drive into Asel. It's the Fledermausturm, or Bat Tower.**

I made it back to Gasthaus Sauer, Asel in time to be picked up by Karl-Heinz. Thursday morning was for sightseeing, and he took Geoff and Daniel and me to the Nationalpark Kellerwald-Edersee. The visitor's center is amazing! It is so interactive and everything you want a visitors center to be. After viewing the introductory 3D film, I was SO EXCITED to go tour the park! But, alas, that wasn't on the schedule. I hid my disappointment as we got back in the car and headed back to Vöhl.



**This handsome fellow is at the NationalPark Edersee-Kellerwald. They've recently introduced wolves into the wild here.**



**The memorial for the murdered Polish workers. Such a peaceful place.**

Along the way, Karl-Heinz turned onto a dirt road and drove into the woods, stopping when we came in sight of a stone monument, not visible from the road. In this secluded space, surrounded by dense greenery, Karl-Heinz told us a story. During WWII, the Nazis "recruited" men from other countries to work for them doing manual labor. In the area of Vöhl, one of these men, from Poland, managed to escape, and he killed a German officer along the way. Himmler ordered the man be found, and issued an order that if he wasn't found, 6 other Polish workers would be killed. Karl-Heinz's father, who was 13 at the time, followed the Nazis and their prisoners into the woods, watched as the 6 Poles were hung. After the war, a memorial was built. Karl-Heinz told us a special memori-

al is held every five years. This was my first introduction to "Never Forget."

Back in Vöhl, Karl-Heinz took us on a walking tour of part of the village. He showed us a beautiful fountain, which is all that remains of the castle that once was there. When the castle was taken down, the stones were used as building material for walls, for other houses, for whatever was needed. Over the next few days, we learned to recognize it in so many different applications around town. Talk about recycling!!!



More later.



**#Oneyearagotoday**, after the mini-tour of Vöhl, Karl-Heinz delivered us to the home of Elke and **Ulrich** (Ulli), who treated us to a marvelous home-cooked lunch. Geoff Baird pretty good German, and Elke and Ulli speak pretty good English, so between us we were able to communicate fairly well. Before we even had a chance to sit down, though, I noticed quilts and quilt art pieces all around the house. In my halting German, with many English words inserted, I asked Elke about them. She was the quilter. I'm a quilter. And an amazing thing happens when two quilters meet: they instantly bond, and they find ways to easily overcome any language barriers. One year later, Elke and I still stay in touch with messages and emails.



**Elke and Ulli let things grow wild, and the result is charming things in unexpected places, like greenery growing on the steps.**



**I love this fountain in Elke and Ulli's garden!!!**



**Ulli's bees. Ulli was supposed to go with us on our sightseeing tour on Saturday, but had to cancel because his bees swarmed and he had to track them down.**

After lunch, they took us on a tour of their backyard. They are a marvelous example of mixing form and function. Rubber clogs nailed to a fence become planters for sempervivum. The salad we had with lunch came from their garden, as did the herbs for the salad dressing. They have a fair-sized pond in the back corner where they grow fish. We asked how they harvest them. Do they use nets? A fishing pole? Ulli grinned and explained they simply drain the pond, gather up all the fish at once, and process them for the freezer. We decided that sounded like cheating.





I have a big planter of hens and chicks (sempervivum) in my front yard. Elke has so many varieties all over her garden. All of them tiny. For example, this is a 6" pot.



Elke with her beautiful quilt. I could have spent hours looking at all her quilted projects. Next time I visit Vöhl, that's one of the things I plan to do!

The Bairds had their own car, so after lunch we walked to the grocery store, where we all bought spices, along with lots of Kinder Eggs. The ones you buy in the States are different than what you get in Germany. The ones there are better. After grocery shopping, we went back to the Stadtler's house. The Bairds and Karl-Heinz went to a political debate (where I'm told Karsten Kalhöfer did a fantastic job), and I stayed behind with Birgit.

The next two hours with Birgit were wonderful. The longer we talked, the more I understood (she quit speaking English pretty early on once she realized I could understand a lot of what was said in German), and I became more comfortable speaking German. I'm pretty certain that if I'd had another 3 or 4

days with Birgit, I'd have been back to being fluent!

Finally it was time to take a drive to Herzhausen and pick up Camille Calman! Honestly, the best part of this trip is that she was able to be there, too! Of course, once we had Camille in the car, we switched back to a mix of English and German.

Dinner that night was with the Synagoge Vöhl, Förderkreis at a fabulous restaurant in nearby Corbach. I can't remember what I had, but the portions were generous and the flavors amazing! Camille and I sat at one end of the table, across from each other, next to Elke, and I think Anna. A late arrive, Walter, came and sat at the end of the table. Camille and I were surrounded by German. Walter kept trying to tell us things that everyone else thought was funny, and which we did not understand.

After dinner, we were told that Walter would be our tour guide for a few hours on Friday, which was the next day. Arrangements were made for him to pick us up the next morning.

Finally back to the Gasthaus. Camille and I were sharing a room, had asked for separate beds. We giggled when we realized we had two twin beds, pushed up together. Didn't matter. Beds were comfortable, we were tired, sleep came easily.

