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 **Cologne high schools**

Students and teachers publish book with moving biographies of Jewish children

From [Alexandra Ringendahl](#) 06/07/2023, 11:20 am Reading time 4 minutes



Book presentation with the teachers and editors Thomas Kahl (left) and Dirk Erkelenz as well as the former student Luca Wielage.

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The project, initiated by two history teachers from the Queen Luise High School and the Schaurtestrasse High School, combines the past with the future.



Terry Mandel from California is a guest in the auditorium of the König-Luise-Gymnasium via a large screen. "A completely unexpected email from a 16-year-old student in Germany changed my life. Anna made it possible for me to bring the story of my mother Ingelore Silberbach to life," she reports. And Edith Jonas' son writes from the USA that the student Carla not only appreciated his mother's fate, which he had suppressed. She also changed his view of Germany and the German people.

"You make the world a better place," he writes. Ingelore and Edith are two of countless students of Jewish faith who went to municipal schools in Cologne in the 1930s and researched about their lives.

The letters from the relatives of the Jewish schoolgirls who had to leave their school and Nazi Germany or were deported during the Nazi era make it clear how much history lessons are connected to the present and how deeply they can touch people: Luise School and Deutzer Gymnasium Schaurtestraße have been researching the stories of Jewish students who attended their schools during the Nazi dictatorship in project courses for eight years now.

25 biographies of Cologne children of Jewish faith

Supported by the Cologne NS-Documentation Center, they trace their paths: from the time when they were students like everyone else to increasing exclusion, escape and, not infrequently, death in a concentration camp. The final point of any research is the [laying of a stumbling block](#) in front of the family's house or apartment at the time. The whole project is based on the commitment of the history teachers Dirk Erkelenz (KLS) and Thomas Kahl (Gymnasium Schaurtestraße).

Supported by the NS Documentation Center and made possible by funding from the City of Cologne, the two educators have now published 25 biographies of Jewish Cologne children in a book. Under the title "Jewish students at Cologne high schools. Their story between integration, demarcation and persecution", their life paths are told and the school history research on Cologne high schools is bundled. More than half of the biographies were written by the students themselves.

Ute Flink, Headmistress of the Queen Luise School, described the book as the "culmination of a long-term project". But it is only an external sign of something bigger and more important: namely, confronting schoolchildren with the consequences of exclusion. "And not through the abstract figure of 6 million murdered Jews, but through the story of contemporaries with the same wishes and dreams."

 victims of National Socialism

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From Petra Pluwatsch



The fact that a bridge is also built to the descendants of those who were persecuted and murdered anchors the responsibility of history in the present. At the end of the book presentation, when the former student Luca Wielage reads the story she had researched on the student Lieselotte Samuel, you can hear a pin drop in the auditorium. Samuel went to school here as a girl and was murdered with her family in Auschwitz.

Pupils nominated teachers for prize

Without the commitment of the two teachers Kahl and Erkelenz, neither the project nor the book would have been conceivable, as everyone emphasizes on this special day for the schools. The students also appreciated this: they had nominated their teacher for the German Teachers' Prize, which the educator who teaches history and Latin actually [received last month](#).

 Adventure student exchange

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From Alexandra Ringendahl



At the end, Erkelenz himself gave an impressive account of what drives him to do this work in addition to teaching. He wanted to make it clear that the road to Auschwitz was not far. Discrimination is followed by isolation, after which people are declared a threat. The conditions were then created. Sometimes he wonders "how many steps we have already taken on this path again today. So that we stand up when someone's dignity is violated, that's why we all made this book."

Info The book "Jewish students at Cologne high schools - their story(s) between integration, exclusion and persecution", Dirk Erkelenz and Thomas Karl (editors) has been published by Metropolverlag and costs 24 euros.

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