

**Place  
my  
stones**

**leah thorn**



**M**y mother tongue

isn't my

mother's tongue



**I** always knew

when the television would go off  
Any hint of the German language  
any images of wartime  
any mention of the camps  
my father would pale  
be on his feet  
lunge at the on/off switch  
whispering, "Shah! Your mother! Shweig!"

He wouldn't buy German goods  
he wouldn't talk to Germans on holiday in Majorca  
unless they moved the towel on his sunbed  
then he let them have it for the Holocaust

He did his best to protect my mother from the past  
We all did  
but none of us could take away the pain  
The pain that couldn't be healed  
by being denied, by being ignored  
The pain that terrified us  
The pain that we worked around

My mother, in answer to the question  
"Where do you come from? You don't sound English"  
always answered "France"

When she arrived here aged fifteen on the Kindertransporte  
my mother forgot every word of German

Her parents had told her they would join her soon

They never did.

**Wichtigste Abschrift aus dem Geburtsregister des  
Landesamts Erkelenz-Land, früher Schwanenberg**

Nr. 19

Schwanenberg, am 2. Dezember 1924

unterzeichneten Standesbeamten erschien heute, der Persönlichkeit nach

Ländler Leopold Leyens, be kannt

Schwanenberg

und zeigte an, daß von der  
s, geborenen Gerson, seiner Ehefrau,

ihm,

berg in seiner Wohnung

Biggs, ten November des Jahres

t vier und zwanzig nachmittags

acht Uhr ein Mädchen

und daß das Kind die Vornamen

Lanna Leonora

geprüft und unterschrieben:

Leopold Leyens,

**Der Standesbeamte**

Kuester

Übereinstimmung mit den Eintragungen im Geburtsregister wird hiermit

den 27. April 1939

**Der Standesbeamte**

Vertretung:

*[Handwritten signature]*

*[Handwritten mark]*

## I show my mother photos of Erkelenz as it is today

The square is airy and clinically clean, the Rathaus shining white, bright with baskets of flowers

In this place, I had been jolted, my t-shirt stained red by the tomato juice I spill

My mother looks in silence, then tells me that this is the place where Jews were rounded up

In the Rathaus, my grandfather had been held

I am there fifty years too late to snatch him away



## Tante Jenni ended up in Los Angeles via Haiti

In the desperation of my twenties, I go to visit her.

She has been institutionalised and her mind wanders, tampered with

She has reverted to German and she thinks I am her cousin

Her daughter remembers only one story. Jenni often spoke of the time the papers came, telling my grandparents they were to go to Theresienstadt

When my grandmother was leaving the house, she gave her fur coat to Jenni, saying she had no need of it where she was going

Jenni has it still, insists on wearing it even in the height of an L.A. summer.

**Sometimes** I hear a knock on the door

and I pretend it is you

and there you stand

cases round your feet

and I have grandparents

and we do grandparent-y things

sit in the front row at the pictures

me translating between mouthfuls of popcorn

days out at Southend-on-Sea

steering clear of the cockle stalls

and my mother's orphaned eyes brighten

and I hear German without flinching

and the constant searching is for nothing

the day you knock

Sorgelesen, genehmigt und unterschrieben

Leopold Leyens

Der Standesbeamte

Kuester

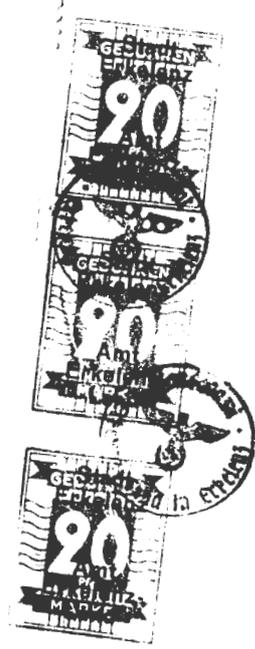
Die Ubereinstimmung mit den Eintragungen im  
beglaubigt.

Erkelenz \_\_\_\_\_ den 27. April

Der Standesbeamte

In Vertretung:

Beglaubigte Abschrift aus dem Geburtsr



# I'm a Holocaust junkie

and I need my fix

Can't get no high  
won't get no kicks  
till I hear those stories  
till I see those pics

Gimme gimme horror  
gimme gimme gore  
emaciated bodies  
piles galore  
stripey pajamas  
and eyes that implore

When the terror gets me, I blow a fuse  
It doesn't make sense what they did to the Jews  
so I read the books  
I watch the films  
no rest there  
so I sit and I stare

*eyes go blank*  
*body slumps*  
*relive the horrors*  
*and I'm in the dumps*

I'm a Holocaust junkie  
I'm sharp I'm hard  
Nothing gets me 'cos I'm on my guard

I wear only black and I crop my hair  
monochrome resistance to the rage I fear  
Keep it all in keep it all down  
Rage that engulfs, feel it and I'll drown

I'm a Holocaust junkie  
See I'm alive  
Even if they didn't  
I survived

In honour of them  
I live my life  
Live my life



I can't do this *she says*

I don't do this *she says*

Then she does

No, I don't dance *she says*

I only look like a dancer *she says*

Then she dances

And the body stretches and fills the space that is hers  
that she thought she could never have again  
and she sees there is no straitjacket  
only the tightness of self-criticism  
and the constant searching for the criticism of others  
to prove

I can't do this

I don't do this

And then she does

She has photos of her back  
back-lit at her waist  
hips rounded and ready for sweeping hands  
She has flesh  
As her hair grows  
she leaves the Holocaust behind  
forever

I can't *she says*

I don't *she says*

Yet she does



She falls back into water  
Leans against unseen energies  
Allows unknown hands to rest on her  
Hears the story of Abraham and Isaac  
and knows

I can't trust *she says*

I don't trust *she says*

Then she does

Life was never meant to be like this *she says*

I wasn't supposed to be close to you *she says*

I can't love *she says*

I don't love *she says*

And she does





'I Place My Stones' is a mixed-media performance piece with poet Leah Thorn and singer/musician Arike.

'I Place My Stones' refers to the Jewish tradition of placing stones on the graves of the dead, symbolising the indestructibility of life.

Leah offers accompanying workshops for young people and for adults.

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