### **Tag 3: Freitag, 17. Juni 2019**

#### **Edersee and Waldeck Castle – Camille in the Synagogue – Sabbath Service – Anniversary Celebration**

[#Oneyearagotoday](#) was a busy, fun-filled day, ending with an emotional evening. Here we go.

After another fabulous breakfast, I took Camille on a walking tour of Asel. Like me, she particularly enjoyed the Fledermaus trail that meanders through the woods and ends at the Fledermausturm. Shortly after we finished, as promised, Walter picked us up in his van for a few hours of sightseeing. He spoke very little English and was relying on Geoff Baird for translation. When I got in the van, I asked, "Walter, hast du ubernacht Englisch gelernt? (Walter, did you learn English overnight?) It took him a moment or two to process that. First, his face was just one of surprise and confusion. Then he realized I was teasing. He shook his finger at me and said, "Oh, du!" (Oh, you!) It kind of set the tone for our relationship. Endless teasing back and forth from that point onward.



**Walter telling Geoff, Daniel, Camille, and myself about Asel Sud**



**Cemetery in Asel. Just a bit overgrown**

Our first stop was the cemetery in Old Asel. A little over a hundred years ago, a dam was built on the river Eder, creating the reservoir known as the Edersee, which flooded the town of Asel. Before that happened, a new location was found for Asel, just up the hill from its original location. The old cemetery remained intact and unflooded. I know the cemetery was added to the tour for my benefit. I had learned in some of my genealogical research that there

were some gentiles named Bock from Asel. My cousin Betty's maiden name was Bock, and her father's family history remains a mystery. I was hoping the cemetery in Asel would lend some clues, but it's too overgrown to yield any clues, unless one has a few hours to cut away the overgrowth.

A few kilometers down the road, Walter again stopped the van so we could get out and see the abandoned Klosterruine in Ober-Werbe. It sits on the edge of a cliff, overlooking the valley below. Walter told his the place was abandoned in the 1500s when all the nuns converted from Catholic to Lutheran, moved to a nearby village, and all got married. The official version is somewhat different, but I like Walter's version better.



**Klosterruine in Ober-Werbe.  
Talk about living on the edge!**

Near the Klosterruine is a large stone monolith that juts out from the hillside. Walter told us that there had been a Nazi installation at the top, and that a large Nazi flag was hanging against the face of the monolith. He said that Richard Rothschild (he is my 3rd cousin once removed) rode his bicycle there at night, climbed up to the top, tore down the flag, and rode home without being discovered. He was later accused of this "crime" and spent two weeks in





prison. That experience convinced him to get out of Germany while he could. I will [#NeverForget](#) his courage.

**Resistance Rock in Ober-Werbe, where Richard Rothschild tore down a Nazi flag.**

A week or two before we arrived in Germany, Karl-Heinz had sent us an itinerary. In looking it over, it had appeared as if Friday morning was wide-open, and Camille and I figured out how to take the bus from Vöhl to Castle Waldeck, and decided that would be a fun adventure. We didn't realize we'd have Walter to take us there.

Walter is a gifted photographer, and raved about the views from the Castle. And I do mean raved!!! And I'm sure they're very lovely. When there's no fog. We couldn't see anything but gray, and Walter was so irritated by that. My hopes of touring the castle were dashed when we learned it's now a posh hotel. Hmm... maybe next time I'll spend a night there.



**Walking up the hill to Castle Waldeck was so much fun. Every few feet offered something new and interesting, revealed a new "addition". Begun in the 12th century, it was added onto through the centuries. The keep, carved into the lintel of a doorway is the date 1518. Other sections of the castle are even newer than that. .**



**I'm guessing this is what remains of some original stairs from the 12th century.**

**Looking out into the fog: Camille, Daniel, Walter, Geoffrey**



On our way to our next stop, Walter stopped at a small visitor's center, where we picked up lots of brochures about the highlights the of the area. Next door was an upside down house.



**Upside down house near the Edersee. No, I don't know why.**

Next up was Edersperre and Edersee. The Edersee is a source of contention in the area. Tourists like to come during the summer for water recreation. However, so much of the water is being sent downriver, that the reservoir is often too low for recreating. The loss of tourism is directly affecting the local economy.



**Edersperre. I love that the architecture makes it feel much, much older than it is.**

I really wanted to spend more time exploring, but it was time to meet Karl-Heinz for lunch. Another fabulous restaurant, another fabulous meal. Camille had this amazing white asparagus soup! Gotta love spargel!



This post is already quite long and the day only half done. I'll write more later.

**Rothschild Girls on the Edersperre. It wasn't until I saw this picture that I realized how similar Camille and I look. In fact, I showed it to someone when I got home and they said, "Oh! I didn't know you had a sister." Gotta love those Rothschild genes!**

One thing I quickly realized is that every day involved at least one visit to the Synagogue during the day, and then going back for the evening's event. [#Oneyearagotoday](#) was no exception.

After our morning adventures with Walter, we were back in the care of Karl-Heinz. Back to Vöhl we went, back to the synagogue. It was Camille's first visit there, and I loved the expression on her face when she entered the sanctuary. I imagine it's much what mine looked like 2 days before.





