

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE



Creating an epicenter for peace adjacent to Auschwitz

When Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany in 1933, numerous anti-Semitic laws were enacted. Jews were forced out of government and public service jobs and banned from public schools and other public venues. By 1937, Nazis began seizing Jewish-owned properties and businesses. But it wasn't until Kristallnacht, the fateful night of November 9-10, 1938, also known as the "Night of Broken Glass," that Nazi policies turned violent. That night, Nazis destroyed synagogues, vandalized Jewish businesses, schools, and homes, and murdered dozens of Jews. After Kristallnacht, among worsening conditions, many Jews fled Germany, seeking asylum in other countries. Prior to Kristallnacht, Gerda and Hans Meyerhof had seen the writing on the wall and escaped to Czechoslovakia, eventually making their home in the United States.

World War II began on September 1, 1939, when Nazi Germany attacked Poland. On October 6, Poland fell to the combined forces of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The Nazis quickly converted a former army barracks near the town of Oswiecim, Poland, into a concentration camp, which they called Auschwitz (German for Oswiecim). They soon expanded

Auschwitz to include slave labor camps, gas chambers, crematory ovens, and the medical facilities where physician Josef Mengele performed his notoriously inhumane medical experiments. Within five years, over a million people were murdered at Auschwitz. Since 1947, the Polish government has maintained the site as a museum and memorial, which nearly two million people visit every year.

A PEACEMAKER IS BORN IN THE MIDST OF TRAUMA

In May 1942, Gerda gave birth to daughter Nina. Gerda later told Nina that, on the day she was born, Gerda's mother was deported to Auschwitz, where she was gassed to death. Many of Hans and Gerda's family and community were murdered at Auschwitz.



Top: Nobel Peace Laureates gather at the 17th World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates in Mexico, September 2019. Dr. Nina Meyerhof and Domen Koccevar attended as VIP invitees. Right: Dr. Nina Meyerhof and Domen Koccevar at the World Dignity Forum (WDF), February 2019, in California. They are WDF Solutionaries.

Bottom: At the 17th World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates, youth human rights activist Mohamad Aljounde is presented with the Turner Prize for Social Change for his winning project. Dr. Meyerhof has worked tirelessly in support of youth activism. Opposite: Dr. Samuel Jacobs-Abbey presents Dr. Nina Meyerhof with the 2019 Jacobs-Abbey Global Institute for Leadership Studies Lifetime Achievement Award, Alexandria, Virginia, October 2019.



Nina Meyerhof, who now lives in South Burlington, went on to receive two master's degrees and a doctorate in education, becoming Dr. Nina Meyerhof. In 1990, Nina founded Children of the Earth, a nongovernmental organization with a mission of "inspiring and uniting young people through personal and social transformation to create a peaceful and sustainable world." An internationally renowned speaker, author, and visionary thought leader, Nina has garnered numerous awards for her work toward peace, including the Mother Theresa Award, the Citizen's Department of Peace Award, and the International Educators Award for Peace. And, although she has been to nearly one hundred countries and seen war-torn lands and sites of devastation, nothing could prepare her for the deeply personal and visceral experience of her first visit to Auschwitz in 2014.

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Dr. Nina L. Meyerhof

Above: Dr. Nina Meyerhof was the 2019 recipient of the Jacobs-Abbey Global Institute for Leadership Studies' (JAGILS) Lifetime Achievement Award. Below: In October 2019, Dr. Samuel Jacobs-Abbey presents Dr. Nina Meyerhof a portrait in her honor as she receives the JAGILS Lifetime Achievement Award.



