

Stolpersteine Konstanz

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Verlegungsrede seines Sohnes John A.
Katzenellenbogen

Ansprache von John A. Katzenellenbogen am 17.11.2022, bei der Verlegung des Stolpersteins für seinen Vater

I am so pleased to be here for the placement of this Stolperstein for my father, because it encapsulates the memory of some critically important events that took place here in 1938, as Herr Hans Seiffert has related to you in his speech: My father being taken from this very house into "protective custody" by the Nazi's on the night of November 9 and brought to Dachau; my mother, after finally learning where he was imprisoned, traveling on December 1 by train to Munich; speaking to a Nazi Officer on the train who asked why she was crying, and saying that she wanted to get her husband out of Dachau; the officer, who worked at Dachau, taking my father's name and the address where my mother would be staying; my father, near death from double pneumonia, being dumped from a car in front of where my mother was staying during the night of December 1; finally, my mother, heroically and with the help of friends, managing to bring my ailing father back to Konstanz and then to Winterthur, Switzerland, where in early January could he finally receive life-saving medical treatment. Fortunately, after his recovery, he was able to make it to the United States in 1939, and was then followed by my mother and older sister in 1941. All of these events—truly a series of miracles—determined the life of my father. I have the deepest gratitude to all who played a part in his rescue, because otherwise, I would not be here today, nor would my children and grandchildren.

Before today, I had imagined that on November 17th the six of us, my wife and I, and our two daughters and their husbands, would be huddled together in the cold and the rain, watching the Stolperstein being placed before this house, and that would be the whole thing.

Today, however, in addition to the six of our immediate family, we have two on my father's side from Germany, three from my mother's side from Switzerland, and four more from my father's side who came from Brazil, a country to which they had immigrated years ago. So, there are a total of 15 members of my family here this morning! Also, today it is actually sunny and quite warm!

What has moved me and my family more than anything I could have imagined is that with us here, this morning, we have been joined by the daughter of the family who now lives in Ruppennerstrasse 13, and also by about 30 members of the neighborhood who have come to witness and support this Stolperstein placement. Some of them as young children, or through stories from their parents, even remember when my parents lived here 84 years ago!

It was an unexpected blessing early this year, when I was contacted by Hans Seiffert saying that there were plans to lay a Stolperstein in front of the home where my parents lived in 1938, here at Ruppennerstrasse 13. I knew a little about the Stolperstein project from my cousin Franziska, who a few years ago had helped in the placement of three of these stones of remembrance for our grandfather, grandmother and aunt in Frankfurt. With help from my daughters, I corresponded actively with Hans about the history of my father, both before, after, and especially during the period of 1938-1941, and we were able to uncover many further details about this critical time in my parent's life. I am most thankful to Hans for his interest in my father's life and his efforts to create a definitive 9-page family history document in German, which I had translated into English. There is a copy of the German version in the S'BLÄTTLE of Allmannsdorf, November 2022, pp 47-55.

I am also grateful to Gunter Demnig, the artist who conceived of this unique way to recognize and remember what horrible things happened to the Jews and others who were designated as undesirable by the Nazis in the 1930's and 1940's. Rather than erecting one grand monument, Demnig imagined creating many, many stones, each recognizing one individual, that would be placed throughout the countries where the holocaust took place. By placing these stones in front of the residence where an individual holocaust victim had lived, each being a point of focus on a single person and a single place, Demnig has created a vast and distributed array of these individual Stolpersteine. Each one is a personal testament of a human being, and collectively they function as a vast distributed monument of individual remembrances. Watching Demnig carefully place my father's Stolperstein in the cobblestone pavement in front of Ruppenstrasse 13 and then secure it into its position moved me and my family deeply.

I also want to thank Katrin Brüggemann of the Stolperstein Project of Konstanz, and the many other individuals who have worked so diligently to have these focal points of remembrance placed throughout the city, and here today! The reception that they held last night, and their support and activities are truly remarkable.

Finally, it was through reading the nice brochure, prepared by this group for the Stolpersteine being placed today in Konstanz, that I read two important sentences, first:

- Ein Mensch ist erst vergessen, wenn sein Name vergessen ist." A person is forgotten only when his name is forgotten.

...and then the simple statement of purpose of the Stolperstein Project of Konstanz:

- Die Initiative: "Stolpersteine für Konstanz – Gegen Vergessen und Intoleranz" The Stolpersteine for Konstanz Project is to: "Work against forgetting and intolerance."

These two sentences reminded me of some words written by Maya Angelou, an African-American writer, which appears in her poem, "on the Pulse of Morning", which she read at the inauguration of President Bill Clinton in 1993.

- "History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again."

Two German translations are below:

- Geschichte kann trotz ihres quälenden Schmerzes nicht unerlebt gemacht werden, aber mit Mut angegangen, muss sie nicht erneut erlebt werden. [google translated with modifications]
- "Die Geschichte kann trotz ihres schmerzhaften Verlaufs nicht ungelebt bleiben, aber wenn man sich ihr mutig stellt, muss man sie nicht noch einmal erleben." [DeepL translation]

Let us all hope through these Stolpersteine that this generation and the ones that follow will be reminded of the horrors that took place during the holocaust and through this remembrance will find the courage to ensure that they will never happen again.

John A: Katzenellenbogen, November 2022