This is in the floor in the center of the sanctuary of the synagogue. A piece of the original cupola ceiling, broken shards of glass, and dirt from the Holy Land. A beautiful memorial to Kurt-Willi Julius, who was the driving force, along with [Karl-Heinz](#), behind the buying and restoring of the synagogue.

When we walked in, Karl-Heinz got this big grin on his face, marched up to the front of the sanctuary, took a right, kept going, and stopped in front of the furthest chair. he then explained that when Richard Rothschild came for a visit in 2000, he walked to that exact spot and announced this was "Platz Nummer Eins" (seat number one) and the hereditary seat of the Rothschilds. (Ascher Rothschild, my 3rd great-grandfather, contributed significantly to the building of the synagogue in 1827). Karl-Heinz then pointed out one section of the sanctuary had been left unpainted, to show exactly how it had looked before restoration started. It included a piece of the privacy screen that encircled the balcony,

preventing the men in the sanctuary from being distracted by the presence of women.



**Camille entering the synagogue for the first time.**

We went upstairs to the balcony. As we were overlooking the sanctuary, I glanced up and saw the number 12 painted on the header. I showed it to Camille, we looked at each other, and all but ran to the opposite side of the balcony and found our Platz Nummer Eins. This is where our 3rd great-grandmothers, Sprinza and Blümchen Sternberg, sat with their children during Shabbat services. Thank you, Daniel Baird, for taking such a lovely photo of us sitting there.

The backyard of the synagogue is surprisingly small. There's a memorial there, On the Threshold Between Life and Death. It is haunting, disturbing, which is the point. It represents the deported Jews as they entered the cattle cars that carried them to their deaths.



Platz Nummer Eins in the women's balcony. Ascher Rothschild was married twice. I'm descended from his first wife, Sprinza Sternberg, and Camille is descended from both her and his second wife, Blümchen Sternberg, Sprinza's sister. How moving to know they both sat here. And how wonderful to sit here with Camille.



Geoff, Daniel, and [Karl-Heinz](#) admiring the ceiling and the chandelier in the sanctuary.

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The view of the Star of David rose window from Platz Nummer Eins in the women's balcony. Shortly before Krystalnacht, Alfred Rothschild, acting on behalf of the Jewish Community, sold the building to a newly-arrived gentile family, and removed this window. This is the only thing that Identified it as a Synagogue, at least from the outside. So grateful for the foresight that preserved this beautiful place from certain destruction. –



**Standing on the Threshold Between Life and Death.**

**Behind it is an apple tree planted in 2000 by Richard Rothschild and Geoff Baird, symbolizing hope and rebirth. –**

After another fabulous Kafee und Kuchen hosted by Birgit, we went back to our room to get ready for the evening's events. First was a Shabbat service. There haven't been any Jews in Vöhl since the last three Jews, three elderly women, including Selma Rothschild, were deported. To have a Shabbat service, we needed a Minyan. So a congregation from Marburg came to worship in Vöhl.

Before the worship started, we were reminded of the history of the building, of the Jewish community that once thrived in this place. We were educated in Jewish worship, learned you can't have a proper Shabbat service without a Minyan. And that there hadn't been a Minyan in Vöhl since 1939. Which made this Friday night, this Shabbat service, the first in 89 years.

Camille and I looked at each other as the reality of that sunk in. Ascher Rothschild, our 3rd great-grandfather, had helped build this synagogue. Our Rothschild relatives had worshipped here every week for over 100 years. There was a Rothschild in the village as long as their were Jews. And 80 years later, for that historic Shabbat service, Camille and I were there, representing the Rothschilds. Words cannot express how moved, how emotional, we were. Dear Congregation Marburg, Dear Cantor, Dear Rabbi, thank you, thank you!



# „Das sucht seinesgleichen“

Kommers zum 20-Jährigen des Förderkreises der Synagoge Vöhl

VON JULIA RENNER

Vöhl – Mit dem ersten jüdischen Gottesdienst seit mehr als 80 Jahren und einem Kommers wurde am Wochenende das 20-jährige Bestehen des Förderkreises der Synagoge in Vöhl gefeiert. Eigens angereist waren Nachfahren ehemaliger Vöhler Juden aus den USA.

„Dieser Abend wird mir lange in Erinnerung bleiben. Nach diesem beeindruckenden Gottesdienst fehlen mir fast die Worte“, sagte Petra Hegmann, Dekanin des Kirchenkreises Eder. So wie ihr erging es den meisten Besuchern des jüdischen Gottesdienstes in der ehemaligen Synagoge.

Ermöglicht hatten ihn Mitglieder der jüdischen Gemeinde aus Marburg, 18 Mitglieder, unter ihnen Amnon Orbach als Vorsitzender der Gemeinde, waren nach Vöhl gekommen. Thorsten Schmermund leitete den Gottesdienst.

Viele Redner nutzten im Anschluss die Gelegenheit, dem Förderkreis für seine wichtige Arbeit in den vergangenen zwei Jahrzehnten zu danken. Der Verein sei nicht mit anderen vergleichbar, sagte Bürgermeister Matthias Stappert.

