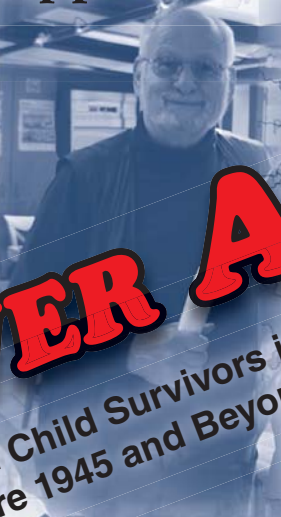


# Philipp Sonntag



# FOREVER ALERT

## German Child Survivors in Action Before 1945 and Beyond 2019



Beggerow  
CSD  
Child Survivors Deutschland



Philipp Sonntag

# Forever Alert

German Child Survivors in Action  
Before 1945 and Beyond 2019

Volume V of the Book Series:  
Die Unruhe der Zeitzeugen des Holocaust  
*The Restlessness of the Contemporary Witnesses of the Holocaust*  
(Four volumes in German and one volume in English)



**B**eggerow

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(Hrsg.: Philipp Sonntag)

Volume V of the Book Series:

The Restlessness of the Contemporary Witnesses of the Holocaust



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Chapters 4 and 5 of this book are an extension of an article by Philipp Sonntag entitled “German Child Survivors in Action,” which summarizes the results of eight volumes. The article was published in January 2019 by KAVOD, see: <http://kavod.claimscon.org/2019/01/german-child-survivors-in-action/>

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# Introduction

We “Child Survivors” survived the Holocaust as children. On April 13, 2001, we founded our membership association “CSD,” 56 years after the end of the Holocaust:

Child Survivors Germany –  
Surviving Children of the Shoah

Child Survivors Deutschland –  
Überlebende Kinder der Shoah e.V. (CSD)  
[www.child-survivors-deutschland.de](http://www.child-survivors-deutschland.de)

## Common Understanding

Our group, initially modest in its aims, soon became a vital new organization, which served as a kind of “surrogate family” for many survivors. It offered them a retreat, as well as much needed social and emotional support. Survivors could provide each other with a common understanding of their shared experiences.

Our bi-annual meetings are essential for our members:

In Petershagen, we are particularly warmly supported by the local “Association of the Old Synagogue Petershagen” and its chairman, Wolfgang Battermann. Together we organize events, such as public musical evenings and lectures, visits to Jewish museums and memorial sites.

## No Competition

Our Child Survivors Germany association decided there would be no competition among its members as to who had the worst fate. It is obvious that each survivors’ experience was trying and every victim tells a different “story.” Of course,



Child Survivors at a meeting in Petershagen in 2018



Child Survivors at an old Jewish cemetery near Petershagen in 2018; on the left side, Wolfgang Battermann



there were and are varying intensities of suffering, before 1945 and until today.

The basic messages of this book consist of the common characteristics Child Survivors share. Our individual fates (in camps, in ghettos, in hiding, etc.) vary. Nevertheless, there are similar challenges we have to overcome. From the association's founding in 2001 through 2019, we have experienced many adventures and have had a lot to share.

### **Unsettled Before 1945 and Beyond 2019**

In this book, we present our experiences as witnesses, who apply their experiences to present-day problems. This is supplemented by expert opinions about us.

We distinguish and focus on three points in time:

- Persecution and plight until 1945
- Frustration after 1945, as German society granted neither mental (empathy) nor adequate financial compensation
- Inner restlessness in 2019, and according actions.

In order to become survivors, we had to constantly be alert until 1945. From 1945 until now, we have had to cope with our wounded identity. We have to be alert in order to protect our wounded inner selves, even when we are alone or when we are having nightmares. We feel that this challenge will last until our deaths.

We are aware how much damage the Holocaust has done to our descendants, mainly to 2G (our children, second generation) and to 3G (our grandchildren, third generation), and beyond. Our descendants are aware of the long period of anti-Semitism and its cruel impact – thus, many will also be “forever alert.”

