

# INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN

---

Red: Gonda Scheffel-Baars, Nieuwsteeg 12, 4196 AM Tricht  
The Netherlands Tel/fax: (+) 345 573190  
e-mail: scheffelbaars@planet.nl

Sponsor: Stichting Werkgroep Herkenning  
www.werkgroepherkenning.nl

---

**Issue 29, Autumn 2009**

---

## INTRODUCTION

Sabine Bode spoke with Andreas Fasel on her book about the grandchildren of the war. I present to you a translation of this interview.

Three articles in this bulletin focus on the issue of children of German soldiers. The German and French governments agreed on granting French women and men born from a relationship between a French woman and a German soldier the German nationality. You will find a review of the book by Monika Diederichs on the fate of Dutch children of German soldiers and their mothers.

Ab van Aldijk was willing to share his personal life story to us.

In Finland six organizations decided on starting a co-operation in a working group. Periti Kaven reports on this topic.

Joe Albeck gave me permission to publish one of his poems.

I was impressed by a text Teresah Howard wrote on the impact of the war on cultural and social processes. I present to you some excerpts of this interesting article.

The story of war children who experienced bombings and shootings is often disregarded. Atie de Vries was willing to relate her story to the readers of the International Bulletin.

The Open Archive in the Netherlands is an initiative of Rinke Smedinga and Paul Mantel. Rinke reports on its present functioning.

'The Dialogue as a helping hand' tells about the Dutch organization where children of various war backgrounds meet and face their problems in a strong alliance.

I hope that you will appreciate the articles in this issue. Reactions, suggestions and new articles are welcome!

Allt he best,  
Gonda Scheffel-Baars

## THE LONG SHADOW OF THE WAR

(A translation of the interview that appeared in the newspaper Welt am Sonntag, March 2009)

The author Sabine Bode describes in her book "Kriegsenkel. Die Erben der vergessenen Generation" ('Grandchildren of the War. The Legacy of the Forgotten Generation'), how the war experiences of their parents affected the children born in and after the sixties and how they have left their marks in many German families up to the present time.

For years Sabine Bode has been involved in studying the effects of the war on the psychological and mental condition of the German people. Five years ago she published her book on 'the forgotten generation', people born in the thirties and forties, who were children during the war, and who were traumatised by events they went through or had to witness. Many of them did not find a way to cope with their experiences and, unwittingly, passed their problems on to the next generation.

Andreas Fasel: 'When did you get the insight that not only the people who were children during the war, but that also their children, in their turn, were affected by the war?'

Sabine Bode: 'When, in the nineties, I did my research on the aftermath of the war, I often spoke with the children of my interviewees as well. They often told me that the relationship between them and their parents was tense, even destructive. When I asked them if this could be caused by the fact that, for example, their mother had to hide in the shelter, night after night, or that their mother had lived through dangerous moments during her flight and had been subjected to existential fears, I always got the same answer.'

AF: 'Which one?'

SB: 'We never reflected on this possible cause. The topic of the war children became an issue in the public debate and then the grandchildren contacted me and asked me: 'Will you please also study our case?' I remember in particular one man who intended to organise a symposium on the issue and he indeed succeeded in gathering people interested in the material. Those people have met several times since then and I guess that without this persistent man, I would never have had the opportunity to write this book.'

AF: 'Why did not you want to commit yourself to this topic at first?'

SB: 'I thought it was so closely connected with the problems I had just studied: War children, war grandchildren, and next war dogs...To me it was so unambiguous..'

AF: 'At first sight it is indeed rather strange to write a book on the vicissitudes of the post-war generation'.

SB: 'The problems of the war children, one can describe easily in such a way that everyone can understand what they experienced. But the case of the post-war generation is different, they experienced nothing special, their lives are characterized by an emotional vacuum.'

AF: 'That needs an explanation. What is typical of this generation?'

SB: 'First of all I would like to say that not all the people belonging to the sixties' generation are affected by the war, in the same way that not all the war children were traumatised. We focus on notable attitudes and feelings. War children often said of to me: 'It did not damage us. It was normal at the time, wasn't it?' By these sentences they managed to hold at a distance their pain and grief for years and years. The war grandchildren say: 'We cannot reach our parents, we cannot have emotional relationships with them' and these sentences describe what is real, these sentences are not a method to escape grief and pain.'

AF: 'A conflict between generations is completely normal, isn't it?'

