

August 24, 1999

### JOHN HELLER COMMENTS ON ORT BERLIN PHOTO ALBUM

The title page of the album obtained from the Museum of Jewish Heritage states that it is made by the Joint British Committee ORT-OZE London which is the ORT organization in London. The German title is translated as "a private Jewish institution for vocational training and for Jews who are willing to leave Germany" and this album is from ORT in Berlin. The title page states that the school started in the Spring of 1937 with 28 students and at the time of these pictures there were 240 students. (Of those 240, eventually 110 left for England with a handful of instructors.) The bottom of this page says ORT Organization for Promoting Vocational Training and Agricultural Training Among Jews in Germany, Registered-Organisation. OZE, (Sic), OSE stands for Organisation Secour aux Enfants, "The Organization to Save the Children" or to help the children. That was the name of the joint British Committee. It's meant to be OSE, not OZE as someone misprinted it. Although this title page is dated December 1938, which is probably when the album was made, on the last page of the album there is a note that the photographs contained in the book were taken in November 1938 by Lilli Scolni from Berlin.

It is appropriate that I state why I believe that a number of students, including myself, are not in the pictures. These pictures were taken in November 1938 and on the night of November 9<sup>th</sup> was the infamous Kristalnacht. My parents had a plumbing business and I remember very well I stayed away from the ORT school for about at least three weeks until things started to sort of "normalize again" because my father had been taken away to a concentration camp and my mother was by herself. With only my help, we tried to carry on as well as we could under the circumstances. I don't find myself in this album of photos. There are pictures of groups of students and instructors of particular departments. If you added up the students in those pictures you wouldn't get 240, so there must have been a number of students who were staying away from school those weeks.

In **picture #1** there is a person who is quite involved with ORT in London. He is the third from the right. His name is now David Cohn. The one on his left, the second from the right, his name happens to be Heinz Cohn. Other faces look familiar but I don't recall the names.

In **picture #2**, there is a boy whose name used to be Peter Kemp. This is the boy who is standing in the back. The instructor is the second from the right. He is Max Abraham who is

now an elderly gentleman, still very active, also with ORT in London. He and his wife celebrated a good number of birthdays. He is in his 80s and still active. They had their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary recently. On the right is Heinz Cohn.

In **pictures #3** I don't remember the name of the fellow but his face is very familiar.

In **picture #4** I am not sure if it's one who was interned and stayed in Australia during the war. His name was Denby. It used to be Judenberg. He is the second from the left. In this picture they are wearing caps to protect them from dust in the shop. They're not religious caps.

**Picture # 5** is a large shop. I remember the second fellow in the front on the right hand side. I think it is Gerd Wohlmann. I recognize the second on the left facing the window as Hans Futter. I kind of I recognize some of the faces. Evidently the picture's purpose was not to take pictures of the faces but to show the shop where hand fitting was being taught for future tool and diemakers.

In **picture #6** we have a blacksmith. The middle guy is Bernard Joseph. He went to London with us. He died years ago in the Chicago area. The fellow on the left is Werner Hirschfeld. He is alive and lives in Australia. The one on the right I don't recognize. These are

blacksmiths. Joseph was a pretty strong guy who was a terrific artist. He did artistic things with steel and he was very well liked and a real tough guy.

In **picture #6A** is Walter Murczinsky-Krell. He was a handsome guy still a few years ago. Unfortunately he passed away. Most of the ones that I knew I met when I organized a reunion of ORT students in Berlin in 1989. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kristalnacht. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our leaving Germany, but also the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kristalnacht. In this picture he is working on the blacksmith's fire.

In **picture #7** is also a shot showing a blacksmith shop. The instructor is the one with the mustache. He had a bit of a temper. When he got mad at somebody he used to throw a hammer in his general direction. His last name was Israel.

In **picture #8** there is the blacksmith again. The one on the left is Bernard Joseph, and the one on the right I believe to be Gerd Futter.

In **picture #9** is another blacksmith. That's Mr. Joseph again on the right. It shows some of his skill with hammers.

In **picture #10** is Mr. Joseph again. He surely impressed the photographer.

**Pictures #11 and #12** show the welding department and locksmith department. I don't recognize the faces. They are wearing protective glasses and learning oxy-acetylene welding.

**Picture #13** shows a part of the welding department. It shows a process of cutting through steel with a flame. The instructor in **picture #13** on the left was Max Selowsky. He is the father of Martin Sanders, who lives in San Diego. The man on the extreme right is Bruno Haase who lives in Australia.

**Picture #14** is a long shot of the welding and locksmith department.

**Picture #14A** is the plumbing department. This page shows the elderly plumbing instructor, Mr. Compart. This is plumbing and sheet metal work. They are hammering a round shape into a shape of a bowl. The middle student's name was Georg Cohn. The student on the right was Felix Burnel. Both live in London. Behind them are hot water heaters that are hooked up with showers.

**Picture #15** is a closeup of this hot water heater with a shower and that person is not an instructor; he's a student, but he's kind of big. His name was Lucian Baer.

**Picture #16** is the tool and die shop, although it's only part of tool and die making. It's the lathe department. The second from the front is Hugo Plaut. Next to him is Sig Neuberger.

**Picture #17** is working on a lathe. I believe the student is Judenberg.

**Picture #17A** is the machine shop department. Plaut is the second from the right

**Picture #18** is more or less the same picture, showing lathes and drill presses.

**Picture #19** also shows a drill press operator. He is learning how to drill holes for jigs or something.

**Picture #20** looks like an electricity shop.

**Picture #21** shows circuitry and I don't recognize anyone.

In **picture #22** I recognize a buddy of mine whose name is Reissner. We used to call him by the name of the town that he came from Selo. He still lives in London. Next to him is an instructor, Feige. On the ladder is Henry Lippman.

