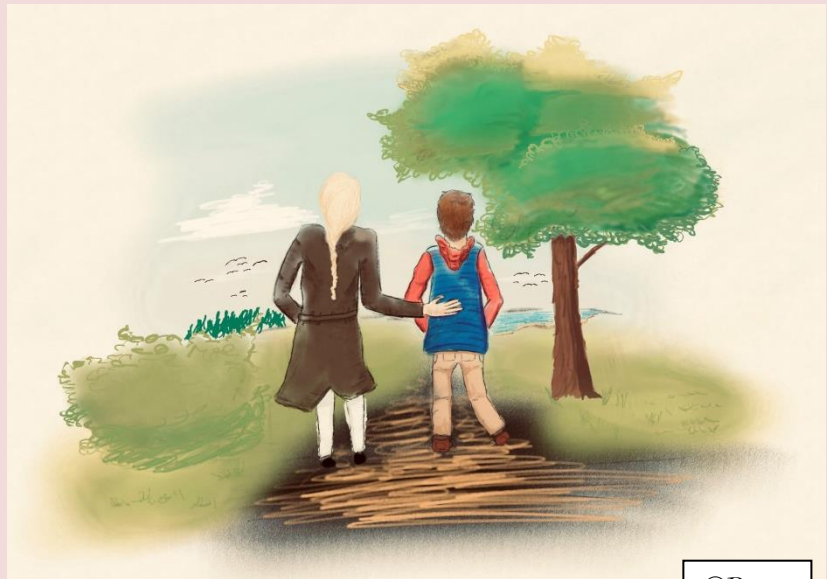


Moments of history

After talking about the diversity of US American society, students from year nine set out to find out more about the **individual fates** of *their* friends and relatives in Germany. Some of these people immigrated a long time ago, others witnessed historical moments or changes in more general ways.

Small groups prepared interviews, which were then conducted by individual students and later summed up in impressive reports.



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Thank you very much to all the people who shared their stories and agreed to make them accessible in this place. Of course, all of the following texts are highly subjective, and they are by no means meant to be generalized. Sadly, however, the consequences of war, the experience of people fleeing from it and reprisals by political systems are still very present in our everyday lives.

“He never got the chance to visit his relatives again”

I asked my grandmother about my great-grandfather. I’ve never met him because he died when my mother was little. My grandmother told me that her father had grown up in the GDR, but he wanted to live in West Germany. So when he had to choose between either joining the army or the navy, he decided to join the navy. One day, when he was in Hamburg, he got off the ship and stayed. He started to work in Hamburg Harbour and soon met my great-grandmother. But he could never return to the GDR, because the government would have arrested him. My grandmother once visited her grandmother in the GDR. She said she had been going with her older sister and her mother. She was only four years old at the time and her mother repeatedly told her and her sister not to “act funny”, when officers came into the train. So when they actually came to control their passports, she was frightened. She doesn’t remember much about the trip, but one of the things she does remember is that her grandmother would always make sandwiches for her and her sister with a thick layer of butter. It is sad that even when his grandmother died, my great-grandfather couldn’t attend the funeral because the government would have made him stay. He never got the chance to visit his relatives again, because he died before the re-unification.

My grandmother’s story

My grandmother was born in Poland in 1943, during the Second World War. In 1945, right when the war was over, her family had to escape from her hometown, because the Russians expelled any Germans and even killed some. So, my grandmother, her five siblings, her parents and her grandparents escaped on foot. Her grandfather died during the march, because he was too exhausted, but the rest of the family continued their way to Germany. After four weeks of exhausting and hard travelling they arrived in Mecklenburg West Pommerania. There they stayed for a few months and then moved to a town in Pommerania where her father got a job as priest.

My grandmother soon went to primary-school for eight years. When she wanted to go to secondary school, however, she was not allowed to do so, because her father had got in some trouble with the government of the German Democratic Republic. She wasn't seen as a 'useful citizen'. She never went to holiday camps organized by the Free German Youth, where other children living in the GDR sang and celebrated, but were also ideologically influenced. Pupils and students got awards for what they achieved, but my grandmother wasn't regarded 'a useful citizen'.

In 1957, three years before the Berlin Wall was built, she went to West Berlin to go to secondary school there. But she couldn't instantly start, because she had to learn Russian to be accepted at her school. So, she found a Russian teacher and learned Russian in less than a year. Then she could finally go to secondary school.

At Christmas she received a call from her father, who said that she and her siblings couldn't come home for Christmas, because then they would be arrested, because they were seen as refugees without a German passport. The same night her father and her mother were separated and her father was interrogated. Her mother never knew, if her husband would come home again.

My grandmother lived in West Germany with her grandfather for a year, without having any contact to her parents except for writing letters. But they really had to watch out what they wrote to each other because every letter was opened and read by the Stasi.

One year later, she could finally travel back to her parents. But they were told, if they didn't leave East Germany the parents would soon be arrested and the children would be sent to a boarding school. So the family left East Germany. At night they were transported to the next train station in a little transporter; my grandmother and her siblings in the back, under a cover, and her parents in the front.