SB: 'Yes, and we, the people of 1968, we had our fights and arguments with our parents. But the people born in the sixties and the seventies have conflicts with their parents they have never spoken about. The parents do not know that their children have problems and if they know, they think: 'I wish I had this kind of problems, compared to mine...'

AF: 'What then are the typical problems of this post-war generation?'

SB: 'Many of the people who contacted me told me that they were aware of the fact that something was wrong inside the family, but that they didn't know what it was. They don't understand why they have the feeling that their lives have 'start-problems'. They often have the feeling they have no basis on which to stand, they lack a sense of security and they see that, in fact, there is nothing to be found in their lives that can explain these feelings. From their birth on there was no want of anything and their parents are even in fact decent people.'

AF: 'What is here the connection with the war experiences of the parents?'

SB: 'People who had to flee or who were expelled from the East when they were children, often don't have the feeling that they experienced something traumatising, something serious. But their experiences damaged in a way their emotional abilities and therefore they cannot have deep emotional relationships with their children. It is not easy to explain this connection, but it is there.'

AF: 'Please try to explain this, nevertheless, to me.'

SB: 'Karl Heinz Brisch, a psychologist specialized in relationships, carried out interesting studies in this field. Experiences the parents could not cope with re-appear in their relationships with their babies, like ghosts from the past, in the way that these parents are not able to react emotionally and in an open way to their children.'

AF: 'What does it mean: to react in an open way to their babies?'

SB: 'Mechtild Papousek, professor at Munich University, describes this as follows: 'To focus on the development and experiences of the child, to react to their signals, their interests, preferences, joy and grief. To play with the child and enjoy its development and speak with the child.'

AF: 'And the war children were not able to behave in this way?'

SB: 'Of course not all the war children had this emotional inability. If they all had lacked this ability, it would have been disastrous to our country. On the other hand, I feel that, nevertheless, many of the war children have emotional problems in relationships.'

AF: 'Have you any idea how many people would say: 'Yes, I am a typical war grandchild?'

SB: 'A trauma researcher said recently that about 8 percent of the Germans over age 65 show symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.'

AF: 'That is what soldiers coming home from Afghanistan suffer from?'

SB: 'Yes, you're right. And the numbers are high, we have 14 million of people over age 65. In Switzerland 0,7 percent of the population is affected. The trauma researcher Michael Ermann of Munich considers a quarter of all the people born between 1933 and 1945 as restricted in their psychosocial functioning. From these figures one can deduct that the number of grandchildren affected will be enormously high.'

AF: 'Beneath this generation that at first sight has nothing to complain of, there is in fact an enormous abyss? Was it not difficult to find interviewees among them?'

SB: 'Oh, not at all. It was much easier than with the war children. I told you, after the publication of my book on the war children they contacted me and said: 'Now I understand the problems my parents have to face'. And often they continued: 'I feel responsible for them, I cannot break away from them', or: 'I have to take care of my mother in her loneliness.'

AF: 'I feel this is quite normal, parents grew older, the children take care of them.'

SB: 'In these cases, however, parents and children have switched their roles from the outset. The war children say that they lacked a lot in their childhood. And their children were as young children already aware of these unfulfilled needs of their parents and have tried to fulfill them, at least tried not to add problems to the heap. But, of course, in a normal relationship between parents and children it is up to the parents to take care of the children and to take their needs into account.'

AF: 'This roleswitch, this parentification, also often occurs in families where parents suffer from psychological disorders.'

SB: 'That is indeed a similar phenomenon.'

AF: 'The war children were grateful that you and other people drew attention to their vicissitudes.'

SB: 'They are grateful that their traumatic experiences and their problems in coping with them are given attention and recognition. They feel relieved. One can witness this in

meetings. At first all the faces are stern, then the atmosphere becomes more relaxed, people start to laugh. There is an optimum effect in a therapeutical sense.'

AF: 'But now, you bring to the fore the failures of the war generation, this generation that worked hard to rebuild society. But people don't like criticisms!'

SB: 'I feel that many war children themselves are interested in these topics, because they want to understand what is wrong in their families. But you are right, reflection on these issues needs the willingness to do so. It is important to say that the complaints of the post-war generation are no accusations of the parents, or of the war generation as such. The children understand very well that their parents were traumatised, this is, however, no reason to keep silent and to swallow their own problems and spare their parents. They choose to break the silence and to find the key for their problems, and by doing so they stop the transfer of problems that have not been dealt with to the next generation.'