For human beings, society poses an ongoing challenge. For us, it was even more difficult, for instance, to cope with hard

work in the workplace. We had to compete in spite of our disadvantages, such as more frequent illnesses, less education, forced adaptation to adverse conditions and so on. In our old age, as survivors, preparation and presence are still difficult for us. Even when trying to relax, we may remain nervous – alert!

Reports about us talk a lot about our suffering during the Holocaust. However, this book also focuses on our achievements, whereby we have to cope with several limitations. For instance,

we tend to be too cautious, too shy, too easily alarmed by too many issues and so we may lose composure quickly – but then we may become alert, and fight.

### **The Main Topics of the Eleven Chapters**

Chapters 1 and 11 characterize and summarize our specific sufferings and reactions to the challenges we face. Our concerns and nightmares keep us alert. We consider our “shy resilience” during the Holocaust, as well as our sensitivity to basic dangers in 2019 to be unique characteristics.

The question remains: what can a Child Survivor do in defiance of the Holocaust? In chapters 2, 8 and 9, I use my own personal experiences as an example. I report on my life, first during the Holocaust, then my attempts to cope as scientist and then as an artist afterwards. The reason I could achieve anything in my life was mainly due to my privilege as a child of a mixed-marriage. Thus, I was among those who had a better chance to survive and I did not have to face the horrifying situations other child survivors did, such as imprisonment in a camp or in a ghetto. Until I was 50 years-old, I didn't even consider myself a victim. However, I had to realize that I had several basic deficiencies, which are characteris-

tic of all Child Survivors. Thus, I am just another example of how we Child Survivors are “forever alert,” given

our common “inner restlessness.”

During the Holocaust, four out of five Jewish children were murdered. Many survivors became overwhelmed by cruelty and tried to hide for the rest of their lives. Nevertheless, as soon as we had the chance, some of us displayed enormous resilience and made great achievements.

In the meantime, any damage anti-Semites cause to victims usually hurts their own society, nation, identity, etc. The “achievement” of the fascist culprits created remarkable damage to their own country: the destruction of Jewish life was also

damaged German society

because it lost its own Jewish citizens and their contributions. However, after 1945, even though most Jewish children had been killed, the few Child Survivors and their descendants immediately made valuable contributions to the recovery and rebuilding of German society. We, as surviving victims, still wait for an according admiration from the perpetrators, who, as fascists, prefer to revel in evil hallucinations about us. In Germany Jews, as survivors and German nationals receive both support and rejection. For me, German and even global society seem to be far away from peace and tolerance, as

mankind is in a pre-stage of civilization.

As an “80 year-old child” I protest, I refuse to get used to this. For me as victim, “forever alert” exists amidst a somewhat odd global society:

I have asked myself all my life:  
in this world, what should be “normal”?

I presented questions about the situation and our tasks to our members and many responded. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 describe the results of our recent books about CSD, published in German in 2017 and in 2018. We are witnesses not “only” to the Holocaust, but also to its destructive impact until today. Nothing we do seems sufficient in the face of the rise of right-wing movements across Europe, so we are caught in the position of being “forever alert” in never ending protest without escape.

Several members of CSD have published numerous books and articles. One example is the recent book by Horst Selbiger (see chapter 3).<sup>1</sup> He is a founding member of our CSD association, a long-time chairman of the board, current honorary chairman and, despite his age, often present in the public. He was born in 1928 and suffered great injustices throughout his lifetime. It is amazing how he, as an active journalist, became a master of justice, a righteous man engaged in promoting real justice. His life is a reminder that one can create a better future.

Furthermore, there are eight volumes at two publishing houses, which I edited in 2017 and in 2018 (see chapters 4 and 5). These examine the experiences and recommendations of more than a hundred Jewish Holocaust survivors and experts on the subject. These eight volumes aim to emphasize the traumatic memories of the Holocaust (pre-1945), frustration after 1945 and inner restlessness in 2019.