Dass das Gemeindepapier seinerzeit gegen den Kauf der alten Synagoge stimmte, sei am Ende gut gewesen. So sei der Förderkreis entstanden, der wichtige Aufgaben besser erfülle, als es die Gemeinde je gekonnt hätte. Der langjährige und bereits verstorbene Kurt-Willi

Julius und der amtierende Vorsitzende Karl-Heinz Stadler seien die „Motoren des Vereins“. Sie hätten die Synagoge über die Grenzen der Region hinaus bekannt gemacht. „Was hier stattfindet, ist Versöhnung“, sagte Stappert.

Erhard Wagner, Mitglied des Kreisausschusses, lobte: „Was hier in 20 Jahren organisiert wurde, sucht seinesgleichen.“ Die Nähe zwischen Förderkreis und evangelischer Kirche betonte Pfarrer Jan Friedrich Eisenberg. Es sei erstaunlich, was der Förderkreis auf die Beine stelle. Zu weiteren Gratulanten zähl-

ten auch Ernst Klein, Vorsitzender des Vereins Rückblende in Volkmarsen, und Dr. Gunnar Richter von der Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft Hessische Gedenkstätten.

Karl-Heinz Stadler blickte zurück auf 162 Konzerte, die bisher stattfanden, berichtete davon, dass in 20 Jahren rund 400 000 Euro in die alte Synagoge investiert wurden und erinnerte seinerseits an Kurt-Willi Julius, der ein „Glücksfall“ für den Förderkreis gewesen sei. Und er mahnte: „Jeder von uns muss sich auch heute immer wieder vornehmen, nicht wegzuschauen.“ » ARTIKEL UNTEN



Besondere Besucher waren am Wochenende in Vöhl: Camille Calman und Elizabeth Foote (von links) aus Salt Lake City in den USA, und Daniel und Jeffrey Baird (zweite Reihe von rechts), ebenfalls aus Amerika. Den jüdischen Gottesdienst leiteten Amnon Orbach (vorne Mitte) und Thorsten Schmermund (hinten mit Brille).

FOTOS: RENNER



Für Musik beim Kommers sorgten Barbara Kuper (rechts) und ihre Musikschülerinnen.

We made the news! [Karl-Heinz](#) is front left next to the Rabbi, with Geoff and Daniel on the other side. Camille is behind Karl-Heinz on the left, with me behind her. What a momentous occasion! I am so very grateful to have been part of it.

After the service, we had refreshments, and I tried caviar for the first time. I'd eat it again.

Soon we were all invited to return to our seats so that the 20 Year Jubilee for the Förderkreis could officially begin. There were so many speakers, and Camille and I didn't understand most of what was said, it being in German. But one thing was clear: [Karl-Heinz](#) was beloved, and credited with much of the progress and success of the Förderkreis, the restoration of the synagogue, the research. Everyone referred to him as "Lieber Karl-Heinz." When they were done, the man himself stood up to speak, to welcome us all, to talk about the 20 year journey to this point.

And then he invited Camille and I to come up, as we had requested. We asked Karl-Heinz to stay. First, in my halting German, I presented a painting to them, asking that it remain in the synagogue. It was a gift from my step-father, my brothers, and me, was painted by my mother in 1999, the same year the Förderkreis was formed. It's a pretty painting of the area by Utah

Lake, in Provo, where she lives. I couldn't look at the painting because I knew I'd start crying. I'm crying now as I write this.

While everyone else had been speaking, Camille and I had begun to understand just what a tremendous feat the Förderkreis had undertaken and accomplished. We also realized they didn't know how far reaching their efforts had been. They were about to.

In the month before this trip, I had researched and written a series of biographical sketches for the first 3 generations of the Rothschild Family of Vöhl. I printed them out, put them in sheet protectors, organized them by generation, and put it all in a large notebook. Camille stood next to me, holding it for all to see, while I read a two page letter to the Förderkreis. A friend of mine had translated it into German for me, for which I will ever be grateful. In it, I explained the 40 year genealogical journey my family had taken to find our way back to Vöhl, that it would not have been possible without the information shared on [www.synagoge-voehl.de](http://www.synagoge-voehl.de). I expressed our heartfelt gratitude for their ongoing efforts, thanked them profusely for their invitation to join them, and explained that the information in the notebook is the beginning of what will, someday, become a book. I promised them a copy when it's finished, but hoped this start would be helpful for now. I presented it to Karl-Heinz, who gave me a big hug, and promised he and Birgit would come to see me in Utah. I can't wait for their visit!

Somehow, I made it through all of that only needing one tissue, which Camille helpfully provided.

When the opening ceremonies were complete, a young girl in attendance asked to see the book. While I was showing it to her, Ulrich came up to me, gave me a hug, and said, "Now I know why you had to be here."



Such a wonderful, adventurous, emotion-filled day. A turning point in my life, for sure.