Sabine Bode's book has been edited by Klett-Cotta.

+++

## **GERMAN CITIZENSHIP FOR FRENCH-GERMAN WWII BABIES**

In February 2009 the German government announced that it will ease the granting of citizenship to 'war children' fathered in France by German soldiers in occupied France during World War II. Researchers estimate there were around 200,000 such children.

The applicants, who are now in their sixties, will be eligible for dual nationality. Many of them have suffered discrimination in France for decades. After the 1940-1944 Nazi occupation, the children were often labelled 'bastards of the Boches' and ostracised by their local communities. Their plight was largely ignored by both countries. Granting German citizenship to those people is viewed as a 'symbolic gesture to make up for past wrongs'. The German Interior Ministry said the applications would be handled 'generously' and there would be no fee. Applications for German passports will still be treated on a case-by-case basis.

The German government's announcement followed lengthy Franco-German diplomacy on the issue. The head of the French National Association of War Children (ANEG), Jeanine Nivois-Sevestre, said the German move was 'superb'. 'Those who have managed to retrace their family want to get German citizenship', she told the AFP News agency.

Since August 2007 EU citizens applying for German citizenship have not had to give up their existing nationality as a matter of course any more. Children with a German and a foreign parent normally acquire both nationalities at birth.

The German Foreign Ministry said it welcomed a French proposal to set up a commission to reassess the plight of French 'war children'.

(From AFP news on internet)

Monika Diederichs reacted to my question: 'Would you like to have a similar agreement for the Dutch children of German soldiers?' in the following way:

'Until age 18 I had the German nationality, but my family never told me. Each time we visited Germany my mother hid my 'wrong' green German passport between her blue Dutch one and that of my stepfather.'

At set times I had to present myself at the German Consulate in Amsterdam and at the office of the Immigration Service, but why? No one explained this to me. My mother and stepfather sometimes threw to me a certain serious glance, there was something mysterious and even ominous around me. The feeling that there was something terribly wrong with me increased throughout the years. Sometimes I asked my mother some questions and she gave me vague answers hinting at a different passport. I got the feeling that, in fact, this was not the place where I was supposed to live, that I had no permission to live here. But where else then? That was not clear at all! At the German Consulate people always were very kind to me, this contrasted with the way the officers of the Immigration Service behaved to me. At age 18 I married a Dutchman. As soon as I had answered: 'Yes' in the wedding room at the town hall, I thought: 'Now I have rid myself of my German nationality, now I really belong to the Dutch people.'

I went to the German Consulate and told them I wanted to use the right to acquire the Dutch nationality. One of the employees, with a strong German accent, answered me that the German nationality always remained open to me, but I told her that I did not feel any need to claim it again.

But over the years I learned that one's identity is not dependent on the colour of one's passport or a change of nationality. Despite my Dutch passport, I kept feeling also German. Germany is my father's country, the Netherlands are my mother's country and are my homeland. My interest in the German aspect of my identity will always remain a part of my feeling a Dutch citizen.

Therefore, I will never get used to people's reactions, in particular of those people I respect and of whom I was convinced they were intelligent and humane, playing down in a cynical way this agreement between the German and French authorities in which French citizens is granted the right to claim the German nationality. These people should read the book 'Enfants maudits' ('Damned children') written by Jean-Paul Picaper and Ludwig Nortz in which the authors pleaded the granting of a double nationality to French people born from a relationship between a French woman and a German soldier.

I for my part, I consider the agreement as a fine gesture. It is the recognition of an identity that was neglected and denied for decades. This co-operation between the two former arch-enemies, I like very much.

What would I do, supposedly a similar agreement was reached between Germany and the Netherlands? A double nationality is attractive, because I experience both nationalities as important aspects of my identity. A double nationality would do justice to my feelings of being German as well as Dutch. But, of course, before taking a decision, I should need to know the consequences and I would never give up my Dutch nationality if that was a condition for acquiring the German one.

I guess that the majority of the people born from a relationship between a Dutch woman and a German soldier, will actually not be looking forward to getting the German nationality. Many of them do not even know the details of their origins and this because of the policy of the Dutch government that still refuses people in search of their father's name to examine documents, even their own birth certificates! I suppose that, compared with the French situation, the Dutch group is but small.

I like the German gesture and to the French people involved it is an important achievement.'