Chapters 6, 7 and 11 focus on specific current and future dangers and challenges. What enrages us Child Survivors, and actually tortures many of us in nightmares, is a bad, menacing situation, where we feel we are helpless. What depresses us is being in a situation, in which we are aware of the dan-

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<sup>1</sup> Horst Selbiger, *Verfemt – Verfolgt – Verraten. Die unglaubliche Lebensgeschichte von Horst Selbiger*. (Baunach, Spurbuchverlag, 2018).

gers around us, while society seems to ignore the indicators and neglects according investigations.

What gives us hope is benevolent support for us within – although not yet really as an accepted part of – German society. Jewish opportunities are better than in previous centuries. Fine Jewish culture is re-establishing itself. We may even hope and try to become integrated, to feel at home in a modern Germany, in an accordingly new way.

### **World Federation for Jewish Child Survivors of the Holocaust & Descendants in 2014 in Berlin**

Together with Max Arpels Lezer, the European president of Child Survivors associations, I organized the 26<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the WFJCSH&D in 2014 in Berlin.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the planning process, I was inundated with questions from participants regarding whether or not they, as a survivor, would be safe in Berlin. Lezer and I took care to ensure that precautions for the meeting were taken and we advised participants to avoid wearing a kippah in town. Everything went smoothly.

The participants were visiting numerous Jewish sites, including museums and synagogues.

None of the participants were attacked – as told to Lezer and me by the security service we had ordered. But there were a number of anti-Semitic incidents in Berlin in 2014 and in the years thereafter, and some positive public reactions. Again and again disturbing events were reported by the Jewish community of Berlin<sup>3</sup>, such as an anti-Semitic agitator assaulted a man wearing a kippah with a whip while onlookers failed to inter-

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2 “2014 Berlin Conference of the World Federation for Jewish Child Survivors of the Holocaust and their Descendants,” Child Survivors Deutschland, Aug. 27, 2014, <http://wfbc.child-survivors-deutschland.de/>

3 [www.jg-berlin.org](http://www.jg-berlin.org)

vene; a rabbi and his daughter were attacked in the street; Jewish cemeteries were vandalized with swastikas and Jewish children were attacked at school. Yet, the public response has not been one of passivity. On April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018, there was a well-publicized demonstration supporting the wearing of kippahs with both Jewish and German organizations participating.

### **Alert for the Future**

As Jews, we are able to be resilient, modern, innovative, even spiritual. Given this background, I use chapter 10 as a science-fiction utopia, which is quite the opposite of a nightmare. This chapter shares dreams about themes, which might help to prepare for a better future for Jewish Germany and beyond.



Top four board members of WFJCSH&D in 2014 at the 26<sup>th</sup> annual meeting, their first time in Berlin; from the left: Melissa Hacker, Philipp Sonntag, Stefanie Seltzer, Steven Adler and Max Arpels Lezer.



Orthodox Synagogue, Berlin,  
Joachimsthaler Str. 13; © Miriam Magall



Liberal Synagogue, Berlin, Pestalozzistr. 12–14; © Miriam Magall







**As children, we survived the Holocaust. Now, at over 80 or even 90 years-old, we still see challenges and chances, and we still remain alert.**

**In 2001, we founded our association CSD (Child Survivors Deutschland). We developed a unique compassion for each other. In public, often in schools, we report on:**

- The Holocaust and its cruelties and causes. We try to unmask current antisemitic fake news.**
- Hope and frustration after 1945. We had to confront antisemitic politicians and stubborn bureaucrats in Germany.**
- The challenges now and beyond 2019. We fight against antisemitism and we are passionate about democracy.**

**The author attempts to illustrate the lifetime efforts of victims by reporting on a dramatic life: his own.**

**For centuries, our families tried to be Germans. For too many, we still seem like aliens. We are good friends with some, but would still like to eventually be seen simply as Germans.**

**We have to cope: for us global society is in a pre-stage of civilization.**

**Our sensitivity to Survival is always on alert: the book offers modern survival projects as models aimed toward making constructive change.**