

## Saved from the gas chamber

**History.** Survivors of the Geislingen satellite camp and their relatives meet online with representatives of the “Remembering - Honoring - Reconciling” initiative by Claudia Burst (translation Eva Kerner)

On April 29, 1945, Allied troops freed Jewish women from a train that was to transport them to the concentration camp (KZ) in Dachau. They came from Geislingen, from the satellite camp of the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp in Alsace.

76 years later, on April 29 of this year, three of the women rescued at that time as well as some relatives of other inmates met online with several Geislingers from the initiative “Remembering - Honoring - Reconciling” (see info) to talk about the past, listen to each other and live reconciliation.

„Now I know what reconciliation feels like.“  
**Malka Zissman**  
daughter of a concentration camp survivor

One of the participants is Rosalie Simon. Now 89, she was 12 years old when she and her four sisters were deported from their hometown of Taacova in what was then Czechoslovakia to Auschwitz. As she told during the meeting, the notorious Nazi doctor Josef Mengele was responsible for the prisoners there. He had put them in two lines: one to work (among others to Geislingen), the other to be sorted out - into the gas chamber. While her four sisters were assigned to Geislingen, Mengele had chosen the gas chamber for Rosalie. She had screamed in despair, her sisters had run to the death row and pulled her out .... and in the end Rosalie was "allowed" to go to Geislingen.



Caption under the photo: For many years, the initiative “Remembering - Honoring - Reconciling” has been calling for reconciliation at commemorative events. Our picture was taken long before the Corona crisis.

This was reported by Baptist pastor Matthias Lotz, who had organized the online meeting. "It was surprising to see how much openness and trust the victims and family members had in telling about how they dealt with the persecution of the Jews," he summarizes. He was also struck by "how strongly the experiences of the mothers, grandmothers or aunts at that time still shape the everyday lives of the relatives in the most varied ways."

Thus, Dr Michael Simon from the USA, the son of survivor Hildegard Lustig, stated at the end of the meeting: "This meeting was a unique experience. It went much deeper than a mere reunion of a graduating class."

Malka Zissmann, the daughter of survivor Helen Jekel, made it clear, Lotz said, that in 2015, when she first came to Geislingen at the invitation of the initiative "Remembering - Honoring - Reconciling" she had not known what to expect. "But now I know what reconciliation feels like", she said.

From the German side, in addition to members of the initiative, the Senior Mayor of Geislingen, Frank Dehmer, took part in the two-and-a-half-hour meeting, as did Dr Stefanie Leiterholt, authorized signatory of WMF Group GmbH, and the head of the press office, Corinna Lägeler.

Stefanie Leiterholt issued an official statement from WMF acknowledging its responsibility towards the "dark history of WMF". "It will always remain a chapter of WMF and should not be explained away," Lotz quotes the company representative, who, however, also emphasized that "today remembering, honoring and reconciling is the goal" of the company.

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## **"Remembering - Honoring - Reconciling" an initiative against forgetting**

**The initiative** "Remembering - Honoring - Reconciling" is based on an idea of Rosemarie and Hermann Schneider from the Geislinger Volksmission. They approached Matthias Lotz in 2014 because he was the chairman of the Evangelical Alliance in Geislingen at that time. In addition to Lotz and Mr. and Mrs. Schneider, Eva Kerner also belongs to the hard core of the initiative.

**The meeting was attended** by these four on the German side as well as Senior Mayor Frank Dehmer, Stefanie Leiterholt and Corinna Lägeler from WMF. In addition, three survivors of the Geislingen concentration camp: Lenka Weksberg (94 years) and her sisters Rose (93) and Rosalie (89). Relatives: Rose's daughter Renee, Dr. Michael Simon, Hildegard Lustig's son, the Sobel and Rieger families, Miryam Sobel's descendants, Malka Zissmann and her son Mordi (Helen Jekel's daughter and grandson), Gita Mann and her daughter.

**Because the major event planned** for the 75th anniversary of the liberation last year had to be cancelled, the initiative "Remembering - Honoring - Reconciling" is currently in the process of creating a homepage in German and English. This should help to keep the memory alive and to connect the relatives of the Geislingen concentration camp prisoners with each other. For this purpose, the Evangelical Alliance is happy to receive donations with the subject "Website KZ-Aussenlager" to the church administration of the Evangelical Church District.