## **MONIKA DIEDERICH'S: WIE GESCHOREN WORDT MOET STIL ZITTEN**

(Those who have their heads shaved should sit still)

Ed. Boom, Amsterdam, 2006, ISBN 90 8506 349 3

(A summarized translation of a review of the above mentioned book in the daily newspaper Trouw, November 4, 2006)

Dutch women who had a longlasting relationship with a German soldier during the Occupation got a more severe sentence after the war than women who had several short relationships. That is one of the outcomes of a research study by Monika Diederichs who interviewed ca 60 women, most of whom had never spoken about the past before. Euphoria, home-sickness, loneliness and grief, these are the recurrent themes in this book.

The social consequences of their relationship with a German soldier were unclear at the time. People associated their relationships with promiscuity, venereal diseases and prostitution. These 'moffenmeiden' ('Boches' girl friends') were accused of 'sexual collaboration'. They offended against the current morals of decency, but also against the national solidarity. They were often excluded and despised, even within their own families. The out-side world's attitude had, however, as a result that they clung the more to their German lovers.

The stereotypes are known: women and girls with blond hair, wearing silk stockings and a rabbit-fur (until recently these images could be seen in movies), ready to spend the night with a German soldier for the simple price of a shawl, a couple of ration tickets or a small present. They were the ones who took into account solely their own pleasures and interests, whereas other Dutch citizens could hardly survive the hardships of the war or were subjects of persecution. But the study of Diederichs shows that these women had often other motives.

For her research she interviewed 56 women. These interviews are unique, never before had their vicissitudes been the subject of a scholar's study and most of them, born between 1907 and 1928, had never spoken about their experiences, fearing the social consequences their testimonies might have. All credit to Diederichs who succeeded in finding interviewpartners ready to tell their stories. She succeeded in gaining their confidence, probably because her own father was a German soldier who married a Dutch woman. Diederichs estimates that 120 000 women and girls had a relationship with a German, but other people feel this figure is too high.

Many women and girls met the men who would become their lovers by chance, in the park, when shopping, at the workplace, but of course, also in bars and dancings. Many German soldiers were only temporarily in the Netherlands and when they were ordered to go to another place somewhere in Europe a period of nervous waiting and hoping started for the women and girls who remained here.

Many of Diederichs' interviewees emphasized that they had but one lover, that the German soldier was the lovepartner of their lives, and in this respect they feel they are different from the 'Boches' whores', who had relationships with several men, sometimes even in the same period.

It is remarkable that their loyalty to one person did play a negative role in their lawsuits, because this loyalty was seen as a political choice, whereas the promiscuity of the others was accepted – although most Dutch people at the time rejected immorality.

Of course, most of these women had some notion of the political aspect of their relationship, but their feelings of love and amorousness predominated. The civil servants charged with the arrest of 'Boches' girl friends' behaved often with an evident nigglingness. One of them

confiscated a girl's album of friends' verses, because one of the poems was written in German; it was used as a piece of evidence for her persecution.

Unmarried women play a central role in Diederichs' study. In the Third Reich many measures protected unmarried women who were pregnant, provided they met with certain conditions one of which was that they were of the 'Aryan' race. In the Netherlands the Occupiers successfully promoted the position of unmarried mothers who had a job. They could get medical help free of charge and admission into mother and child homes. Besides the Dutch homes there were homes under the supervision of the German Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt, the best known of them being the Boerhaave Clinic in Amsterdam. Diederichs' interviewees appreciated the German clinics, probably also because all the women there were in the same position. In the Dutch clinics, the 'German' women were often humiliated. One of Diederichs' interviewees recalls the notice above her son's cradle: 'wash your hands very carefully after having touched this child'.

On Liberationday many women and girls who had a relationship with a German were submitted to a kind of popular court in which they had had their heads shaved. In cities and villages all over the Netherlands people organised these courts spontaneously, although they were in fact illegal. Although the legal Dutch authorities had not yet taken charge, Diederichs guesses, that they in fact turned a blind eye to these outbursts of anger to have this anger canalised and not directed to other things. In this way, the 'Boches' girl friends' were sacrificed for the social rest that could be restored afterwards.

+++

## MY STORY

I dedicate these words to my son Alfred, who grew up with a father whose feelings and behaviour he could often not understand, a father who too often and for too long a period suffered from depression. A father who too often became furious about stupid things. I could not have a better and more careful son than this Alfred, who went through thick and thin with me, out of love for me. It is for him that I live.