**This was taken a few days later, but is me holding the painting of mom's we gave to the synagogue.**

#### **4. Tag: Samstag, 18. Mai 2019**

#### **Visit in Volkmarsen - Walk in the footsteps of Vöhler Jews – House Rothschild**

The impact of things I learned [#oneyearagotoday](#) didn't really sink in until after I got home. But sink in they did, affect me they did. Don't worry, it was a good day.

More sightseeing, this time in the town of Volkmarsen, about 40km away from Vöhl. We started our adventure there by meeting with Ernst Klein. He is the [Volkmarsen](#) equivalent of [Karl-Heinz](#), with the same passion and drive to educate, remind, and instill the concept of [#NeverForget](#). In 2013, Ernst approached the owner of a house in Volkmarsen, explained there were some interesting things in her basement that led him to believe there was a Mikvah, a Jewish Ritual Bath, underneath her brick floor. He received permission to excavate, with the understanding he would put it back the way he found it if there was nothing there. Except there was. Exactly as he had thought, there was a Mikvah, and all indications are that it's 500+ years old! I walked down the stairs, touched the niche where the women would have laid their belongings, and gazed in awe at the cool, dark water that still flows into this sacred place. We were all amazed and touched by this place.



Geoffrey Baird in the Mikvah





**This beautifully carved pedestal was one of the clues that led Ernst Klein to tear up the floor.**

A few years after the discovery of the Mikvah, the owner of the house died. Ernst was able to raise the funds needed to buy the home, and he has turned it into a museum that educates how Jews were treated by the Nazis. There's a small room that looks like someone's kitchen, with broken dishes and spilled flour all about. Kristallnacht, the pogrom of Nov 9 - 10, 1938, when the Nazis officially declared war on the Jews, destroying synagogues, businesses, and homes.



#### **The Night of Broken Glass. Kristallnacht.**

There's an area set up like a classroom, complete with school books teaching Aryan children how all other races, especially the Jews, are beneath them. Across the room was a Nazi sign that had been found in the attic. The irony of that: Nazi signs in the attic, Mikvah in the basement... I loved seeing the vintage sewing machine and the dress pattern.



My beautiful friend [Elke](#) holding up a clothing pattern. Each size/style gets it's own unique line. You trace it onto other paper, then cut out your pattern. Yeah... no way I'd be able to make that work!



Each of us received a copy of Ernst Klein's new book, "Aber es ist besser als Butterbrot in D." It's letters written by Jews during WWII. In many instances, he interviews them many years later. I haven't read all the way through it yet because it's in German. But I'm getting there.

Next was a visit to the Jewish Cemetery. It isn't an active cemetery anymore, but it is a memorial. A low wall separates it from the sidewalk, and it has holes in it. Ernst explained it's made from the remnants of the headstones, and that the holes are deliberate, showing how losing the Jews of Volkmarssen left big holes in the fabric of their community. A cement path leads at an angle to a memorial, and it is lined with trees, 6 on each side, offset from each other, representing the 12 tribes of Israel. Camille, Daniel and I were fascinated by the monoliths surround by the highly polished black rocks surrounding their bases. These rocks were the re-



mains of headstones. The Volkmarsen Jewish Cemetery must have been stunning before the war, before it was destroyed by hatred and fear.



**Camille by the wall at the Jüdischer Friedhof in Volkmarsen. This wall is built with the remains of the headstones that once dotted this sacred place. The holes in the wall represent the holes in the fabric of the community created with the loss of each Jewish life.**



**Beautiful headstones reduced to piles of rubble. The Nazi party seriously believed removing headstones would remove these people from our memories, from existence. They couldn't have been more wrong! [#NeverForget](#)**

We left Volkmarsen and had lunch at a fabulous restaurant with amazing food, as always.

So, now you know about my trip to Volkmarsen. Later, I'll talk about the rest of the day, which includes my ancestral home, my 3rd great-grandmother, and the discovery of my favorite music.

Should you ever find yourself in Vöhl, and would like a guided tour that includes a history of homeowners from the 10th century, you really need to reach out to Karl-Heinz Stadtler. He can tell you everything there is to know, including anecdotes and funny stories, of the Jews who used to live in the village. I know this for a fact, because [#oneyearagotoday](#), I took that



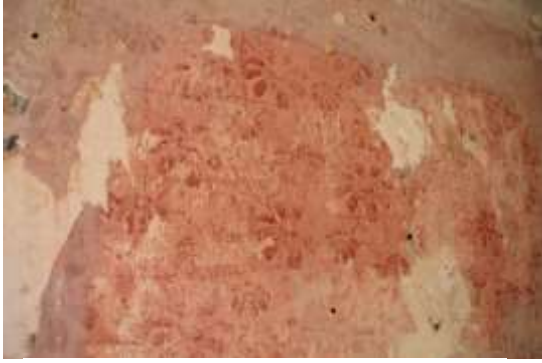
tour. He speaks of these people as if they're his friends and neighbors, people he saw the other day or last week, not people who've been dead for a century or more.

Before we set off on our walking tour, we stopped by the synagogue (of course) and Karl-Heinz grabbed a zebra-striped tote bag from his upstairs office. It was jammed full of laminated pages/photos/documents/things. With that fetching bag clutched firmly in his hand, we set up. It seemed like every few steps we stopped so he could tell us about this house or that one, the people who lived in it.



