



Five questions about the origin of this book

How did you become involved with Down's Syndrome?

A. Bohnenstengel: I once photographed a reportage piece for Time Magazine („Walter, 53, Down's Syndrome“ No 37, 6.9.1996) and as a result I got other related commissions. It's now become kind of my specialist subject. My first exhibition (I am different than you think, 1999) resulted from my relationship with the Munich-based parents' initiative „Down's Child e.V“. To our amazement it struck a real chord. The large format pictures have been touring uninterrupted throughout Europe ever since. The second exhibition (Meeting people with Down's Syndrome, 2002) was no longer just portraits of individuals; it was more about people within their social groups, connecting them with one another.

H. Holthaus: Angelika and I both have children with Down's Syndrome, my son Matthias is 29.

A. Pollmächer: my daughter Judith is 13. Hanni and I got to know each other by working together on a magazine called L.I.E.S. It's a members' magazine for counselling in Munich. We have both worked with Andreas Bohnenstengel on a number of occasions. We're all linked by a common interest.

What reasons did you have for putting a book together?

H. Holthaus: working on the L.I.E.S magazine meant we read and learnt a huge amount about disability. And there were so many things we wanted to share with other people. This is also an opportunity for us, the families affected, not only to educate the general public but also to make them more aware and more sensitive of the issues. Personal accounts and stories touch people more than just facts and statistics. And we wanted the book to reach people on an emotional level.

A. Bohnenstengel: over time I've taken numerous photographs that give a remarkable insight into the condition. They show normal people who just happen to have Down's Syndrome.

A. Pollmächer: we already knew Andreas Bohnenstengel's pictures. And it was obvious to us that they'd fit perfectly with our prose, creating a book that shows people with Down's from a variety of very different perspectives.



Andreas Bohnenstengel with Fotomodel Viviane



Angelika Pollmächer with her children Judith und Thaddäus

What was the most important thing in choosing the pictures and the texts?

A. Pollmächer: we were trying to give the broadest possible picture from our society today, which people with Down's are also a part of. It was particularly important for us to let people with Down's have their say too – they have opinions which they are perfectly able to express when they're given the opportunity.

H. Holthaus: some of the stories and prose we've collected are wonderful, interesting and touching, while others are shocking or thought-provoking – they show how varied and colourful life is for people with Down's Syndrome.

Interview: Phoebe Doring

Why did you take the pictures in black and white?

A. Bohnenstengel: I wanted to get away from colour with its well-meaning, nice and happy feel, but which leaves no lasting impression. My intention was to take the people in my pictures seriously. Black and white strips everything back to the bare essentials. I've taken this even further by using a white backdrop.

Was it more difficult to photograph people with Down's Syndrome than 'normal' people?

A. Bohnenstengel: quite the opposite. Most of them loved this type of stage and really took the initiative. I love the way that they look so expressive, merely by just being themselves. In my experience, people with Down's have an advantage over us, finding it much easier to be photographed than most people do. As a professional photographer I often wish the people I photograph could be as natural and relaxed as my Down's subjects.

Hanni Holthaus with her son Matthias