I also dedicate these words to the woman who gave birth to this beloved son, the woman I was married to for 29 years before we divorced. She expected she had married the prince on the white horse, but I could not give her the happy life she deserved. Life was more unmanageable than we expected.

My name is Albert van Aldijk. In May 1942 I was born in the Dutch town of Haarlem. My father was an officer in the German Navy and was encamped for some months in the Dutch harbour of Den Helder. My mother was Dutch and lived in Haarlem. Some months after my birth, the Dutch authorities denied my mother the parental control and since my father was on a war ship somewhere on the ocean, I was taken to a children's home. I stayed there ca 16 months and was afterwards adopted in a family. Some years later they adopted another boy.

My life is deeply influenced by the war; although it ended in May 1945, in some way it started for me only then.

I remember me sitting in a push-chair and watching parcels dropped by airplanes falling past me. Many of these parcels landed in the Leidsevaart, a canal in the village of Bennebroek where we lived, and I remember people jumping into the water to pick them up. People were excited, waving their arms to the air pilots and only much later I understood that these parcels contained food for the starving people, among other things the famous Swedish white bread.

In 1946 we moved to Aerdenhout, to a farm next to the flower bulbs firm of my stepfather, close to a nature reserve, the dunes used for the extraction of water. It was a remote place,

quiet and splendid and I spent wonderful hours at this place. I had no friends to play with, but lived through all kinds of adventures, real or imagined. I imagined I was a German soldier strolling through the dunes on his way home. I guess the neighbours had told me something about Germans and I even knew the word 'Boches' whore', but I did not know the meaning, so it did not hurt me. I was an enterprising child, sometimes naughty, but life was good. That ended when I had to go to school, a school run by nuns. Suddenly I saw myself compelled to sit down quietly with crossed arms and with no other action than listening to the teacher. I was used to playing in the dunes among the trees, watching rabbits and birds and now I felt locked up. There was no warmth between the children and their teachers and very often I ended off in the corner of the class room because of my behaviour. They blocked my way of escape by pulling the piano between me and the class room, but one day I managed to escape. The nun tried to catch me and I saw no other way than to run through a door with leaded windows. That was the end of my 2 months' career in Kindergarten.

Meanwhile our family was confronted with financial problems because of the bankruptcy of my stepfather. He had had the idea of growing a special kind of bulbs (grape hyacinths), and thought this would give him a good living, but so short after the war people were not interested in flowers. The prestige of our family in our neighbourhood was gone, poverty became our guest. But I feel that this did not influence my life, there was always something to eat. There was no money for meat, but a rabbit from the dunes could do also and might even had been better for our health.

In 1948 I was sent to a distinguished primary school, the St. Josephschool. Our family belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, so the choice for this school was no surprise. But, I guess there was also another reason. My stepparents were under the supervision of the Child Protection and maybe they stimulated my parents to send me to this school. It was a disaster!

The Child Protection Office had sent a report on me to the school principal and to the parish-priest, so everyone knew that a child of a 'Boches' whore' had entered the school. All the teachers, and in particular, the school principal, felt the need to prove they were the 'good' Dutch people, whereas I belonged to the 'wrong' people. Many teachers behaved in an unacceptable way towards me, punished me for acts I had not done, or punished me too harshly for acts I indeed had done. They made my life in school hard, very hard, and I had problems to follow the lessons and to pick up what I was supposed to learn. In the fifth form I spent more time standing in the corridor by way of punishment than sitting in the class room. One day I used an indecent word when playing with my school mates in the school court, one of them blabbed it to the school principal who ordered me to come to the front of the class room. He pointed at me and said that I was a dirty, bad and dangerous boy to be avoided by the school mates.

The teacher in the sixth form often said: 'as the tree, so the fruit', an expression I did not understand at first, and he too often told us how bad the German people were. I was never invited whenever one of the boys of my class organised a birthday party. The assistant parish-priest used to pank or flogg me

Of course I could not expect help from my stepparents, they stood in awe of the teachers and the parish-priests, because these people had had an education. These people could not do bad things, they thought, their integrity was beyond doubt. But I did not understand all this injustice done to me.