In **picture #23** I recognize several fellows particularly the one second from the right. He is a good friend of mine who lives in Georgia, Jimmy Green. When this picture was taken, his name was Hans Guenbaum. (I never changed my family name, Heller. I only changed my first

name. I didn't want to go through life with the name of Hans. So I changed it to John.) This fellow in the middle I knew very well. His head is somewhat down. His German name was also different, Paul Heidemann. He also lived in this country. His name was Hill, the fifth person from the right. The one next to Hill, the third visible face from the right is Hirschstein. They're examining the workings of an electric motor. Next to the instructor is H. Keil.

**Picture #24** shows a control board of the electrician's department with the instructors demonstrating. They had meters here and fuses.

And the same thing goes for **picture #25** which is a group of instructors or officers of ORT.

**Picture #26** looks like a class. And here I recognize quite a few faces. First of all the instructor's name is Dr. Lewinneck. He came out of Berlin with us. He was in Kitchener Camp with us and he gave us instructions at the ORT School in Leeds. And the student facing the camera was Jean Wolff. I don't believe he is alive. Jean Wolff would be the third person from the right starting from the extreme right, the first person being the instructor. Sitting next to Wolff is Manny Rosenberg. He is looking at the instructor. Some of the other faces are a little

bit too difficult to recognize.

In **picture #27** the seating is similar to the previous page. This is Wolff again, being the third person on the window side. And the one in front of him was Freddy Metz, the second from the right, who joined the British army. He died in the war. There are various others. Rosenberg is here again. He is in the third row and he is sitting next to Wolff. His head is coming out of the side into the aisle. The first row on the aisle is Josi Kuhn. We went to school together. He didn't make it out of Germany.

In **picture #28** you have the one person I recognize absolutely, definitely. He is Dr. Werner Simon. In the center of the picture. He stayed behind hoping to get the rest of the students out. There were 240 students and only 110 got out. He would have had the chance to leave Germany also, but he stayed behind and he perished with his wife and their young child.

**Picture #29** is wash up time. The one in the middle happens to be Henry Lipman, Heinz Lipman who lives in Australia, in Melbourne.

In **picture #30** I don't recognize the faces.

In **picture #31** it's chow time and excluding the person on the left who is doing the



ladling the third one from the left is Alfred Jason-Jablonsky. Two over, towards the right, is Heinz Cohn and Bernard Joseph the blacksmith again. I don't remember ever having soup in that place.

In **picture #32** I don't recall the names.

In **picture # 33** starting from the left and front is Joe Schleider, changed to Sadler. He passed away. Sol Schleider, his brother, is the next one towards the right in front. He is still alive and lives, I am not sure, either in Germany or in England. And Hans Futter on the right in front is active with ORT in London. Behind him is Hans Gessler who used to be one of the most studious guys of all of us. I believe he got a college degree while we were still in England. This is the second row on the extreme right. Right behind Sol Schleider are two people with an arm around each other. The one on the right, his name is Zellner. He disappeared somewhere in Bolivia. Never heard from him anymore. And his friend, I think his name was Steve Ziegler. He passed away in this country, the United States. The one next to Joe Schleider is Gerd Wohlmann. There may be others here but the pictures are not too clear. This room was a lunchroom. The lunchroom was used for meetings, etc. The most important one of the meetings

took place in this room when it was decided, because the Nazis didn't allow us to take out any of the equipment, the machines from the school, to make a telephone call to British ORT in London to tell them, "for heavens sakes save the kids and forget about the machines," and this is what saved our lives, a phone call like that.

**Picture #34** is the plumbing department. The plumbing instructor was an elderly gentlemen at that time and even though this is the plumbing department there were some who were not concentrating their studies in the plumbing department because what ORT tried to do was rotate all of the students through the different departments to give them an idea of what they would be most suited for or what they would like best. Behind the instructor, way on the left, is Hans Gessler and I believe this looks like Rafaelson immediately to the right of Gessler. Rosenberg is standing, the second from the right. Next to him also on the right is Joseph Kuhn. Freddy Metz is the third one. Hans Gruenberg, who is now John Gilbert, lives in Australia. He's the fifth from the right. Some of the others I am not sure about. The instructor in the middle is surrounded by about 17 students.

**Picture #35** looks like a conference of the executives. On the extreme left is the

Headmaster Behrendt. Again, there is Werner Simon standing third from the left. I don't recognize or remember any of the other gentlemen except the one way on the right. He was well known in the place. He went with us to England and he had one specialty. He used to be able to weld aluminum, which was an usual feat at the time. He said whoever knows how to weld aluminum is a made man. He and his wife and son went out with us from Berlin. His name is Heilbronn.

**Picture #36** looks like more instructors. They are looking at what looks like Morse Keys, telegraph keys that were probably made by the electrician students.

**Picture #37** looks like some kind of document being signed. The second one from the right sitting down is Werner Simon. Headmaster Behrendt is in the middle and the one standing on the left is Lewinneck.

The key that's on **picture #38** of the album is the key to success for the ORT students. It was made by the ORT students. It was made in Berlin. The bottom of the key is ORT in Hebrew. The top letters are ORT which are the same in either German or English. At that particular time I don't think there was a translation of "Organization for Rehabilitation through

Training." ORT was actually an abbreviation of a very difficult to pronounce Russian word, actually three Russian words. I have seen a photo of that key mounted on wood with a plaque saying: "This is the key for success of the Jewish youth."