

History told to sharpen the conscience

-Preface-

This book tells of people who had become invisible in the "shadow of oblivion". To present these people, their fates their lives, and suffering in the light of public awareness is its ambition.

At that, it concerns nothing less but the collective memory of our town, a town in which – just alike many places, although that does not condone anything – a creeping erosion of human decency, of respect towards individuals of different peoples, and of humanity in the local conduct took place.

For a long time, condemnation of the Nazi regime and its crimes belonged to the "refusal of remembrance", for us, too, while simultaneously transforming it into a distant, non-personal and non-local happening. After reading this book, that is no longer possible.

The aforementioned erosion of human decency and of cautious social interaction was not least promoted by a vast number of racist newspaper articles in the "Burgdorfer Kreisblatt", that had downright become the mouthpiece of the National Socialist ideology. In the everyday life, this ideology led to defamation and denunciation becoming part of the daily agenda and to discrimination and use of violence seeming justifiable. But perhaps it was not just the ideological influence that resulted in these terrible consequences. To possess power over people and to be able to harass and punch them apparently satisfies the sinister needs of some souls – unfortunately not only in those days.

In reality no-one was pressured to discriminate against prisoners of war, forced laborers, or homeless foreigners, or to treat them as second-class citizens.

Because it did exist – fair interaction with each other, kind behavior, encounters at eye level and with respect; yes, even friendships that lasted for centuries developed. This is proven by individual examples that are impressively depicted in this book.

Sometimes such behavior was kept hidden from the representatives of the Nazi regime by stratagem. Sometimes it required a large amount of courage.

But these encouraging and impressive individual examples, as they are told in the section "Schicksale" (Fates), can and may not block the view of the fact that the years of imprisonment and of forced labor were experienced by the victims as oppressive and humiliating. They are rather exceptional cases that in no way depict the reality in general. Understandably, there have not been any correspondences following the end of the war with forced laborers from Poland and Russia, male and female, who were subjugated in Burgdorf and its districts. Their memories would be meaningful but are not available.

Who wants to identify with the town he lives in has to do that in the whole, has to know and accept the dark sides and chapters of its history, too. For that, it is essential to tell Burgdorf's complete story, to which the downsides belong as well.

We consciously face our past in all its facets to make it explicable – not comprehensible – for generations to come since we know that we have to permanently and actively contend every day for humanity, if we wish to win and responsibly shape the future.

For a culture of coming to terms with and of not suppressing the past the publication of this book constitutes a historically meaningful event for our town_because it tells history to sharpen the conscience.

Alfred Baxmann
(Mayor)