

Remarks by Ellen Kandell

Thank you Klaus and your associates and anyone else who helped make this ceremony possible for our family. I am Ellen, daughter of Beate Bernheimer, the oldest of the three daughters. Thank you Dr. Josef Sieber of the Goppingen Jewish Museum for your work preserving the memory of the vibrant Jewish community where our ancestors, the Bernheimer, Simon and Dettelbach families were from. Thanks also to Gunter Demnig, the artist who conceived of this project. Finally, thank you to Matthias Weniger from the Bavarian National Museum whose tireless work returning Nazi plundered silver to their rightful heirs is what precipitated our application for Stolpersteine on behalf of our moms and grandparents.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said, "To us, recollection is a holy act; we sanctify the present by remembering the past. To us Jews, the essence of faith is memory. To believe is to remember." In fact, according to Heschel, remembering is more important than believing. On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, which took place this past week we light yahrzeit candles to remember our loved ones who are no longer here. There's a tradition of visiting the cemetery around the time of the high holidays and placing a stone on the headstone. Another part of the Jewish tradition of remembering. That's why this ceremony is so important.

This is my second time in Goppingen. The first time was with my mom in 1976. Selma was still alive. We drove into town silently, except for her directions. We went to the place where the synagogue had been, now just a plaque remains, she pointed out the Hotel Dettelbacher, owned by Selma's family and we visited the cemetery which she had promised her mom we would do. Then we left. We didn't talk much about feelings. It wasn't her strong suit anyway and I don't think she was ready to share, even though it was 38 years after she was forced to leave, her citizenship withdrawn by the Nazis.

I believe there will never to another generation quite like the one our moms were part of. They grew up in a simpler world. Cars were rare as were telephones. They grew up in a world of defined sex roles and expectations. Before she left in 1939, Selma purchased three sets of silver-plated flatware, presumably part of each daughter's new future household, a sign of optimism at a bleak time. They experienced vast changes in their almost century long lives.

They were the lucky ones. Our grandmother's sister Gene Zawadski was married to an American who worked at the US Consul in Berlin. Selma's half-brothers were already in New York running a business. Thus, they were able to get the necessary paperwork to leave Nazi Germany. So at age 17 my mom along with Anne, age 15, left their parents, their sister Margot and their home and crossed the ocean. I asked Bea whether she ever thought she'd never see them again and she said, "you didn't let yourself think those thoughts."

It wasn't until Eugene's funeral in 1970 that I learned he had been in Dachau. When I started asking questions it wasn't something my mother was comfortable talking about. I had to visit my grandmother by myself to learn more.

As a result of the persecution and trauma they endured, they learned toughness, strength, resilience and optimism. The trauma or fear they wrestled with as young girls and teenagers was buried away for decades, sometimes for a lifetime, not unlike many Holocaust refugees. Their Judaism wasn't something they declared or proclaimed, other than the mezuzah on the front door of their homes.

I believe their common characteristics of strength and resilience helped them survive and endure the indignities of aging that they experienced in their long lives. And they passed on some of these characteristics to Rachel, Naomi and me and for that we are thankful.

Remarks by Naomi Karp

My name is Naomi Karp, and I am the daughter of Margot, the youngest Bernheimer sister. My mother died this past February at age 98. Appropriately, the three sisters died in their birth order—and all lived to be almost 100. My cousins and I have often referred to them as “tough old birds”—and I think that resilience must have come in part from what they experienced as children and teenagers.

Like Ellen, I also had the experience of coming to Goeppingen with my mother. In 1999, my husband, my ten-year-old son, my thirteen-year-old daughter, and I moved to Berlin for a year so my husband could serve as the Bureau Chief for the Wall Street Journal. Germany was the last place we ever thought we’d go for a year abroad, since both of our mothers were German-Jewish refugees. But it turned out to be a wonderful year, and it made a huge impression on our kids. One of the most memorable parts was our visit to Goeppingen (along with a visit with my mother-in-law to Kassel, the place she left in 1938 on a Kindertransport).

Margot and Bea met us in Ravensburg, where we visited their cousin Frank (whose daughter, Julia, is here today). Then we had planned to visit Goeppingen. My mother kept saying “Are you sure you want to do this? We don’t have to.” We were sure....but she wasn’t! She had lived through Kristallnacht with her parents after her older sisters had already emigrated to America, and she didn’t leave Nazi Germany until the middle of 1939. She was very nervous about returning.

We came to this intersection so we could see where the family home had been. We walked past the school she had attended—and she told us about how the Nazis wouldn’t let Jewish children go to the school anymore after a certain point. Then Bea said “We’re near the Schloss, let’s walk there!” Margot said “No, the kids are too tired” but that wasn’t really the reason. Unlike Bea, she remembered going to the Schloss with my grandmother in November 1938 to try to find out where my grandfather was – he had been detained on Kristallnacht and sent to Dachau with the other Jewish men, where he was imprisoned for weeks or months.

Despite the painful memories triggered by the visit, my mother was glad she had come. We went to the Jewish museum in Jebenhausen where there were pictures of our grandfather’s store and other items that interested Margot and Bea. And I think she was glad to share her memories and origins with her daughter and grandchildren.

I am thrilled to return to Goeppingen today to join with all of you in honoring and remembering our grandparents and our mothers. I appreciate how hard the current generations of Germans have worked to honor the Jews and others who were persecuted by the Nazis. As we say in the Jewish tradition, “May their memory be for a blessing!”

Remarks by Rachel Schwartz

I am Rachel Schwartz, the middle sister Anne's daughter. I want to say first, a heartfelt thank you for the Stolpersteine project and to you, and all those in Germany who have worked hard to make remembering an important part of today's Germany. It wasn't always so. For years I wasn't sure I could come here.

I was visiting my grandparents Eugene and Selma in New York when I was 8 in 1958. We were in the living room, and I asked him (she was in the kitchen) what happened when he was sent to Dachau. I might have said prison in Germany. He looked at me as if I were asking him to go there. Astonished and almost angry. I was 8. How dare I mention it? I am not sure he even said anything. It was unspeakable to him. It was too present, 20 years hence.

I visited Germany the first time when I was 14, in 1964 with my family. We came here to Goepingen, as my mother wanted to see her childhood home, which was still intact, and to see the town. She spoke fondly of her childhood. I had seen pictures and heard the stories of how my mother loved to walk in the mountains, to pick fruit in their garden, and to taste the schnapps and liquors my grandfather made in his distillery in the house.

Grandfather though Jewish, felt a true German; he was a decorated officer in World War I and a respected, prosperous business owner. He had to be talked into leaving by his non-Jewish friends. Only after he was arrested and thrown into Dachau and miraculously released, was it clear they had to leave; his wife's (our grandmother's) family connections made it possible.

On that same visit my mother and father took us to Dachau; 20 years after the war; for me the war had ended long ago. My mother sat down on a bench in front of the ovens and just wept as if it was yesterday. I don't think I had ever seen her cry. I'll never forget realizing then just how lucky they were.

We stand here today descendants of the lucky, and I feel we must honor those who fled and those who died. These stones strewn on the ground all over Germany represent the forever tears of those who fled a life, a country they were part of for generations, and they represent the lives of those lost; dragged away to Dachau or elsewhere. In the scheme of things, it is still yesterday. The horror is present when we think about what happened. And the only way it won't happen again, here, or anywhere is by remembering; a piece of that for me (for us) is by doing what may seem like a small act – coming here to lay stones for a family who lived here 75 years ago. They were real, as real as I am, standing here.

Thank you for this opportunity to do our part.