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When We Were 17 Youth at the Crossroads

A century of youth in Germany: We take a look at how young people experienced turning points in history at turning points in their own lives. Our protagonists lead us back to where they spent their teenage years, places where German and European history was made. The personal stories of young people at six different milestones in German history show that the role young people play in a society says a great deal about that country's attitude towards freedom and democracy. Teaching young people respect for human rights, freedom of speech and tolerance is a vital cornerstone for the peaceful co-existence of different peoples.

01 1914: Erich Krems

At the outbreak of World War I, a young man from Berlin reports for duty – together with his friend Peter Kollwitz. They have no idea of the horrors awaiting them on the front.

02 1914: Helene Mierisch

As a nurse, she lives through World War I on both the eastern and western fronts. Will she ever see her beloved Heinrich again?

03 1945: Esther Bejarano

At the Auschwitz concentration camp, this young girl learns to play the accordion. This would eventually save her life.

04 1945: Dieter Wellershoff

In 1945, the 19-year-old is a member of the elite tank division "Hermann Göring". The end of the war means imprisonment for him.

05 1961: Ingrid Reimann

The Wall has separated the young seamstress from her one true love. But the two plan Ingrid's escape from the GDR – as a Belgian.

06 1961: Reinhold Grüning

Still in high school, he wants to help a friend escape from the GDR. He hires a smuggler, but it doesn't go as planned.

07 1968: Barbara Köster

This student lives in one of the first communes in Frankfurt and takes part in unprecedented political actions.

08 1968: Bert Ostberg

The East Berliner is a founding member of the band "Oktoberklub". The more popular it becomes, the more the authorities observe him.

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09 1989: Anne Hahn

Because this East German girl hangs out with punks, she loses her job. But then she comes up with a daring plan.

10 1989: Carsten Schatz

The 19-year-old is a soldier in the East German National People's Army. And he's gay. The fall of the Wall is a liberation for him.

11 2014: Bryan

At the age of 17, he fled India for Germany. He can speak the language now and wants to stay. But there's no security for him. He can be deported at any time.

12 2014: Sibel Özkan

This young woman wants to become an officer in the German military. As a soldier, she has learned to resist stereotypical thinking.