

Children of Blankenese

During the youth exchange in Hamburg in March 2012 we were introduced to Mr. Hellwig, who is the chairman of the association for the research on the history of Jews in Blankenese. Blankenese is a quarter of Hamburg, close to the river Elbe. During the last few years this association brought the story of the children of Blankenese back to Hamburg.

Mr. Hellwig told us about the history of the children, about the house they had been living in after 1945 and about the visits of these children, who came back to Blankenese in 2004 and 2005 as elderly people. Most of them returned to Blankenese for the first time after almost 60 years.

What exactly is the story of the children of Blankenese about?

The story began in a villa of the Jewish financier family Warburg (...) situated in Blankenese. Like the properties of all of the Jews in Germany, also the house of the Warburg family had been expropriated by the Nazis.

After the war, when the family retrieved its property, the Warburgs provided their house on the "Kösterberg" as a home for displaced persons, which The American Joint Distribution Committee established as a children's home then – with the permission of the Warburgs.

It was planned on not only bringing displaced persons together in one place, but also on preparing these children for the Aliyah, the immigration to Palestine. But first the children had to be coddled up. For the majority of them it was the first time in their lives, to sufficiently be provided with cloth, food and school education. Jitzhak Tadmor, one of the former children of Blankenese, whom we met during our visit in Israel in December 2011, had similar memories. He also is the editor of the book "Cherries on the river Elbe", which documents the experiences of the children and the people, who looked after them, at the same time. This book was one of the determining factors, which made it possible, that the story found its way back to Hamburg.

Many of the former children of Blankenese remember the home in Blankenese as the first real home in their life.

Among the staff, which looked after the children, the prevailing opinion existed, that Palestine, where a Jewish state was to be founded, would be the only place, which could provide a life in security for the children - even though an armed conflict in the context of the foundation of the later state of Israel had to be expected then already.

The first children, who were brought to Blankenese, came from the former concentration camp of Bergen Belsen, which became a camp for displaced persons after the liberation by the British troops. From 1946 until 1948 roundabout 300 - 400 children from different camps all over Europe were sent to Blankenese. They were survivors of the Shoa. They had lost their parents, some of them their entire family.

It is the topic of one of our working groups to report about the biography of one of the children briefly. Anna Prochotta, a historian, who wrote her thesis about the children's home in Blankenese, presented the material of her historical research to this group of ours.

Thorsten, March 2012

