

One simply cannot put this horror into words

Nazi era – 17-year-old Lilly Lindenthal moved visitors at the Holocaust memorial evening at WMF with her perspective on the events and today's reflection.

At the Holocaust memorial evening at WMF last week, eleventh graders from Michelberg High School handed white paper roses they had made themselves to ten descendants of concentration camp survivors who had come to Geislingen (we reported). Each of these students had reflected on what the girls and women might have experienced and expressed it in short sentences.

Lilly Lindenthal (pictured), who had also agreed to contribute at the request of her teacher Anne Kaßbohrer, ultimately chose not to join the action. One simply cannot put this horror into words, she explained and therefore decided to describe her perspective, her view as someone from her generation, at the event. She delivered her speech in German to the nearly 200 attendees in the WMF communication center and in English for the international guests. At the end, the 17-year-old moved many listeners to tears.

Everyone could feel how deeply she had engaged with the topic and how the thoughts challenged the audience (excerpts from her speech are in the info box). She had in fact only briefly prepared for the speech, but it still made a strong impression. Shocking for her, she said, was already in 9th grade during a history lesson when she learned that there had been a concentration camp in Geislingen. No one in her family had ever openly spoken about the past before. And suddenly, everything they had learned in school matched what was being told.

Lilly Lindenthal gives the example of how her grandmother only spoke much later in life about the displacement of the events after the war. Her grandma had told them how her mother, as a forced laborer, had baked bread in the factory toilets. But her father, who had been a Nazi, had said almost nothing. For her generation, it's hard to imagine, from today's perspective, to forget the Holocaust. But that's exactly the danger: the greater the time distance, the easier it is to suppress it. She sees the risk of trivialization, such as jokes about concentration camps, and when far-right parties like the AfD say things like "We can't take responsibility for everything anymore," that's when she gets angry. And when she sees how quickly antisemitic and racist statements are made today, even in everyday life, how they are laughed off, how discriminatory remarks or racist and antisemitic jokes are normalized.

The event at WMF (and the next day, when nearly 200 students listened to the descendants' presentations in the town hall) clearly showed: Lilly Lindenthal's words moved people. Because here, a real person with flesh and blood speaks of her mother, out of her own life—and fights back tears. You can't just ignore that, that's truly real, said an attendee. And many shared the view that such a personal speech, without a final moralizing tone, can find a way to reach young people. It's not about blaming anyone for the past. It's about reflecting and ensuring the future does not repeat the past.

At the same time, it became clear how easily current times can be connected to back then—when placed in historical context. Many drew parallels to populist speech patterns and propaganda today, with simple slogans and radicalized messages.

A recording of Lilly Lindenthal's speech and a conversation with Anne Kaßbohrer, some of the descendants, and students from HeGy and Michelberg High School will be broadcast on Thursday, May 8, at 11 a.m. on Radio Fips.

— Claudia Burst