They went to Stralsund by train and first stayed in a refuge camp. Then my great grandfather was offered a parish in Dithmarschen and the family moved and lived there until my grandmother's father died of a heart attack. Finally, my grandmother and grandfather went to Barmstedt, where they are still living today. My grandmother is 77 years old.

"It was a hard decision"

My interview partner came to Germany in 1960, when she was a teenager. She and her family travelled for about two weeks and sometimes it was exciting and overwhelming for her because she saw new countries. They crossed three countries until they finally arrived in Germany. My interview partner came to Germany because her family did not like the political situation after the war and there weren't any jobs, so they didn't have any money. It was a hard decision to leave Croatia, then Yugoslavia, because they did not know anyone in Germany and had to sleep in their car until they had enough money to buy their own flat. But this wasn't easy for her parents as they didn't speak any German. They managed to learn it through my interview partner because she quickly made friends at her new school. As soon as she was allowed to get a job, she wanted one because they lived in a big apartment building in Hamburg and the family wasn't happy to live there. When she was already working for a few months, my interview partner met her husband. He was a new employee and he was friendly, which she liked very much. She already lived in Barmstedt, and when they got married, she moved in with her husband. Ever since they have lived in the same house and raised their three children.

My grandmother's story

My grandmother was born in Poland in 1940. Her father was taken away by the French army as a prisoner of war, when she was three years old. So my grandmother lived in Poland with her mother and her sister, who was six years older than her. They stayed with a family of Polish farmers and they spoke Polish to communicate with the family. But my grandmother's mother also spoke German with her children, when the Polish people couldn't hear it.

Children in Poland were very mean to my grandmother and her sister. They often insulted the girls and were disrespectful. This was because my grandmother's family was not Polish, but German: In 1860, my ancestors had migrated to Russia with other people because of poverty and famine in

Germany. But after one cold hard winter, many of these people, my ancestors among them, had migrated to Poland in the hope of better living conditions.

My grandmother's family consequently lived in Poland during the Second World War. They often had to hide from Russian soldiers. My grandmother's grandmother, who also lived in Poland near the farm where my grandmother grew up, died because she had a heart attack when Russian soldiers knocked on her door. She was paralyzed and later she died.

My grandmother made another traumatizing experience later. She and some more girls had to hide in hay so the Russian soldiers would not find them. But the soldiers came and searched for the girls, using sharp sticks. When a soldier found a girl, he raped and then killed her. In 1949, my grandmother's father finally came back to Germany from captivity of war. He lived in Lower Saxony, and one year later he got a permission for his wife and their children to join him in Germany. In this way, my grandmother immigrated to Germany from Poland in 1950, when she was ten years old. Together with her mother and her sister she travelled for 12 full days by train, from Warsaw to Goettingen. The train never stopped. They were not able to shower, they washed themselves at the sink. They were not able to move much because the train was full. But when they finally arrived, they were put in a camp with many prisoners of war. Yet, some time later, my grandmother was finally reunited with her father. The last time she had seen him was seven years earlier. She was not able to remember him, so it was as if she had met him for the first time. He had already found a house in Lower Saxony, so my grandmother, her mother and sister, finally, after a long time, had a good place to live. Within six months, my grandmother unlearned Polish.

"She was lonely"

When my grandmother was seven years old, she and her family had to migrate to Germany from their Polish hometown. Her parents were not able to get a good job in Poland and my grandmother was not able to go to school. It was really hard for her and her family to migrate to Germany, but it was better for everyone. It was very difficult to learn something about German culture and, of course, to learn the language. The difference between German and Polish is quite big, so learning the new language was a challenge. And that was a problem my grandmother and her family struggled with, because without knowing the language they were not able to find work or visit school successfully. Well, in fact my grandmother was able to learn the language at school, but for her parents it was really hard to learn it quickly by themselves. Although my grandmother's grandfather had German parents and knew the language really well, my grandmother and her mother had big problems learning it. It took them some time, but my grandmother said it was okay and quickly they were able to call Germany their new home. My grandmother's parents died when my grandmother was 30 years old only. She was lonely then, what made her think about moving back to her Polish hometown. But soon she met a boy, who became her husband later. He was from Germany, which was the reason for her to stay. It was the best decision for herself, she thought. My grandparents moved in together, in the house which belonged to my grandfather. With the money she made by selling the house of her parents to another family, my grandmother was able to visit her friends in Poland more often, which made her very happy.

"She hoped for a better life and a good education"

I asked my friend about her immigration to Germany. She told me that she had left her home country with her father, her mother and her sister, when she was little. They immigrated to Germany for political reasons and they were poor. They came to Germany by train. At the beginning, my friend was sad because she had to leave her dear friends and part of her family behind. But she also hoped for a better life and a good education. In the past it was difficult for her and her family because of the new culture and the different language. After some time, however, both her parents found a good job. So they were able to pay their own rent. Nevertheless, my friend misses her home country a lot, but she decided to stay in Germany because of her new friends. She tries to visit her family and friends in her home country as often as possible.