

Community ‘Stumbling stones’ of remembrance

Project commemorates Holocaust victims

Posted: Wednesday, November 6, 2013 10:00 am

MARILYN HAWKES | Staff Writer

After Valley resident Peter Reinstein read a story in *Intelligent Life*, the lifestyle publication from *The Economist*, about “stumbling stones,” a project to commemorate Holocaust victims, he became interested in digging a little deeper into his roots. His grandparents, who owned a clothing store in Wiesbaden, Germany, before World War II, were victims of Kristallnacht, the November 1938 pogroms that took place throughout Germany. “The store was destroyed along with all the other Jewish businesses and my father and his father were taken to the concentration camp, Buchenwald,” Reinstein says. In 1942, his grandmother died in Sobibor, a concentration camp in Poland.



Stumbling Stones

These stumbling stones are in front of Peter Reinstein’s father and grandparents’ former home in Wiesbaden, Germany.

Photo courtesy of Peter Reinstein

The “stumbling stones” project, or *Stolpersteine* as it is known in German, was initiated by German artist Gunter Demnig in the early 1990s as a way to recognize the victims of Nazi Germany. He creates cobblestone-sized brass plates set into concrete and embeds them into the sidewalk or pavement in front of homes and businesses that were once occupied by Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Each stone is engraved with the name, birthdate, date of deportation and place of death.

Demnig has said that the stones are a more personal way to commemorate the victims than going to a museum or visiting a monument. Pedestrians walk over the stones and are reminded daily of the people who lived in the home and eventually perished.

Reinstein, who is a Maricopa County Superior Court judge, contacted the Spiegelgasse Active Museum of German-Jewish History in Wiesbaden to see if the museum had a connection to the *Stolpersteine* program. He discovered that one of the museum’s main projects is to commemorate victims of the Holocaust with *Stolpersteine*. Museum officials

were able to help Reinstein uncover information about his family that he didn't know. "They were very interested in having stones for my grandparents," he says.



Remembering family

Pictured at the Oct. 1 ceremony in Wiesbaden, Germany, are, from left, Ron, Judy, Zachary, Peter and Adam Reinstein.

Photo courtesy of Peter Reinstein

Reinstein exchanged emails with museum officials for several months, and then the museum set a date of Oct. 1 for the commemoration ceremony and invited Reinstein and his family to Wiesbaden.

Reinstein, his wife, Judy, sons Adam and Zachary, and Reinstein's brother, Ron, a retired Maricopa County Superior Court judge, traveled to Germany for the ceremony. The night before the memorial, a meeting was held of more than 100 *Stolpersteine* sponsors.

"I speak German, so I addressed them in German and told them a little bit about my family and thanked them for doing this," he says. Typically, the sponsors are local residents, schools and religious and secular groups. In this case, Reinstein says, "they were residents of the community, all gentile."

Stolpersteine are not without controversy. Some say that walking and biking over the stones dishonors the people being commemorated. Others say that don't want memorials in front of their homes and businesses because it's bad for property values. City officials in Munich have banned the stones, saying they desecrate the memory of the victims.

Reinstein's father, Alfred Reinstein, was released from Buchenwald after six weeks, when his mother "bribed corrupt Nazi officials with her remaining resources and purchased for him a false visa to Paraguay," according to a 1943 article in "The Beacon," a United States Army publication. Before the war, Alfred had been a lawyer, but in 1933 the Nazis told him he could no longer practice. After his release, he eventually made his way to New York, graduated from University of Pennsylvania, became a businessman and served in the United States Army during World War II.

Reinstein says the trip was a wonderful experience for his family. "It was gratifying to see that so many people in Germany were willing to at least have a remembrance of Holocaust victims."