Today, for us, those who were born after the Holocaust, it is just clear that we have a duty of responsibility. We are not allowed to avoid and stop reflection on the past. The work of remembrance is about pausing for reflection. In my opinion, remembering the atrocities of the National Socialists is a gesture of humility towards the victims.

The work and the encounters with Holocaust survivors were my strongest motivation for a voluntary service at the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center. In retrospect, it was also the part of the work which gave me the most strength and pleasure.

Before my voluntary service started, I only knew two Holocaust survivors; now I know about 50. I know their stories, I was allowed to work with them, and not only that, I got to know and appreciate them as human beings with their joys, fears, and characteristics. It is a privilege for me to call many of them my friends. I will miss
them a lot and I really hope that I will get the chance to meet some of them again! This is something I feel very strongly about.

The most touching and saddest moment during my entire year was the farewell from David Dragon. David was born in Warsaw in 1923, survived the Warsaw ghetto, and was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. There, he was forced to work as a bricklayer to build a crematorium. David is part of the Speakers’ Bureau and did speak a lot to the school groups last year.

I always thought that David is different. I thought that he doesn’t like me so much or, maybe, that he struggles with the fact that I am German and that my ancestors were responsible for the death of this family – this would be totally understandable for me.

In June, Balthasar and I get a call from the information desk at the Museum with the message that David is waiting for us in the lobby. Surprised, since he did not have a speech that day, we start “preparing” ourselves to explain to David that he might have the wrong date. But he was not wrong – we were!

What followed was one of the most emotional moments in my life. David came all the way to the museum to say goodbye to us. Suddenly, holding our hands, he started to cry and with warmth in his voice thanked Balthasar and me for our help. Standing in the lobby and with tears in our eyes, we three embraced each other and tried to find words. How do you say goodbye? I was speechless and overwhelmed. I became aware of the important work of the Museum and Action Reconciliation Service for Peace. Of course, we don’t change the world – not in the big picture. We are not able to undo the history of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, we can try to set a small sign of hope for individual persons. And sometimes this happens and you are entirely unaware of it.

Bio: My name is Lotte, I’m 19 years old and I am from Dresden, Germany. After graduating high school, Balthasar and I started a voluntary service with the organization “Action Reconciliation Services for Peace” at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Skokie. I really had an amazing time here and I’ve met so many great people! When I am back in Germany, I will apply for drama schools and will work in a theater in Dresden.