NINA MEYERHOF'S TURNING POINT

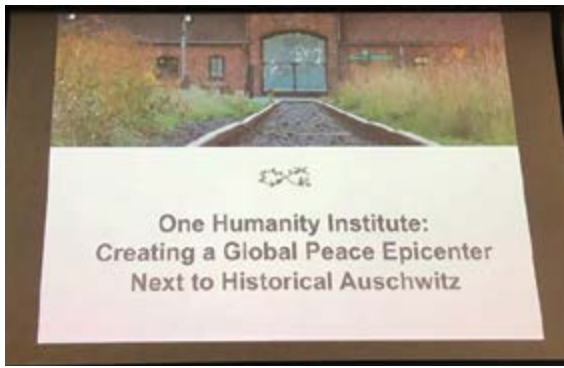
At Auschwitz, Nina stood inside a gas chamber where victims had been poisoned with Zyklon B, their fingernail marks still on the walls. She walked past the crematory ovens and the “death wall,” where, after having been forced to strip naked, people were gunned down by a Nazi firing squad. As Nina flipped through the books containing the names of those who had been murdered there, she recognized the names of several not-so-distant relatives.

Reliving the horror that millions had experienced was deeply traumatic for Nina. She walked away from Auschwitz “shattered,” with nowhere to go to process what she had just gone through. At the same time, her life’s work as a

peace worker began to take on new meaning, as she felt like she had been “brought back to the point of origin.” The next phase of her work began as she envisioned a simple bench near Auschwitz, a place where visitors could sit in quietude to reflect on and process what they had just experienced at the death camp and museum.

ONE HUMANITY INSTITUTE

In 2015, while attending the Parliament of World’s Religions, Nina met Slovenian religious scholar Domen Koccevar and told him of her burgeoning vision. Soon after, the two co-founded One Humanity Institute—City of Hope (OHI). Today, OHI is guided by an



international team of visionaries, leaders, and community builders. Its vision has expanded to encompass a multidimensional international peace center with spaces for meditation, formal and informal education, research, conferences, offices, an interactive museum, a villa, a garden, and a restaurant.

Under OHI's vision, Auschwitz will remain untouched. Visitors will, as they always have, learn about and experience the horrors of the Holocaust. OHI will provide spaces for them to reflect on their experience and process their thoughts and feelings upon leaving Auschwitz. Beyond that, OHI will encourage and inspire visitors to become part of its mission to build a future for humanity based on "the values of understanding, freedom, equal dignity, justice, equity, harmony, compassion, and forgiveness." OHI seeks to shift the focus from the horrors of the past to a peaceful, sustainable future.

As notable OHI supporter Jane Goodall put it, "The very word, Auschwitz, is synonymous with one of the darkest chapters of our human history. Thus there is no more fitting place for creating a peace center to educate of the unimaginable that we are capable of. But a center that will also teach about our capacity for love and compassion. A place where people can be inspired with a vision of a world where we live together with respect for each other and co-creation. A world of sustainable peace.

"A place for peace education and an environment where the more than two million visitors a year will be encouraged to build a new future together and will leave empowered to be the change they want to see in the world and to spread the message of 'never again.' Only together can we open the door to this new future. It's time."

Peace and Sustainability Education programs are a large part of OHI's plan. As is an EnVisionarium—an interactive, innovative museum of the future—where, through state-of-the-art technology that includes virtual

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Left: Dr. Nina Meyerhof and Dr. Samuel Jacobs-Abbey with recipients of the 2019 Dr. Nina Meyerhof Leadership Award.

Below: Dr. Nina Meyerhof at the United Nations General Assembly celebrating the 20th anniversary of the United Nations High-Level Forum on the Culture of Peace with event organizers in September 2019.







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reality, visitors will be able to explore scenarios, make choices, and create and generate solutions and see the results, thus enabling people to experience their power to contribute to a just and peaceful world and to help create a better future.

At 77, Nina devotes all of her time and energy to OHI. She has returned to Poland several times since her first visit to Auschwitz and has met with fundraisers, dignitaries, government officials, and volunteers there and in many other countries. In September, she and Domen Kocevar were VIP attendees of the 17th World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates in Mexico, where they continued to garner support and visibility for OHI. Spending time with Nina, seeing her in action and hearing her speak of her life's purpose, is like being in the presence of a bright light that illuminates the darkness around it. To borrow a George Bernard Shaw quote posted on OHI's website, "Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got a hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations." ♦

Dr. Nina Meyerhof

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