

Remembrance and Commemoration: Steve Cole from Kansas City, about 7,400 km away, meeting one of our history classes via video conference

This year, it was not possible for any memorial services to take place on the occasion of the Kristallnacht of November 9, 1938. Nevertheless, there was a special encounter at St Ursula's, reminding all of us that we must not forget what happened.

The "Walk of Lights" to the Synagogue Square and the Jewish cemetery, relatives of former Geilenkirchen Jews visiting, cleaning the "Stolpersteine" – all of these activities, which over the past years have become traditions, could not take place this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to nevertheless commemorate the 1938 incidents and honor the memory of our former Jewish citizens, the "Initiative Erinnern Geilenkirchen" our school is part of organized a commemorative silence at the Synagogue Square. Small delegations from each school as well as citizens of Geilenkirchen laid down flowers and lit candles.

Furthermore, a very special guest visited St Ursula's for us to be able to realize the personal meaning of the terrible events from 82 years ago: Steve Cole, son of the Geilenkirchen Jew Ilse Dahl, who was a student of St Ursula's herself and who, unlike most of her family, was able to escape to the United States in 1938. Steve, who lives in Kansas City, has visited Geilenkirchen several times, and is amicably connected to our school, had suggested such meeting to tell sophomore students about his mother's fate and to answer the young persons' questions.

In the early afternoon hours of November 11 (6:30 in the morning in Kansas City), a video conference with Steve Cole started and he appeared on one of our digital boards, which made him able to get in touch with the history class and to tell his story.

The students showed great interest in the fate of the Dahl-Cole family as well as in Steve's experiences and evaluations. Besides a deeper insight into the perception of the Nazi persecution of Jews from the perspective of one personally affected's descendant, topics such as the current antisemitism as well as the US elections and their meaning for people's co-existence came up.

Steve's message was clear: The crimes of the Nazis and the fate of the Jews must not be forgotten, and it should be each person's mission to stand up against all kinds of exclusion and discrimination.

We admire Steve Cole's open approach to his ancestors' fate as well as his own feelings and are very thankful for the fact that he once more connected with students of our school and shared his family's history with us.