**Karl-Heinz showing a laminated document to Geoff Baird, explaining it to him. Did I take notes? No. I've forgotten most of what he said that day. - This is a copy of the oldest document about a Jew in Vöhl from 1682. He supplied material for the renovation of the church in the neighboring village of Marienhagen.**

We were excited to stop at the Rothschild house, and not just see it from the outside, but tour the inside as well. Built in 1836 by Ascher Rothschild, it was the largest home in the village. And it still is!!! The street level housed a bakery, as well as the community Mikvaot. The next three floors are living space. The floor above that is the attic, with special racks for drying laundry. And above that, believe it or not, is another attic! Just the three floors of living space come in around 8100sf, so the place is massive. The home has been purchased by a nice Dutch couple, who are renovating it and converting it to nice, spacious apartments. They were gracious enough to let us tour the entire place. It's in rough shape, but we were able to see the original hand-painted wall stencils, the timber framing, the pegs holding the rafters together... it was so amazingly wonderful to walk through this home with Camille, to see and touch so much of our family's history!!!



**Wallpaper or stencil? We think the latter. Camille Calman and I had fun finding all the different designs and colors, imagining Blümchen picking them out, or painting them herself. Loved loved the Rothschild haus.**



**The blue stars were rare, but Camille and I were tickled to find them in the Rothschild haus**



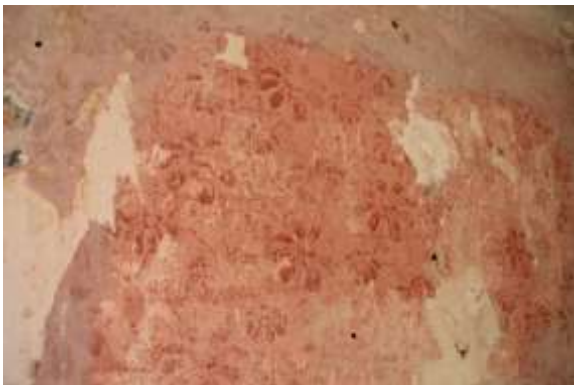
**These hooks are hanging from the rafters of the Rothschild haus. Something tells me they've been there since the house was built. Oh, how I wanted to ask the nice Dutch people if I could have one!**



Ok, bad picture, but what I love about it is the registration marks. The same marks are on the synagogue. I imagine Ascher Rothschild used the same builders for both structures. —



Better picture of the registration marks in the attic of the Rothschild haus.







We were intrigued to realize the back side of the house offered wonderful views of the nearby Martinskirche. Why are we interested in the local Lutheran Church? Tune in tomorrow and I'll tell you!



**The steeple of Martinskirche, as seen from the Rothschild haus**



Camille on Arolser Strasse, with the mammoth Rothschild haus in the background



Karl-Heinz telling Alf all about the Jews of Vöhl



Günter Sternberg was a young boy, not quite 10, when he was deported, with his mother, was deported to Sobibor, where both of them were murdered. One of the accomplishments of the Förderkreis has been to have the name of this street changed, to honor him. [#NeverForget](#) – hier: [Vöhl](#).

When we were done with the tour of Vöhl, Karl-Heinz led us to the outskirts of the village, to the beautiful, peaceful, restored Jüdischer Friedhof: the Jewish Cemetery of Vöhl.

During WWII, the Nazis came into villages and demanded the headstones be removed from the Jewish cemeteries. Vöhl was no exception. Instead of breaking them into rubble, as was done in Volkmarsen, they were stacked in a nearby barn, and residents were told they could be used for building materials. Some of them were, and are lost forever. Roughly 48 of them survived, and when the Allied forces rolled in after the war, they ordered the headstones be put back. They are as close to their original locations as possible.

Camille went through and photographed every headstone in the place, and when she got home, created a memorial for each one on findagrave.com. Go, Camille!

She and I were both fascinated and excited by the large, impressive, granite headstone near the back. It's truly the most impressive headstone there, and it belongs to our 3rd great-grandmother, Sprinza. Of the headstones returned to the cemetery, her's the only one of our direct ancestors. We were grateful to Daniel and Geoffrey who, it turns out, read Hebrew! They were able to help translate the headstone for us.



**The headstone of Sprinza Sternberg Rothschild, beloved wife, daughter, mother, grandmother, aunt, and so on. She was known by Sprinza, Sprinz, Spring, Sophia, Sophie, Iris, and Bertha. Many of her granddaughters, some of her great-granddaughters, nieces, and great-nieces were named Sophie, more than likely in her honor.**



**Dear GGG-Grandmother, I'm so grateful Camille and I could visit your grave!**

**The Rothschild Girls (me and Camille) with GGG-Grandmother Sprinza's grave.**





**Jews leave a stone on the graves of those they visit, Christians leave flowers. Camille and I decided to cover all the bases. –**

I could have spent at least another hour at the cemetery, but it was time to move on. Back to Karl-Heinz' house for a bit, then the Synagogue for the evening's entertainment, provided by Aufwind! Aufwind is the best kletzmer band in Germany, it seems.



