

A life against racism

Descendant of a Jewish family from Meimbressen spoke with HGS pupils

by Markus Löschner

„Racists are gaining more power everywhere in Europe. These are dangerous times.“ When Peter Loewenstein talks about racism, he knows what he is talking about. His family comes from Meimbressen, where his great-grandparents are buried in the Jewish cemetery.

His grandparents were murdered by the Nazis, and his parents fled first to the Netherlands, then to South Africa. Loewenstein spent the first eight years of his life there until his family, who wanted to live in a liberal state, left the country because of its racial policies. As a young man, he himself had to flee when he became involved in the fight against racism and against the government in Rhodesia. Even in England, where Peter Loewenstein studied psychology, social work and computer science and later worked as a professor, he repeatedly observed racism, particularly against Asians. Today, the 78-year-old advises asylum seekers on legal issues in his home town of Nottingham.

Loewenstein shared this with pupils in their final year at the Heinrich-Gruppe-Schule (HGS) in Grebenstein. Loewenstein also addressed the events in Israel. As much as he condemns the terrorist attacks by Hamas, he has little sympathy for Israel's actions against the Arab population [in the Gaza Strip]: *„What is happening now is impossible to comprehend.“*

Questions from the audience related to his family, opportunities for Jews to leave Germany during the Nazi era, and whether Jews could protect themselves by renouncing their faith. He was asked how he feels today when he is in Germany. *„Good!“* For Loewenstein, Germany is a beautiful country; he appreciates the landscapes and has friends here. *„The Germans are a country like any other. Something like what happened back then can happen anywhere“*, he is certain, adding: *„I don't feel like a German, I feel like a human being“*.

When asked by a student how to respond to racism, Loewenstein explains: *„We must stand up to racism and not let racist comments go unchallenged.“* He believes in responding firmly and politely – within the family, among friends and everywhere else.

Stumbling stone („Stolpersteine“) laying ceremony today

The „Judaica in Meimbressen“ association will continue laying stumbling stones in front of the former homes of expelled and murdered Jews from Meimbressen today at 10 a.m. The association has now identified 84 Jewish villagers who lived in the village in early 1933, reported Judaica chairman Heinrich Neutze. Members of several Jewish families from around the world are expected to attend the unveiling of the brass plaques. The graduating classes of the Heinrich Grupe School in Grebenstein have also addressed the topic. Around 30 pupils researched the lives of Jewish villagers and will present their findings today. Headmistress Martina Boye-Griesel thanked everyone involved for their commitment. Peter Loewenstein, for whose family further stones will be laid, will also be there with his wife and son. *„For us, stumbling stones are a very powerful symbol against forgetting“*, says Loewenstein.