

Episode 42: The Long Shadow of the Perpetrators

Guest: Alexandra Senfft — German author, journalist, and researcher; first grandchild of a Nazi perpetrator in Germany to publicly confront and expose her family legacy.

Hosts: Efe & Philip

Bio: Alexandra Senfft is a German publicist, Middle East expert, and political author. She studied Islamic studies and worked as a non-partisan Middle East adviser for the Green Party in the German Bundestag. She later served as an UNRWA observer in the West Bank and as UNRWA spokesperson in Gaza until 1991. Senfft has worked extensively in Israel as a journalist and expert, and served for five years on the board of the German-Israeli Working Group for Peace in the Middle East (DiAk). She also closely collaborated with the great Israeli psychologist Dan Bar-On in the dialog training program *Storytelling in Conflict*, learning the biographical approach to conflict resolution. He was the first to bring descendants of victims and perpetrators of the Holocaust into dialogue, a work that he later continued with Israelis and Palestinians. Her most notable books include: *Silence hurts. A German Family history* (Schweigen tut weh. Eine deutsche Familiengeschichte) that was awarded the German Biography Prize in 2008, *Between Antisemitism and Islamophobia* (Zwischen Antisemitismus und Islamophobie, 2008), *The Long Shadow of the Perpetrator* (Der Lange Schatten der Täter. Nachkommen stellen sich ihrer NS-Familiengeschichte, 2016) and *Great Uncle Paul's Violin Bow. The Family History of a Prussian Sinti*, (2024). She is also 2nd chair of the working group for intergenerational effects of the Holocaust and board member of the memorial site of the concentration camp of Dachau and the *Parents Circle - Families Forum Germany*, which brings together grieving Israeli and Palestinian families in the spirit of reconciliation.

In this Episode: Efe and Philip speak with Alexandra Senfft about the long shadow of the Nazi era on subsequent generations in Germany and how intergenerational trauma persists. Senfft reflects on being the first grandchild of a Nazi perpetrator to publicly confront her family's history, exposing the silence and denial that often shape families of perpetrators. The conversation explores the effects of familial silence, how responsibility is perceived today, and the societal and political implications of unaddressed historical trauma. Senfft discusses her work with the Holocaust intergenerational studies group, her time in Gaza as UNRWA spokesperson, and lessons learned from working with Dan Bar-On on dialogue-based conflict resolution. She also shares her perspective on Germany's approach to memory and responsibility, the role of schools in fostering inclusive remembrance, and how dialogue between Germans, Israelis, and Palestinians can help untangle the complex trauma binding these communities.

Links:

Alexandra Senfft: <https://alexandra-senfft.de/> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Senfft, Alexandra. *Schweigen tut weh: Eine deutsche Familiengeschichte*. Claassen, März 2007. <https://alexandra-senfft.de/books/schweigen-tut-weh/> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Senfft, Alexandra. *Der lange Schatten der Täter: Nachkommen stellen sich ihrer NS-Familiengeschichte*. Piper, 2. Mai 2016. <https://alexandra-senfft.de/books/821-2/> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Senfft, Alexandra. *Fremder Feind, so nah: Begegnungen mit Palästinensern und Israelis*. Edition Körber Stiftung, Oktober 2009. <https://alexandra-senfft.de/books/fremder-feind-so-nah/> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Alexandra Senfft, Malte Ludin: Zwei oder drei Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß <https://lernen-aus-der-geschichte.de/Lernen-und-Lehren/content/15242> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Parents Circle Friends Deutschland e.V.: <https://parentscirclefriends.de/> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Dedication:

We dedicate this Podcast to all victims and survivors of October 7, the hostages and their families, to all innocent civilians killed and injured in Gaza and their grieving families and friends. To our dear guests Udi Goren, Khalil Sayegh, Sima and Mai who shared their losses so powerfully with us. To their families: Tal's wife Ella Haimi, their children Nir, Einav, Udi and Lotan, who never got the chance to meet his father. To Khalil Sayegh's mother and siblings, to Mai's and Sima's family, to her mother Bushra.

To the blessed memory of: Tal Haimi, Lara Sayegh, Jeries Sayegh, Mahmoud, Danny Darlington and Haim Perry.

Disclaimer:

In each episode of this podcast, the invited guests speak on their own behalf. They share their experiences, assessments, and expert perspectives. These contributions are central to the multiperspectivity of the project but do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial team or producers.

Legal & Historical Anchor Episodes:

This podcast may include controversial legal terms of specific technical significance. Their legal applicability requires a thorough expert contextualization; for this, we refer to our legal chapter. All relevant terms of international law, its institutions, current controversies, and the state of jurisprudence are explained in the anchor episode with Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. Claus Kreß LL.M. (Cambridge) (Episode 36). He is co-author of the Rome Statute, Special Advisor to the International Criminal Court, and Judge at the International Court of Justice in the parallel Gambia vs. Myanmar genocide case.

Historical matters are discussed from multiple perspectives in this podcast. Please check the cross-references in the shownotes of the respective episodes for details. All historically contested issues are addressed in the history anchor episode with Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Gudrun Krämer (Episode 21), author of the comprehensive work *A History of Palestine: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Founding of the State of Israel* (Princeton 2008), a standard reference in the field. For her scholarly achievements as a historian, she was awarded the *Preis des Historischen Kollegs* in 2025, the highest distinction in her discipline in Germany.