**The lead singer for Aufwind. I couldn't get enough of this music!!!**

By the end of the first song, I was hooked. HOOKED!!! Who knew Kletzmer was my favorite music?!? As Camille said, it's upbeat music, in a minor key. It's Jazz meets schtetl. It's mournfully joyous. It is so many contradictions, and I can't begin to express how it spoke to my soul. After the performance, I bought 4 of their CDs. I still

play them, loudly, but only when Jim isn't around. He is not a fan of kletzmer music, poor misguided soul.

After the music, we went to a restaurant at the end of the street for yet another fabulous meal. Part way through, Walter showed up with his dog. Sweet, sweet puppy. She came over, let me pet her and love on her, since I was going through Cricket withdrawals. When I complimented Walter on his dog, he handed me her leash, and with a completely straight face, said I could keep her. Then he started to laugh. Such a tease, that Walter!

Another day in Vöhl. Another day connected with my heritage. So little time left before I would have to go home.

**Sonntag, 19. Mai**

**Church Service – Adolph Rothschilds House – Memories of 20 years of the Förderkreis - Abschied von Vöhl**

[#Oneyearagotoday](#) was bittersweet. So much joy and fun, so much learned, new discoveries. But our last full day in Germany, in Vöhl.

Our first stop of the day was to attend services at Martinskirche Lutheran Church. This was maybe not the best decision Camille and I made. For some reason, in my head, I thought we'd understand more of it. Nope! A new-to-us church service (neither of us is Lutheran) in a



**Light streaming in the window -- with its original glass -- at Martinskirche.**

foreign language. Lost from the get-go. Still, it was important to us to go because Ascher Rothschild had financed the building of this church. Martinskirche celebrated its 175th anniversary in 2018, and received a facelift. Pastor Eisenberg had, prior to our trip, searched the records for any mention of Adolph, Kathinka, Wilhelmine, Augusta, and Reinhardt Rothschild, but found none. He graciously posed with us outside the church, and allowed me to take a few pictures of the interior.



**Outside Martinskirche with Paster Eisenberg, myself, Camille, and Karl-Heinz**



**The Rothschild Girls outside the Adolph Rothschild haus. Talk about icing on the cake!**

Karl-Heinz had a surprise for us after the service. Across from the church is a house attributed to Aron Rothschild, one of the presumed children of Ascher and Sprinza (Camille and I have since ruled him out as one of their children. Probably one of Ascher's nephews.) Then he took us on a walk. A few blocks

away, he pointed out a house, and with a big smile on his face told us, "This is the house of Adolph Rothschild," Camille and I couldn't wait to cross the street, touch the walls, and could easily picture Adolph and Kathinka here with their children. What a treat!!!



**There was a big rhododendron bush on the corner of Birgit and [Karl-Heinz](#)'s house. It bloomed on our last day. —**

We had lunch in the Stadtler home, and a relaxing afternoon, before heading back to the synagogue for the final event of the Jubilee: a performance of the music of Jewish composers from the 20s and 30s, presented by Renate & Roland Häusler. There was also

a presentation by Walter and Karl-Heinz, talking about where the Förderkreis started 20 years ago, and how far they've come.

I'll be honest, I spent my time in the synagogue that day soaking up as much of the place as I could. I took pictures of the flowers on the windowsill, of the menorah, of the ceiling, of Walter taking a picture of me, of everything I could think of. I knew when I left that evening, I wouldn't be back until my next visit, and I'm still not sure when that will be.

After the performance, during the obligatory -- and always delicious -- Kaffee und Kuchen, Walter was going around with a basket, taking donations. We hadn't been allowed to pay for anything during our visit, so I had some money I hadn't spent. I pulled a bill from my wallet and dropped it in the basket. I don't think I even looked at it. Turned out to be 50 Euros. Walter was stunned. "Elizabeth, so much?" I shrugged, pretended to be someone with lots of



money all the time, gave him a smile and said, "Well, I'm a Rothschild." He laughed, we all did.

Everyone left, eventually, until it was just [Karl-Heinz](#), Birgit, [Camille](#), Geoff, Daniel, and myself. Camille walked into the sanctuary, sat in Platz Nummer Eins, looked up at the Star of David window, wished our relatives farewell. I asked to see my mother's painting. When [Karl-Heinz](#) asked where I'd like it to hang, I joked, "Platz Nummer Eins!" But, honestly, knowing it's there, knowing a part of her is with the ancestors she spent so long searching for, makes me so very happy, very emotional.



**Last day means group photos. Here Camille and I are with Birgit and Karl-Heinz Stadtler –**

We weren't quite ready to say goodbye, so we all went back to the Stadtler home to relax for a bit. Honestly, it was the first time I'd seen [Karl-Heinz](#) hold still. He looked tired, understandably so.

The conversation reached a lull. It was time. [Karl-Heinz](#) and Birgit drove us back to Asel. We all got out of the car, stood there with tears in our eyes, unwilling to say goodbye, even though we knew we had to. And then [Camille](#) saw something that lifted our spirits and made us smile. A perfect, beautiful rainbow, just north of us, probably arching over Vöhl and our synagogue. Somehow it eased our hearts. So many hugs, a few more tears, last words, and they drove away. Camille and I went inside, began the process of packing.

