

Stolpersteinverlegung, 09.12.2019, 10 Uhr, Old Town hall

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

my name is Petra Broistedt. I am the head of the department of social and cultural affairs of the city of Göttingen and today I have the honor to welcome you in the name of the city of Göttingen. A very warm welcome to our guests from overseas, the descendants of the former Jewish family Gräfenberg, who lived in Göttingen. Among us are Richard and Lilian Gray with children and cousins. I am delighted that you have traveled all the way from the East Coast of the United States (some of you even from the West Coast) to be our very important persons today.

Today, for the fifth time, we are laying stumbling blocks to commemorate Jewish fellow-citizens who lived here in Göttingen at the beginning of the 20th century and were persecuted, arrested, tortured and, in many cases, deported and murdered by the National Socialists between 1933 and 1945.

Today we remember the suffering of those affected, who were at the mercy of this injustice and the brutality of the Germans.

That was a disaster for those affected. And the situation was all the more terrible and incomprehensible, because Jews in the first two decades of the 20th century seemed so firmly integrated into German society, as in almost no other country in Europe - also in Göttingen.

And I have to admit, the persecution, robbery and murder of people of Jewish faith was not "only" the work of a small group (the Nazis) – (kurze Pause) - the entire German-non-Jewish society profited from it.

Evidence of this - among others – is the comprehensive so-called "Aryanization", that is the illegal robbery of property of Jews.

The responsibility for today's Germans is immense! Göttingen faces up to this responsibility. The memory of the victims of National Socialism in Göttingen and their murder is a central component of the culture of remembrance of Göttingen. We have already taken some steps to face the past and to reconcile. Let me just mention three examples:

- First: In 1973 we inaugurated the synagogue memorial on the Synagogue Square. Since then, in annual commemoration sessions on November 9, we have commemorated the destruction of both the synagogue and several shops of Jewish residents during the so called Reichsprogromnacht in the 1938. These commemoration hours are extremely well attended. They are organized by high school students from

Göttingen and every year they are sad but there are also moving moments of reconciliation and togetherness.

- Second: In 2007 we renamed one of our townhouses in Gotmarstreet (which ist our library now) to Thomas Buergenthal House in honor of the probably youngest survivor of the concentration camp Auschwitz. Thus, the city of Göttingen commemorates the crimes of National Socialist dictatorship on the Jewish people and - in the spirit of Thomas Buergenthal – calls for dialogue, mutual appreciation, tolerance and international understanding. It also shows that Jewish life and the Jewish faith belong to Göttingen, that they have a place in our city. To my mind, this ist very important! I am ashamed, but there are anti-semitic tendencies in Germany again. May be they never stopped, but at the moment they are getting stronger, also in Göttingen. We had swastika smearings on the synagogue memorial and in front of the university as well as an anti-semitic fire attack on a shared flat in Göttingen this year). And for this reason it is so important, that the majority of Göttingens´citizens show, that there is no space for right-wing extremists in Göttingen and that jewish life belongs to us.
- Third: Since 2013 we are laying stumbling blocks. With the stumbling blocks Göttingen shows that the city is responsible for the injustice committed by the National Socialists. There was an interruption of 3 years, in which the practice of laying stumbling blocks in Göttingen was intensively and partly also controversially discussed (some jewish inhabitants didn´t want people walking across the names of jewish victims, which was a strong agrument). In the end, we agreed on a compromise: The installation will only take place, if the descendants agree. And, ladies and gentlemen, that's what our guests did. They agreed, that the name of their ancestors are allowed to be published in front of their former houses. The city of Göttingen is very grateful for that. Therefore, we can add another 17 to the existing 37 stumbling blocks today. And I am particularly pleased that this will take place in the presence of the descendants of the Gräfenberg family. Dear guests, with your visit to Göttingen today you have taken a step towards us - in a concrete and figurative sense. Thank you very much.

The act is carried out in colaboration with the Society for Christian-Jewish Colaboration, the History Club of Göttingen and the city of Göttingen.

Today we are laying stumbling blocks at two places: Weender Straße 19/21, the location of the former, magnificent department store of your ancestors, and in Bühlstraße 28a, the home of Meta Müller, née Gräfenberg and the Eisenstein and Rosenberg families. We will learn more about this in a moment.

After the installation at 1 pm we would be pleased if you follow our invitation to have a snack here in the museum.

There is also the opportunity to inspect the things that your ancestors have donated to the Göttingen Museum – (pause) in the museum itself and also in our outdoor depot. This donation is a sign that the Jewish inhabitants of Göttingen around 1900 considered the Municipal Museum as their museum, that they felt fully integrated into German society. This was a tragic misconception, as could be seen a few decades later. This makes it all the more important that the objects are kept in the museum and, hopefully - after a refurbishment - they can soon be shown to the public to keep the memories of the past alive. Because the secret of reconciliation is remembrance!

Thank you for your attention and I look forward to a speech from our circle of guests.

Petra Broistedt
Head of social and cultural affairs