

International Artist Gives Holocaust Survivor, a Stockton Professor, a Portrait of Little Sister Who Was Murdered by Nazis

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Galloway Township, NJ - Dr. Murray Kohn lost his little sister, his mother and other family members in the Holocaust. On Wednesday, he got back a little bit of 7-year-old Ida Rebecca, in the form of a drawing by internationally known artist Manfred Bockelmann.

Dr. Kohn, Rabbi Emeritus of Beth Israel Congregation of Vineland, NJ and a professor of Holocaust Studies at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, survived two-and-a-half years in a Nazi death camp, along with his father. On Wednesday, he remembered how Ida Rebecca, three years younger than he, kept holding on to him "for three days and three nights as we were dragged on the railroad cattle cars to Auschwitz."

"She held on so much, as if saying, 'This is the last moments together...' And this stays with me forever," he said.

"This man did not just take a picture - he has read her face from the inside out," said Dr. Kohn, who is 85, as he looked at Bockelmann's portrait of Ida Rebecca, done in charcoal on burlap.

"It's a present for you," Bockelmann said.

"Oh my god, I can't believe it," responded Kohn. "I will find a place for it," he assured Bockelmann.

Bockelmann, who lives in Austria, is the uncle of Stockton's Dr. Marion Hussong, professor of Literature and Holocaust and Genocide Studies and a resident of Absecon. She photocopied a picture of Dr. Kohn's family from his memoir, "Weep Tears of Blood," and asked her uncle to make the drawing of Ida Rebecca from it as a surprise gift for Dr. Kohn.

Dr. Kohn's mother and sister were sent to the gas chambers immediately upon arrival, and their belongings, including the family photo, were confiscated. A woman from their village, assigned to sort those belongings for valuables for the Nazis, recognized the family. The woman, who ***-more-***

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was later killed, hid the photo, then eventually wrapped it in cloth around a brick and threw it over the fence to Dr. Kohn and his father, according to Dr. Hussong.

That same photo became the basis for Bockelmann's portrait, which is about 4 feet high and 3 feet wide. He uses charcoal to evoke the ashes of the dead, he said.

"I planned this for years," Dr. Hussong told Dr. Kohn when he was given the drawing. "I wanted to tell you so badly, but I couldn't. This was a long time coming, my friend."

A major exhibit of Bockelmann's drawings of children murdered in the Holocaust was shown at the Leopold Museum in Vienna in 2013. The artist, who is also known for abstract landscapes, photography and sculpture, wanted to do something different and significant as he neared his 70th birthday and a retrospective of his work, said his niece. Over 88,000 visitors saw the 72 portraits of children on display at the exhibit.

His portraits start with photos salvaged by survivors, like Dr. Kohn's, or those taken by the Nazis, who also recorded the names of the people they murdered. Bockelmann travels to places such as the Auschwitz Memorial and Museum on the site of the former Nazi death camp in Poland to copy the photos. His pictures are not for sale, but will be given to Holocaust memorial sites after exhibition, said Dr. Hussong.

"I had a feeling for the person" (Ida Rebecca), Bockelmann said about drawing her from the family photograph. He said it was very emotional for him to meet a family member such as Dr. Kohn.

Final Frame, an international film crew based in Munich, Germany, has been shadowing Bockelmann for 18 months as he works on this project, which includes more than 100 large portraits so far, all in charcoal on burlap. The film crew came to Stockton this week to film the meeting of Bockelmann and Dr. Kohn, who was the first to teach Holocaust Studies at the college.

They met at the Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center, which honors two other Holocaust survivors who settled in South Jersey after the war. Its powerful entrance includes three 20-foot sections of railroad tracks, part of a system that led from the Jewish ghetto in the Bialystok area of Poland to concentration camps. Stockton also was the first college in the nation to offer a Master's in Holocaust and Genocide Studies.

At the Holocaust Resource Center, director Gail Rosenthal welcomed the artist, explained the significance of the region as a home to many survivors, and assisted Bockelmann in his research. Scenes shot on campus featuring Rosenthal and Dr. Kohn receiving his sister's portrait will be an integral part of the documentary film.

The trailer for the film, "Drawing Against Oblivion," won the gold medal on Tuesday, April 8 at the New York Festivals' World's Best TV & Films. To view a preview of this powerful film, [click](#)

On the bittersweet occasion of seeing Ida Rebecca's face again, Dr. Kohn said he was angry and determined to continue bearing witness to the murder of millions of Jews while the Christian world "stood by and let it happen."

"Yes, I want the world to have a guilty conscience," he said. "Maybe, then we will have a better world."

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