I know what you're thinking, there couldn't be anything left, but there is. One more mini adventure for tomorrow.



**Camille and I chose to walk into Vöhl, soaking up the scenery. Love this picture of Martinskirche in the center of the village.**

## Montag, 20. Mai

### Burg/Gemünden - Wandering in the Genealogical Desert – We will be back!

[#Oneyearagotday](#), I woke up in Asel for the last time. Camille and I looked at each other with sleepy eyes and flipped for who had to get up and showered first. I lost. We had our breakfast at 7, which means our host had gotten up at 6, walked into Vöhl, picked up fresh brötchen, and was back in time for us to eat it. Should you find yourself in the area of Vöhl and need a place to stay, go to Asel and stay at Gasthaus Sauer, Asel. I cannot say enough good things about the food, the room, the hospitality. All of it was marvelous.

One more morning stroll around Asel, past the pond; the church/fire station; the cold water filled walking pond that's supposed to get the blood flowing; the Fledermaus haus park; Udo and Gisela's beautiful garden. I remember looking at someone's garden and Camille told me a random piece of trivia about Iceland. Iceland is an Island, and the Icelandic spelling of Iceland is Island.

Walter and Anna picked us up promptly at 8am to take us to the airport. The night before, we had asked Walter, if it were no trouble, to take a detour on the way to the airport through the little town of Burg Gemünden. We wanted to see the church. Walter had never heard of the village, but apparently spent a good share of the night before mapping out a route, and Anna was to act as navigator. It was more of a deal than we had realized. In fact, if we'd known how big of a deal it was, we'd never have mentioned it. There were wrong turns. There was confusion. And we were just about to say nevermind, when Walter and Anna agreed we were on the right road and nearly there.

We were getting close, when we were suddenly in the town of Homberg/Ohm. Camille and I both wanted to stop the car, get out, and go exploring. This is the town where Sprinza and Blümchen Sternberg were from! And it was only minutes away from Burg Gemünden

By now you're probably wondering why we wanted to go to some out of the way place that was causing stress and worry, and concern about possibly missing flights.

For 4 decades, starting with my mom in 1977, then me, and then Camille, our family had been looking for something that would link our Rothschild family to the Rothschild family of Vöhl. We couldn't find a thing. Even after I found the family trees on <http://www.synagoge-voehl.de/> website and began emailing with Kurt-Willi Julius and Karl-Heinz, we couldn't figure out the connection.

In July of 2016, ancestry.com gave Camille a hint: a baptismal record from the church at Burg Gemünden for Adolph Rothschild, son of Abraham. Except we couldn't see the document. We found an email address for the church at Nieder Gemünden and emailed them, they referred us to the correct church, so we emailed them. Nothing. No response. In January of 2017, I was going through mom's genealogical notes, found an article about Jewish genealogical research, and how the largest repository of Jewish records is at the Family History Library in downtown Salt Lake City, 20 minutes from my house. I took a chance, ran to the library as soon as I got off work. A very nice man there helped me find the correct reel of microfilm, and I scrolled through until I found the correct year, gave the crank one more spin, and it froze on a record with the name "Adolph Rothschild" in the margin. The nice man came to read it for me. To summarize: "On 1 June 1860, Abraham Roth-

schild, son of the deceased merchant of Vöhl Ascher Rothschild and Ascher's first wife Sprinza nee Sternberg, after having spent months of study, gone before a board of inquiry and proving his understanding of Christianity and his acceptance of the Lutheran faith, was baptized and given by the priest the Christian name of Adolph."

After 40 years of wandering in the genealogical desert, we had found our connection to Vöhl. We didn't need to see this church, but we really wanted to. We are forever indebted to Walter and Anna for taking us there.

Our visit lasted just a few minutes. We didn't even walk all the way around the church. Just took a few minutes, and got back in the car. When we arrived at the airport, traffic was a mess, and Walter found a place to drop us off. Quick hugs, grabbing of gear, and they were gone. We walked into the airport, realized our flights were on opposite ends of the airport, and very sadly said goodbye.

But Camille and I were excited as well, because just two months later would be our Rothschild family reunion in California, and we couldn't wait to share all we'd learned.

We wondered what Adolph's connection to that little out of the way Lutheran church could have been, and speculated someone in his mother's family was Lutheran, or had known a priest. What would have caused Adolph to choose that particular church? Literally DAYS before our reunion, we found the answer. Pastor Wilhelm Eberwein, the same pastor who baptized Adolph, was the informant for the death of Adolph's older brother Siegmund, and listed his relation to Siegmund as Brother-in-Law! Some more digging, and we learned he was married to an unknown sister, Friedericke.

So, our trip was over, but our journey to find the Rothschilds of Vöhl and their descendants is ongoing.

Lieber Karl-Heinz, und Lieber Synagoge Vöhl, Förderkreis, vielen dank für so ein wundervolle Reise! Wir werden in 2024 zuruck kommen!