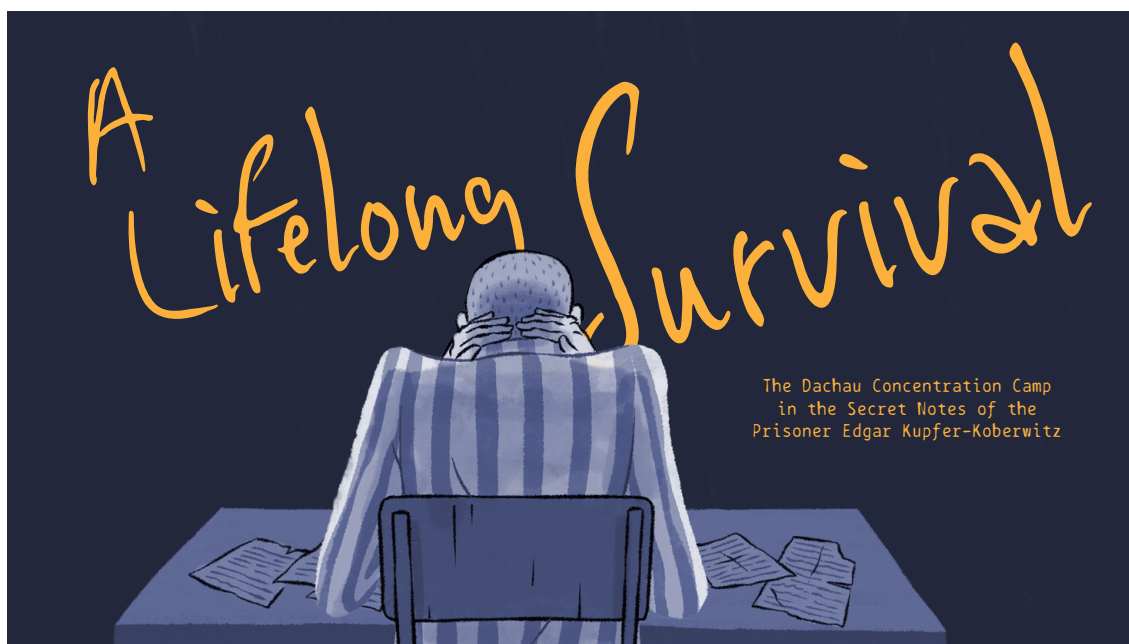


GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE GRAPHIC NOVEL *A LIFELONG SURVIVAL*



The title illustration of the graphic novel *A Lifelong Survival*

THE GRAPHIC NOVEL – THE RESULT OF A PROJECT BY THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF THE DACHAU CONCENTRATION CAMP MEMORIAL SITE

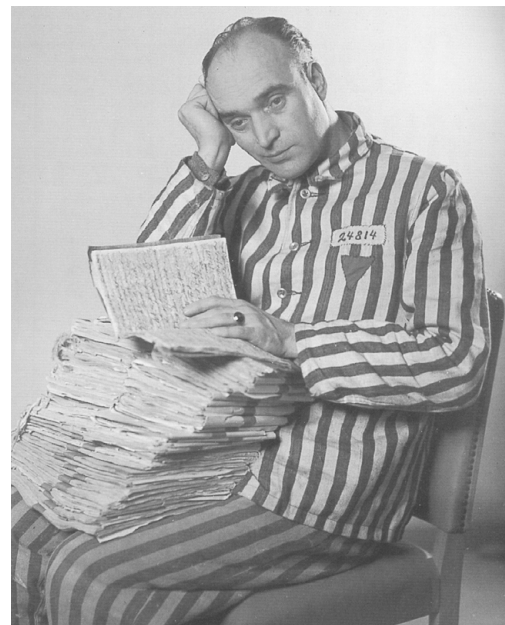
The graphic novel *A Lifelong Survival* was created in 2025 at the instigation of the Education Department at the Dachau Memorial Site and completed in collaboration with the design agencies Goldener Westen and Navos (Berlin). It is available on the Memorial Site's website as an animated short film (16:45 minutes, English) and a more detailed ePaper / flipbook version. Both versions are contemporary and touching ways to approach the history of the Dachau concentration camp. They are aimed primarily – but not only – at youths (13 upwards) and can be used by teachers and in extracurricular education for the preparation and follow-up lessons to a visit of the Dachau Memorial Site. Shorter and longer lesson plans are available for download. Fostering a holistic approach, cognitive and emotional learning are brought together in studying and discussing *A Lifelong Survival*.

