

Germans and Jews



Photographing a relationship is never easy. It helps, of course, if you choose a dramatic subject, like Nan Goldin did. But to focus on middle class people of different religions having a chat is something else again. On the left, Margaret Roesler is taking her granddaughter to Berlin, where Margaret was born, and managed to flee from as a young girl. They are in the Berlin Jewish cemetery.

*I concentrated on this subject from 1991 until 1993, when I was drawn into Sarajevo, and resumed my German work in 1995, when I spent another year on it. The book that was published in 1996 in English and in German. *Jews, Germany, Memory* also drew from pictures I had taken in from 1987 to 1990.*

This was a documentation project unlike anything else I had tried before, as I had to capture several different spheres, not all of which had intersecting sets. My documentation covered:

- *Jewish life in Germany*
- *the influx of Soviet Jews to Germany*
- *German Jews abroad, and by that I mean those who fled, never returned, yet they seemed to live as exiles in their new lands*
- *Germans on Jews, meaning, how Germans related to Jewish history and culture — and guilt*
- *the Mosel River story, in which I accompanied a group of elderly German Jews who returned in 1996 to the villages they had lived in as children, and ran away from.*

There were two separate exhibitions from this book. The US version was sponsored by Steven Spielberg's foundation and was traveled by the Judah Magnes Museum of Berkeley. It traveled for three years in North America and saw eleven venues.

The prestigious Museum of Contemporary History in Bonn, which is dedicated to post-war German history, assembled an exhibition from this work that started traveling in 1997 and continued to travel until 2009. It was shown in more than 26 sites in nine countries.

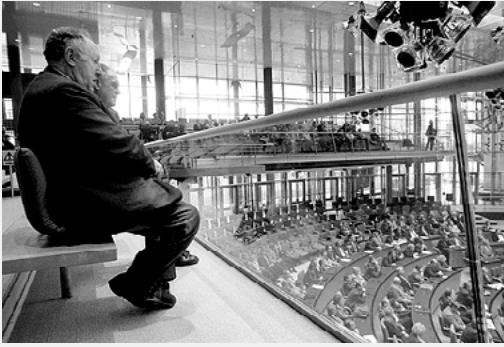
Following is a summary of each of the themes in this project.

Jewish life in Germany



The picture on the left was used as the cover for Time Magazine in January, 1995, on the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. The article covered the rebirth of Jewish life in Germany, and I reported the story as well as photographed it.

I lived in Berlin between 1991 and 1997 and in that time joined the Jewish community, took part in synagogue and volunteer activities and almost always brought along my camera. I wanted to document something that very few people knew much about:



how Jews were living in Germany, how they had come to make their peace with their decision to live there and how they were raising their families.

This a subject that had to be written as well as photographed, and I traveled with width and breadth of Germany in those years so I could draw the most comprehensive picture possible. In the photo on the left, above, Ignatz Bubis, Chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, is listening to a debate in the German Parliament in Bonn in 1995 (shortly before the Bundestag moved to Berlin). On the left, below, Rabbi Chaim Engelberg is holding Hebrew classes in the Düsseldorf Jewish community in 1996.

