

'Dream' comes true for author with Gretzky visit

AUTHOR MEETS WALTER

Photo by Brian Shypula, Brant News

German author Felicitas Hoppe shares a light moment with Walter Gretzky. Hoppe included the Gretzkys in her 'dream' autobiography and visited Brantford and the Gretzky home she wrote about for the first time on Monday.

Brant News

By [Brian Shypula](#)

Walter Gretzky showed German author Felicitas Hoppe how to hold one of Wayne's hockey sticks.

For that brief moment, fantasy and reality came face to face in one of Brantford's magical places.

Hoppe, who'd never been to Brantford or met a Gretzky until Monday, is author of a book that includes the Gretzkys as central characters.

The self-titled Hoppe is her "dream" autobiography, in which she lives out what she wants to be versus who she is. As a child she moves in next door to the Gretzkys and learns to play hockey with Wayne on their famous backyard rink – Wally's Coliseum – as almost an adopted daughter of her neighbours.

The author earned Germany's highest literary honour, the Georg Buchner Prize, in 2012 for Hoppe.

She laughs as she recounts how some German readers compliment her for creating such genuine characters, not knowing that the Gretzkys are real people.

Hoppe, who is a month older than Wayne, was studying at University of Oregon in the mid-1980s when the NHL superstar was setting scoring records and leading the Edmonton Oilers to five Stanley Cups. She came across his picture when someone gave her a book about hockey.

"I sort of fell in love with him," she said.

The image stuck in her mind and was inspiration for the story.

“I followed my intuition. I was fascinated by the character; I was fascinated by the family,” she said.

“You’re sort of a literary star now in Germany,” she told Walter during the visit to the Gretzky home.

Walter shared his family story with the visitors, explaining that his father was from Belarus and mother from Poland.

“They were wealthy land owners and had to flee the country because of the Communists. That’s why we’re here,” Walter said.

“I know,” said Hoppe, who studied about the family and Brantford for the book.

The story also draws on telephone inventor Alexander Graham Bell and renowned Canadian pianist Glenn Gould. Hoppe also visited the Bell Homestead during her stay in Brantford.

“It’s really strange because it seems different and familiar at the same time,” she said of finally seeing Brantford.

The author was invited to the Telephone City by Coun. David Neumann and his wife Elfrieda, who also arranged the visits with Walter. The Neumanns met Hoppe on a trip to Germany.

Neumann, who also invited Hoppe and her group to speak before city council on Monday, said he is reading the German book.

Hoppe said she hopes to see the story translated into English in the future but also worries whether Canadians will like it. In Hoppe, the lost children from the Pied Piper of Hamelin also learn to play hockey on Wally’s Coliseum. Hoppe’s hometown is Hamlin.

The three-day Brantford visit was a side trip for Hoppe, who is on an interesting journey in North America with three other travellers: Alexej Meschtschanow, a Ukrainian-born sculptor now living in Berlin, Jana Muller, a photographer and visual artist in Berlin, and Ulrike Rainer, a Vienna-born professor of German literature who teaches at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire.

The group is tracing part of the route of Soviet satirists Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov, who travelled by car from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts of the United States in 1935, revealing Great Depression-era America to millions of readers in the Soviet Union.

Hoppe wrote the introduction when the Russian book, Little Golden America, was translated into German in 2011.