



Gabriela and Uwe von Seltmann at their wedding in July, 2007

Former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt once said it was better to speak of the “future of the past” rather than the “presence of the past”. The project is future-oriented in this very sense. It is only if we succeed in processing the past in an open way that a process of mutual understanding can set in, thus bringing about peaceful interaction in the present and the future.

*»Anything that has not been suffered
and solved to the end
will return.«*

(Hermann Hesse)

*Cover photos:
above:*

*Michał Pazdanowski with his wife and their three children,
photo taken in 1942 in their home in Żabie (Carpathia).
The baby is Anna, mother to Gabriela Maciejowska.*

below:

*Member of SS, Lothar von Seltmann, with his wife and five
children, photo taken in Krakow at Christmas, 1943.*

Uwe von Seltmann, born July 29, 1964 in Müsen/District of Siegen, Germany, freelance author and publicist, lives and works in Krakow, Poland, and Leipzig, Germany. After completing his studies of Evangelical Theology in Erlangen, Vienna and Tuebingen, he worked as a journalist in cities such as Berlin, Vienna, Dresden, and Goerlitz. From 2004 to 2008 he was Chief Editor of the Saxonian weekly “Der Sonntag” (“Sunday”). From the summer of 2006 on, he began spending more and more of his time living in Krakow and mainly writes articles for Jüdische Allgemeine and Spiegel-Online.

Uwe von Seltmann has written or published six books altogether. In 2001 he was granted a scholarship from Baden-Wuerttemberg Arts Foundation and went on a literary trip abroad in 2002 (Poland and Czech Republik) with the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany. He is founding chairman of the support group for the Goerlitz synagogue “Förderkreis Görlitzer Synagoge e.V.” and a member of the action group “Gegen Vergessen für Demokratie” (“Against Forgetting For Democracy”). His book “Schweigen die Täter, reden die Enkel”, written with co-author Claudia Brunner, was published in 2006 (Fischer-Taschenbuch).

More information: www.uwe-von-seltmann.de.

Weiterdenken - Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Sachsen supports the research project. Weiterdenken is a charity for the political education of adults.

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Two Families, Two Pasts – One Future

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The future of the past



Reverse side of the below-mentioned postcard from Majdanek concentration camp, written 09-30-1943 (detail)

The message starts with the good news first: “Dear Mother, I am alive and in good health.” But in his next sentence, concentration camp inmate Michał Pazdanowski lets loose with his desperation: “Have not received any mail from you lately. I am uneasy...” And in between his request for a sign of life from his mother Jadwiga, his wife Iza and the kids, and for bread and onions, he asks the questions that keep tormenting him: “Why haven’t I received any mail for the past eight weeks? Has somebody fallen ill?”

Michał Pazdanowski is one of a million victims of the German National Socialists. Pazdanowski, director of a school in Żabie, today Verkhovyna in western Ukraine, is believed to have been murdered in Auschwitz in April, 1944. His wife Izabela and her three children managed to escape the Nazis in a rather hazardous way. The postcard from Majdanek concentration camp of September 30, 1943, is one of only few things left to remind of Michał Pazdanowski.

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Michał Pazdanowski (1903 - 1944) and his wife, Izabela, Date of photography unknown

Journalist and author Uwe von Seltmann now plans to do research on the life and death of Michał Pazdanowski - he is married to one of Pazdanowski’s granddaughters. The now married couple first met in the context of Seltmann’s book “Schweigen die Täter, reden die Enkel” (“If the perpetrators will not speak, their grandchildren will”), drawing research for his own grandfather into the public. His grandfather Lothar, held taboo within the family, had been a member of the SS and, as such, of the staff of Odilo Globocnik, one of the most brutal mass murderers in the Third Reich.

Research into the life and death of Michał Pazdanowski follows the motto of “Two families, two pasts - one future”. The project is to demonstrate that it is possible for members of victims’ and perpetrators’ families to live together - even if the past continues to have an impact on today’s daily life.

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Lothar von Seltmann (left) with Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler on July 20, 1941, in Horyszów, east of Lublin, Poland.

War, elimination and the Holocaust are just a few pages in a history book to many Germans aged 16 or 40 today. To the descendants of victims, however, the Nazi period is still present even 70 years after the attack of Nazi Germany on Poland - present as a trauma.

Research is a challenge of social and political importance with an international dimension. No matter if it is in Ruanda, the Balkan states, or in Germany/Poland, families of perpetrators and victims will meet again and again. The Seltmann and Pazdanowski families are an example for numerous other families who must learn to handle a burdening past.

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