

VareseNews

“I was personally affected by that massacre, we must remember it”

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✘ A few years ago, the film “Hotel Meina”, which was based on the book by the journalist Marco Nozza, brought to the big screen the story of the first massacre of Jews in Italy. This crime was committed on the shores of Lake Maggiore, in Meina, just a few kilometres from Varese Province. The events occurred in a place that will always be the symbol (at least in our memories) of that moment, Hotel Victoria, where the victims of the massacre spent their last few hours before being killed. Today, all that remains of that hotel are the memory, and a man, Gianni Mazzucchelli, who was personally affected by the tragedy of the Holocaust. From the pages of VareseNews, he makes an important suggestion: a symbol to remember forever what happened.

Dear Readers,

After the demolition of Hotel Victoria, formerly Hotel Meina, all that remains of the Jews slain in that place is the memory. Among them was Mrs Lotte Mazzucchelli Fröhlich Wertheimer, who was killed near the Meina pier and then thrown into Lake Maggiore.

A German association has suggested putting STOLPERSTEINE, stumbling blocks, consisting of cobblestones to which a brass plaque with the dates of the victim of Nazi persecution is fixed. The stones should be put in the place of her birth and the place of her death. What do you think?

My sympathy for the Jewish cause stems from profound dismay, which causes me to remember those who died in such a cruel manner, and only because they belonged to a different religion.

The waters of Lake Maggiore are a taboo for me. I was a child, when my grandfather caught me on Via Nazionale in Oggebbio “counting” the military jeeps passing at high speed. I was a child when they told me my mother had gone to a country called Germany. For me, Germany was a great stretch of water, where fish as big as whales swam. I was a child when, on returning home from the small beach opposite, I found about ten people lying on the ground, silently watching me, eyes wide open. They had been shot, but I still knew nothing of death.

It was many years later that I heard the news of the killing of Lotte Mazzucchelli-Fröhlich, (in the photo, Becky Behar, the only witness of the massacre), which occurred in September 1943. I was in Switzerland and had successfully completed my

apprenticeship as a typesetter and linotypist. They told me that the victim was a relative of my grandfather, and that was how I came to understand why he had always looked for me so anxiously. I have a tiny collection of postcards-photographs that show Hotel Meina, which later became Hotel Victoria. I can see the fourth-floor windows where my Grandfather Diaz was killed with his three grandchildren. I can see a valet fully dressed, standing upright beside a table in the Hotel's large garden, and I wonder, "Was he the one that reported the presence of 13 Jews in Hotel Meina, to the Fascists and Nazis, almost as a vendetta after he had been dismissed?"

The building is no longer there, but the massacre committed between the building and the Meina pier must not be forgotten. Only then will such crimes never occur again!

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