

# Portrait presentation sparks a myriad of memories

January 4, 2016 by Michael Kuttner

In a moving and memorable ceremony Sydney-based Johnny and Thea Weiss have presented a print portrait of Lotte Weiss to the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem's Yad Vashem.



Thea Weiss and her work

Conceived and drawn by Thea, an amazingly creative and talented artist, this loving tribute to her mother-in law who survived the hell of Auschwitz, will be part of the permanent display in the art gallery of Yad Vashem. It will no doubt be viewed by thousands of visitors who visit this most impressive museum from all corners of the globe, as well as by groups of school

children, soldiers and citizens of Israel.

Gathered at the presentation were relations of the Weiss family from Vienna and London as well as family and friends from many parts of Israel of whom many were Wellingtonians. The event turned into a mini New Zealand reunion.

Johnny opened the proceedings and declared that even though his mother couldn't be present in person her presence would still pervade the event and so it proved.

Thea spoke most eloquently about Lotte's life and the motivation which led her to create an exhibition centred on the unspeakable horrors experienced. Thea's speech was a moving tribute of her mother in law's determination to overcome unbelievable adversity. 92-yr-old Lotte could not make the trip from Sydney to Jerusalem.

In her speech Thea said she had known Lotte for 42 years after arriving in Wellington, New Zealand from the United States and was "totally unprepared to be greeted by the most incredible and disturbing stories I had ever heard."

Thea Weiss's parents arrived in the U.S> before the outbreak of WWII. She said in her speech: "Almost my mother's entire family of Polish relatives were killed in the Holocaust". She said her grandparents never discussed it and that "the Holocaust was something to be whispered at home or read in books or seen on TV."

She said that Johnny's parents Lotte and Ali "made it real".

Thea Weiss added: "Lotte has continued to relate her horrifying two and a half years in Auschwitz and Birkenau in her book "My Two Lives", on radio, on television, in newspapers and films, to children in schools and to the countless visitors to the Sydney Jewish Museum since its inception in 1992."

She said that Lotte's story had served as inspiration in her work which incorporates painting, printmaking and installations. Thea Weiss said: "There many layers of Lotte's life resonate in my work with the overlapping of forms and textures."

On behalf of Yad Vashem, Eliad Moreh, Curator and Art Department Director, accepted the print and also paid tribute to Lotte's indomitable spirit.

A video was screened of Lotte's recent visit to Wellington where the art exhibition was shown and an opportunity was also provided for all those who wished to send personal greetings to her to be videoed. This will no doubt bring back a host of memories when Lotte views it in Sydney and sees all those with whom she and her family were such close friends back in Wellington.

Johnny mentioned that when the family had visited Yad Vashem some years ago they were shown a picture of former Jews from Czechoslovakia who had disappeared in the Holocaust and were presumed murdered. Lo and behold there was a photo of Lotte. The guide was absolutely flabbergasted to be told that in actual fact she was still very much alive and it was only after she showed her number tattooed on her arm that the guide realized this was so.

A similar experience occurred when my wife and I visited Yad Vashem a few years ago and we saw a photo of Lotte amongst the prisoners in Auschwitz on the day of its liberation. A group of school girls were gathered around us. We pointed out to them that this particular lady was still alive and that we knew her very well. The look of incredulity and excitement on the faces of these teenagers was something to behold.

Thea's labour of love combined with her talented artistic tributes made for a most memorable and emotional afternoon. Lotte's triumph over incredible adversity will be permanently recorded in Israel for future generations to learn from. It is indeed a triumph of the spirit over hate and prejudice.