The Democratic Process of Choosing a Name

In May of 2012, we set up a roadmap for a democratic process of finding and choosing a new name for our school. Over a period of more than half a year, 18 classes of our school presented their proposals in 10-minute presentations during our weekly school assembly (plenary meeting of the school).

Ninth graders from our school and from Israel met on an educational exchange trip to Yad Vashem/Israel in 2011. From this trip, they brought back their proposal for a new name: Refik Veseli.

After all presentations had been considered, a secret election of a new name took place on January 30 and February 01, 2013, in polling stations that had been set up especially for the occasion. Students, educators, and parents were allowed to vote. After all the votes had been counted, it was decided:

REFIK-VESELI-SCHOOL

In January of 2014, so almost a year later, the district parliament (BVV) of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg of Berlin confirmed the name.
Who was Refik Veseli?

In 1942, when Refik Veseli was seventeen years old, he was doing an apprenticeship with the photographer Neshad Prizerini in Tirana. Originally, he was from the mountain village Kruja; from there, his parents had sent him to the city to get an education.

In 1941, the Germans had invaded Yugoslavia and many Jews had fled; among them were the owner of the photography shop, Moshe Mandil, and his family. They went to Tirana, which was part of the Italian occupation zone and Jews were still relatively safe there.

As he was looking for work, Mandil came across the photography shop of his former apprentice Prizerini, who not only offered him a job but also offered him a place to stay for him and his family. This is where he met the young Refik Veseli, who was soon going to become his lifesaver.

The Hideaway in the Mountains

After the Germans had invaded Albania as well, the situation became life-threatening for the Jewish population. Refik Veseli suggested to Moshe Mandil that he could hide him and his family at his parents’ house in the mountains. After a long and difficult journey, during which they could only move at night because they had to hide from the German military in daylight, they finally reached Kruja.

They lived there for two years – hidden away in a room above the barn – with another Jewish family until the liberation in 1944. During this time and especially towards the end of the occupation, there were a lot of military activities, battles, and manhunts in this area and the village was bombed; it was a dangerous situation for everyone involved.

After the war had ended, Moshe Mandil once again opened a photography shop in Yugoslavia – in the city of Novi Sad. Refik Veseli now lived with them and finished his apprenticeship as a photographer. He stayed with them until they emigrated to Israel.

Refik Veseli with Gavra Mandil and Gavra’s sister Irena in his arms, Yugoslavia 1946
**Muslims Save Jews During the Holocaust**

In 1987, Mandil’s son sent the story of Refik Veseli and the way he saved the Mandil family to Yad Vashem (the Israeli memorial and research site of the Holocaust). He highlighted the unparalleled support during those years by Veseli and his family, which was also based on a Muslim code of honor, the Besa.

**The Righteous Among the Nations**

In the same year, Yad Vashem recognized the Veseli family as Righteous Among the Nations; the international honorific title the memorial site awards to non-Jews who risked their lives during the Holocaust to save Jews.

*The Jews and their saviors in front of Veseli’s house*

**School Program**

The school program of the Refik-Veseli-School will be developed until the end of April 2014. As of May 1, 2014, you will be able to find it on our website. On the way to an inclusive society and in terms of the social human rights, a democratic school culture is a pillar of our school program that moves the acknowledgment and acceptance of diversity further into the spotlight.

**Refik-Veseli-School, Berlin Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg in February of 2014**