

Graduate Spotlight

Every year, over 300,000 students and educators in Israel and around the world attend hundreds of educational activities, in a dozen languages, at the International School for Holocaust Studies. Featured here are two of the School's graduates, and what they have achieved since:

Dr. Andrea Peine and Gerda Küper Germany

James Joseph McIntosh

Photo: Medienberatung NRW/Bildungspartner NRW, Andreas Weinhold



■ Holocaust survivor Helga Becker-Leeser showing her family photo album to students

■ **Dr. Andrea Peine**, a history teacher at the Hermann Leeser School in Dülmen, first made contact with Holocaust survivor Helga Becker-Leeser in 2008, in connection with a project she and her colleague Gerda Küper conducted at her school. Becker-Leeser was born in Dülmen, a city located in the German federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), to Hermann Leeser (after whom the school was named) and Dutch citizen Rhea Leeser (née Zondervan). During the war Helga fled to the Netherlands, where she remained after liberation. Each class in the school had sponsored a *Stolperstein* (a brass-plated cobblestone inscribed with the name and dates of birth and death of a Holocaust victim) to be laid in Dülmen. In the lead-up to the dedication ceremony, Dr. Peine and Küper encouraged their students to mail questions to Becker-Leeser.

The ceremony at the school's assembly hall drew all of the class representatives, several guests from the Dülmen municipality and numerous teachers, students and parents, as



■ **Dr. Andrea Peine and Gerda Küper.** Courtesy: Claudia Marcy, *Dülmener Zeitung*

well as Becker-Leeser, who attended together with her son Joost. Becker-Leeser answered the audience's questions and recounted in detail how she had witnessed the *Kristallnacht* pogrom as a young girl. "Getting to know Helga was just wonderful," says Dr. Peine. "What struck me most was her matter-of-fact manner and her warm and open personality."

Following the ceremony, the teachers and their students contemplated the idea of writing a book about Becker-Leeser's life. Theo Schwedmann, an educator and longstanding partner of Yad Vashem, advised and supported them throughout, and Andreas Weinhold of Bildungspartner NRW encouraged them to pitch their book idea in a state-sponsored competition. The students won, and they received a sizable grant for their project.

Becker-Leeser sent material and texts, and the students combed the local library for age-appropriate books about the Holocaust in a search for inspiration. It quickly became clear that the students were interested in the graphic novel genre, as well as developing a mobile app in order to attract more students to the project.

In May 2015, Becker-Leeser met again with the students, who were working on their project about the story of her life and survival, and answered questions about hitherto unmentioned historical details. "Helga had her photo album, a unique historical source since Dülmen was almost destroyed during WWII," recalls Küper. "Not very many photographic sources have survived. Thanks to the album and all the stories that Helga told about herself, a new world full of details opened up."

The project team quickly realized that every picture illustrating Becker-Leeser's narrative would require meticulous research. This triggered a whole array of questions, such as the color of her eyes, the appearance of the so-called 'Green Police' (Nazi German Police who donned a green uniform) in the Netherlands, and the design of radio sets in the late 1930s. In addition to hiring a graphic designer, they used funds from the grant to cover a study visit to Yad Vashem. Weinhold further proposed that they design a mobile app to complement the book, giving rise to the motto "Students Explain Yad Vashem to their Schoolmates." NRW Education Minister Sylvia Löhrmann visited the school upon the release of the graphic novel and mobile app, praising the group's accomplishment. "Working on the book and our app taught our students so much about the Holocaust," concludes Dr. Peine. "I am deeply convinced that it's a good idea to include both graphics and digital media in Holocaust education."