

## DP (Displaced Persons) Life, 1945 – 1950

This exhibition contains materials held by the Estonian Archive in Australia that gives a small glimpse of what Estonian refugees experienced in the DP camps in Germany during the years 1945 – 1950.

The story of these camps is a much, much larger one than our overview could ever express. It's a story of enormous loss, uncertainty and the fear of an unknown future. But it's also a story of survival and enduring hope.

In 1945 thousands of Estonians, and other nationalities, found themselves stranded in Europe, stateless and unable to return home where imprisonment, deportation and the threat of death was very real.

Even knowing this many believed that returning to a free Estonia was still a future possibility. Maintaining language, education and culture was vital, especially for children and a new wave of babies being born outside Estonia.

Reality was different and people realised that there would be no such return and that the next step must be an uncertain future in a new country. Thus preparations began for a new life. Not knowing what was to come, and often carrying the burden of having experienced not only terrible violence and trauma but also of not knowing the fate of family members who either remained in Estonia or were still not heard from in other parts of Europe of worse still, those that were deported to Siberia or lost in the depths of Soviet Russia.

For adults this must have been an extremely difficult time, but for the young people and children there was an element of excitement and expectation which many of them carried on to their new countries.

This was a period of life in extreme transit and the changes to come were tremendous and impossible to imagine.

The people of the DP camps contributed to the creation of a world of displaced Estonians, a very significant force that would come to be known as 'välis Eesti.' All was not without its humorous side as seen by the regular back page cartoon situations in the DP publication 'Pildipost.'

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