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Das mehrsprachige Webportal publiziert fortlaufend Informationen zur historisch-politischen Bildung in Schulen, Gedenkstätten und anderen Einrichtungen zur Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Schwerpunkte bilden der Nationalsozialismus, der Zweite Weltkrieg sowie die Folgegeschichte in den Ländern Europas bis zu den politischen Umbrüchen 1989.

Dabei nimmt es Bildungsangebote in den Fokus, die einen Gegenwartsbezug der Geschichte herausstellen und bietet einen Erfahrungsaustausch über historisch-politische Bildung in Europa an.

Visit to Yad Vashem Memorial, 1995

Written by Wanda Wiederanders, age 16, joined by Franziska Federle.

Anyone who has seen the film "Schindler's List" knows what happened under National Socialism, what characterized this era, and what many people cannot forget even today. The period of the Shoah, the destruction of the Jews, is probably the most horrible period in all human history, and the most unforgettable era for the Jewish people. But how do the Jewish people deal with it now?

In 1995, for the second time, the German-Israeli student exchange included Christian Thomasius High School in Halle and a junior high school in Herzliya (Israel). This exchange enabled German and Israeli students to study each other's cultures. After lengthy preparations, the German ninth to twelfth grade students flew to Israel, the "land of milk and honey," in September 1995. It was a very special experience for us to set foot on Israeli soil. We were eager, curious, and nervous all at the same time. We expected that there would be a great deal waiting for us, and that it would surely be instructive. In addition to school visits, several days in the desert, a trip to both the new and old sections of the city of Jerusalem, and participating in the Jewish New Year's festival called "Rosh Hashanah," we also visited the Yad Vashem memorial in Jerusalem.

My host family explained to me that Yad Vashem was the heart of Israel and that one could not know even half of what the Jewish people were all about without visiting it at least once. We knew that the visit would be difficult, and that was probably why we were so nervous. But it was a day that I will never forget!

It has always been horrifying for me to read books or see photos or movies about National Socialism. But no history book can reveal what the Israeli people think about those times today.

Yad Vashem is not just a small house or a museum. It is not a normal exhibit, which can be built and then removed. Yad Vashem is a place, which in my opinion is incredibly beautiful. Every room and every picture in the many buildings has a special meaning. Even the valley bordering Yad Vashem hides important yet terrible secrets. My first impression was that everything looked so peaceful at Yad Vashem. I had, perhaps, expected it to be otherwise, but it was calm and peaceful.

We went silently into the first room in small groups. We looked at pictures, and in tears saw photos of people whose fate was etched in their faces. Photos of half-starved children; objects for medical experiments; pictures of destroyed streets and burned synagogues; photos of neglected people wearing rags on which a yellow star of David was still visible. Photos of endlessly long lines of people on their way to a concentration camp, only one of many.

After the shocking photos, we reached the Hall of Names. Many looked around this hall with surprised expressions, others seemed to be stunned. I found it, from the first moment, simply eerie to look at all the thick files on huge shelves. The atmosphere seemed a bit like a mortuary to me.

For me, the most impressive aspect of the entire memorial was the "Children's Memorial": a small room full of mirrors, pitch black with a small candle in the center. It was simultaneously so impressive and so horrifying that all of us left in tears. The many, many children's names that are read aloud to the accompaniment of Jewish hymns are just as moving as the small candle that is reflected thousands of times in the darkened room. One feels that here one is fully conscious for the first time of the full extent of the Shoah. But the feelings that came over us in that moment cannot really be described, since only after an actual visit can one comprehend the sense and purpose of this

memorial.

Not only Jews are remembered at Yad Vashem, but also those who saved Jews during the Nazi era. A tree has been planted for each rescuer. The "path of the righteous" is more than 100 meters long. Oskar Schindler, too, has been shown thanks with a tree. It seemed to me that this path compensated a bit for all the horrors we had seen. To be honest, I noticed that I had never felt so close to the Shoah as in Yad Vashem. Of course, I had already known something about the Holocaust, but I often still felt very distant from the barbarians who had tried to annihilate the Jewish people. But when I walked through the "Valley of the Destroyed Communities," it became clear to me that National Socialism was closer to me than I had realized. I had always imagined six million Jewish people as a gigantic mass, but the thousands of individual communities engraved in the shining stones of this valley closed in around me. Everywhere I looked were the names of places, cities, that I had once heard about, a few of which I had even visited. Everywhere in this labyrinth were the names of destroyed and lost communities.

It took us a long time to get out of this valley, since there is only one exit, which is difficult to find.

The visit to Yad Vashem left us all very sad, and we returned somewhat shaken to our host families that evening. I had the feeling that the Israeli people had made their peace with God with the help of this memorial, because we exchange students left for home thoughtfully, but not with endless sadness.