

TEACHERS FACILITATE STERILIZATION OF STUDENTS



Why did some teachers choose to protect their students while others chose to collaborate with the Nazis?

TRAINING INSTITUTE FOR TEACHERS OF THE DEAF, BERLIN

Gotthold Lehmann became the school principal and director of the teacher training program (1924). He encouraged the implementation of the sterilization law among the students in his institution. Sources say he took the initiative to inform authorities about his deaf students and had children as young as ten years old sterilized against their parents' wishes.

Lehmann hired teachers who were loyal to the Nazi cause and quickly wrote to Reich officials so they would be recognized for their "professionalism." One of his hires, a teacher by the name of Schurmann, had recommended that his student, a 14-year-old boy, be sterilized. The student had tried to escape from

A teacher helps a student to read in a school for deaf children in Geretsried. *US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Samuel B. Zisman*

What were the behaviors of ordinary individuals and what were the pressures and motives that might have shaped their behaviors?

the school three times. On his third attempt, Schurmann had police apprehend him, put him in handcuffs, beat him, and deliver him to the hospital for sterilization. Schurmann was recognized as a leader at the school and given a promotion.

PROVINCIAL INSTITUTE FOR THE DEAF, SOEST

Director Wegge carried out his educational duties in an SS uniform. He reported to the Reich on every student with handwritten notes in the margins. It is believed he recommended 98 percent of his students for sterilization. He also recommended that this be done during the summer holiday to prevent student unrest and to avoid circulation of details of the sterilization among clubs for the deaf. Health authorities agreed with his recommendation. Documents demonstrate that many were forcibly sterilized and that Wegge not only notified authorities, but arranged the transport of his students to the clinics where the operations were performed. Parents often were not informed until after the operation had taken place.



Above: A letter from Gotthold Lehman regarding the sterilization of a young student. *US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Horst Biesold* Right: A translation of Lehman's letter. *Donna F. Ryan and John S. Schubman, Deaf People in Hitler's Europe (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2002)*

Director, State Institution for the Deaf and Training Institute for Teachers of the Deaf
Log No. 930

Dear Frau NN,

NN was released from the clinic in good health on August 16. The operation proceeded normally. NN has already written you about this.

The law stipulates that in the case of persons above 14 years of age, the operation may be performed without the consent of parents and guardians. You could not then have changed anything in this regard. I believe that it will be quite a good thing for NN that she has no children. Her life will likely be hard enough as it is.

With best regards, Heil Hitler!
Gotthold Lehman

LETTERS REGARDING FORCED STERILIZATION OF STUDENTS

Teachers, local police, and city government officials collaborated with the Nazis to carry out the orders.



Above: Participants in a National Socialist Teachers Union (NSLB) training camp in Birkenwerder, Germany in 1935. *US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Horst Biesold.* Below: A decision regarding sterilization. *US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Horst Biesold.* A translation of the decision. *Donna F. Ryan and John S. Schubman, Deaf People in Hitler's Europe (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2002)*

Re: Sterilization of NN, baker's assistant in the Institution for the Deaf of Dillingen, born xx in XX, resident in Dillingen at the Institution.

Decision

It is hereby ordered that NN born on xx in XX shall be forcibly conveyed to the hospital in Günzburg for a sterilization operation, unless she immediately goes there of her own accord.

Grounds

NN is to be sterilized in accordance with the decision of the Hereditary Health Court of the Augsburg District Court of October 20, 1936, No. XIII 414/36. The decision has been drawn up by the court clerk in the office of the Hereditary Health Court with the mention that it becomes final on November 13, 1936, and that the sterilization operation may also be performed against the will of the subject. This decision was delivered on November 19, 1936, to the legal representative of NN, NN a farmer in XX, with the order of the public health officer that NN present herself for the operation at either the municipal hospital in Augsburg or in Günzburg within two weeks.

Since NN did not submit to sterilization voluntarily nor did her legal representative provide any further explanation, forcible sterilization at the hospital of Günzburg is to be effected in accordance with the prescription of the state health authority in Dillingen with the assistance of the responsible police authorities (Mayor of the City of Dillingen) (article 6 of the Ordinance of December 5, 1935, *Reich Law Gazette* 1, 1021, section 2, Ordinance of July 8, 1933; Referral No. 222/36).

Dillingen, December 10, 1936
District Police Authority, Dillingen
signed Dr. Hogen

HELGA GROSS



“ We were young, we really didn’t understand. Then a man came from the government to our school and told the teacher to choose which children [to] send to the hospital for sterilization. Then as the time became near, I was in the kitchen and I was cleaning. My mother came and said, ‘Helga, sit down.’ And she explained, ‘You have to go to the hospital in two days.’ My father cried. He refused to see me. He didn’t want to hug me before I left home to go to the hospital.

Not until later, years later, I saw my baby sister; she had a beautiful baby. And the baby was so beautiful and I got to hold the baby and that morning my sister was feeding the baby and then I realized what I felt when I realized I couldn’t have any children. I started to cry and I, I ran into the bathroom and just cried and cried.

When I came back out my sister said, ‘What’s wrong? What’s the matter?’ I said, oh I’m just crying because I’m happy for you because you have a beautiful child. ”*

* <http://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn60511>

Above: Helga Gross (fourth from left) with her siblings; and holding a doll. Right: Helga Gross describing her experience. *Oral History Interview with Helga Gross, US Holocaust Memorial Museum*

HELGA GROSS was a deaf child who was sterilized at age 16. One of her brothers was also deaf but he avoided sterilization due to hospital overcrowding.

She refused to join the Nazi Party. Gross successfully immigrated to the United States in 1954 with her deaf husband, though they were initially denied entry due to their handicaps.