EDGAR KUPFER-KOBERWITZ AND HIS SECRET NOTES

As the title indicates, the story of survival of the former Dachau prisoner Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz (*1906 near Breslau, †1991 in Stuttgart) is the subject of the graphic novel. Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz was arrested in Italy at the end of 1940 and deported to the Dachau concentration camp. Assigned to work in a more privileged detail at the "Präzifix" screw factory, located a short distance outside the main camp, Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz was able to secretly keep notes on the living conditions in the Dachau concentration camp, giving a direct impression of what he saw and heard. Amounting to some 1,800 pages, he was able to hide the notes with the help of fellow prisoners. In April 1945, US troops liberated the camp. In May 1945, with the support of the

liberators, he began to restore his manuscripts, which had been damaged by groundwater seeping into their hiding place.

The biographical approach was an important aspect in the conception of the graphic novel. Readers are given the opportunity to get to know Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz as a person and at the same time understand how he experienced the Dachau concentration camp during his imprisonment. In addition to lesson plans, teachers are provided with extensive biographical material on Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz as background information.



Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz in his former prisoner clothes with all the manuscript pages, beginning of 1946. Archive of the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site, DaA F5229

THE EXEMPLARITY OF THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

The Dachau concentration camp existed from March 22, 1933 until April 29, 1945. More than 200,000 prisoners from over 40 nations were incarcerated in the main camp and its subcamps; at least 41,500 persons died from starvation, illness and disease, torture, murder, and the consequences of their imprisonment. The function of the camp, the composition of the prisoner groups, and the living conditions the prisoners were forced to endure, changed repeatedly over the years of the camp's existence.

The graphic novel depicts the Dachau concentration camp from the perspective of a prisoner who experienced the camp firsthand from the end of 1940 until liberation. As a German prisoner who the SS categorized as a "political prisoner", he was better off in the concentration camp than many other prisoners. Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz was an attentive observer, and his descriptions have been used to shed light on the fate of other prisoner groups, for example the Jewish and Polish prisoners. Inevitably, however, a story focusing on a single biographical fate cannot reflect the broad spectrum of different prisoner experiences of the camp.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

The framework for the narration is a (fictive) dialogue between Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, who is restoring his notes, and an American liberator (B-plot). Their conversations lead Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz back into the past when he was a prisoner in the Dachau camp (A-plot).

The Education Department has selected situations and descriptions from Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz's notes which help us understand the living conditions in the former camp. This include the registration procedure, which many prisoners experienced as transforming

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them from a person into a “number,” the harsh conditions in the work details, and surviving the routine and everyday life in the camp while under constant threat. The composition of the illustrations drawn digitally with pen and ink refers to how Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz wrote his manuscripts in ink. Mainly in monochrome, the drawings feature blue and orange accents. The respective color scheme provides orientation on the strand of the plot readers are currently in (A-plot = blue, B-plot = orange).

WORKING WITH THE HISTORICAL SOURCE IN THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

To work closely with the historical source, the graphic novel’s A-plot is comprised solely of (translations of) original quotes from Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz’s notes. For the purposes of readability and to compactly provide a range of his experiences, these were abridged in some cases and, rarely, minimally adapted. An important episode Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz experienced but is not taken up in the graphic novel, is the time he spent in the Neuen-gamme concentration camp, to which he was transferred in January 1941. In April 1941 he was sent back in a very poor physical state to the Dachau camp, where his fellow prisoners organized additional food rations to help him recuperate.

The B-plot is also oriented on historical circumstances. After liberation, Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz stayed on the grounds of the former concentration camp and dried his manuscript, assisted by the American liberators. It is not known in which rooms this work took place, nor what the drying machine looked like and what kinds of conversations took place. To a respectful degree the graphic novel permits itself to make assumptions here in order to be able to vividly tell the story of how his notes were saved. In doing so however, as few words as possible are put in Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz’s mouth – original statements from him are set in quotation marks. All the persons who have a speaking role in the graphic novel were described by Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz.

THE DEPICTION OF THE DACHAU CONCENTRATION CAMP IN THE GRAPHIC NOVEL AND THE DACHAU MEMORIAL SITE TODAY

All the drawings in the graphic novel were based, as far as possible, on original photographs or notes. However, historical source material does not exist for all locations. In the graphic novel for example, the office where the notes were salvaged was kept simple because it cannot be verified in which room the work took place. It is also not known where Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz was staying overnight at that time and what clothes he was wearing. It is likely that he slept in a building that was formerly part of the SS commandant's headquarters, and this is also where he worked on drying the pages. Many of the places depicted are modeled as closely as possible on the appearance of the Dachau concentration camp between 1940 and 1945.



The drawings in the graphic novel are based on historical photographs. Left: the Jourhaus of the former Dachau concentration camp, May 1945, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photograph Number: 55045. Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, copyright: public domain. Right: drawing from the graphic novel *A Lifelong Survival*



Some of the locations in the graphic novel can still be found today on a tour of the Memorial Site's grounds and this enables students to recognize historical buildings during a visit.

Exercise sheet 2 in the preparation modules 1 and 2 aims to sensitize students about the differences in the appearance of the historical concentration camp and the Memorial Site today.