In the third form I had many health problems, my heart and intestines did not function well. Medical examinations in the hospital did not lead to the source of the problems and I guess they were caused by my psychological troubles. My performances in school deteriorated and I disliked school thoroughly. I had the ambition to become a wireless operator and go to the Navy vocational school, but children under supervision of the Children Protection Office got only permission to attend a vocational school of the lowest level. So I went to a school for technical education, but I left school after two years and found a job.



At age 16 my stepparents thought the moment was there to tell me that they were not my biological parents. But I knew this already when I was a boy of 7 or 8! I don't remember that someone told me, but there were always troubles with my school reports. On the report the teacher gave me in the class room my family name was Hoogervorst, but there was also a report sent by mail with the family name Van de Pol. This was the name of my biological mother and also my actual family name. For years my stepparents and I did not speak about this 'secret', we played a funny piece of theatre. My stepparents wanted to start an adoption procedure and for that reason they had to tell me the truth. They told me that my mother was a bad woman who had had a child without being married, moreover my father was a German and my mother had given me away and never had felt the need to inquire after my well being. My stepparents needed her permission before they could adopt me as their son, but my mother agreed only on the condition that I visit her. That was too complicated to me at the time and I refused. Finally my mother accepted the proposal to have my picture and I went to the photographer. I made a wry face and spoiled the picture in some way. A year later my adoption was formalized.

At age 18 I was liable to military service and I spent 21 months in the barracks in Grave. We were trained by Korean War veterans and I belonged to the 7<sup>th</sup> December division, a unit for boys of the lower social classes. My training was aimed at service in Dutch Nieuw Guinea, where the Indonesian Republic tried to take over sovereignty, but the political development in the region was such that we could stay home.

Meanwhile there was an emotional unrest in me that made me think about my biological parents almost constantly, that troubled my sleep and found an outlet in excessive drinking. I did not want to burden my stepparents with questions about the past, so I had to find my answers myself. I started in Haarlem, but the civil servants of the community register could not give me any information. The Roman Catholic Children Protection Office could, however, and I learnt that I had a half-brother 'Frits'. They told me that my mother had moved to one of the overseas territories of the Netherlands and they had a dossier containing letters from her. In May 1972, 14 years later, the community register of Amsterdam sent me Frits' address. Thanks to a friend I could meet my half-brother. He had always known about my existence, but he had had the conviction that I lived in an institution. We took our time to become closer to each other and one year later we paid a visit to our mother. I asked her my father's name and she gave it immediately. I did not feel any emotion with respect to her and although I contacted her a few times over the years, I stopped the contact after Frits' death. I had asked her some financial contribution for his funeral and the amount she was ready to give me was so inconsiderable, that I once and for all knew how little value she attached to her children.

I liked Frits very much. He was an artist, a man of emotions, in many respects my opposite. He liked to play with my young son Alfred. He lived in Munich, because he thought his father was German. This was not the case, as I discovered when I tried to find out who his father was. My mother told me that he was Dutch, but refused to give me his name. She told me, however, that he was shot when on the toilet by someone expressing his joy because of the liberation by shooting his rifle. She told me the name of the village, in the south of the Netherlands, where this had occurred and the community secretary I contacted could give me his name. He was a reporter of a Haarlem newspaper.

I asked Frits if he liked me to continue my research, but he did not. He became depressed and I feel this was caused by the truth about his origins. He lost his 'German' identity and could not find a way to accept it and build up another identity. His relationships came under pressure and broke down, he had suffered during his whole life from fears of being abandoned and now he, indeed, was all alone. In September 1987 he called me in the night and said that he intended to put an end to his life, he did not want to go on. I persuaded him to seek professional help and he did, but some weeks later he jumped out of the train, somewhere between Munich and Augsburg. It took 4 days before the police found me,

because the name on the piece of paper they found in Frits' pocket was different from the name I used by then (because I had adopted another family name).

I feel guilty about Frits' death, although my therapist says I should not. But I feel that I should have gone to Munich after my brother phoned me, maybe I could have prevented his desperate act.

My stepparents had died meanwhile, my stepmother full of bitterness because of the problems in her life. My stepfather died in 1982, after some months of illness and a bankruptcy to be expected soon. I could not but stop his catering enterprise, but his relatives were angry. They had already blamed me for my quest of the truth, now even more they expressed their feelings of disapproval. That was the moment that I decided to ask the Minister to grant me another family name, I wanted to make a new start in life. The procedure took two and a half years, but finally, in May 1987, I received the family name Van Aldijk.

As early as 1973 I took the first steps on the way to finding my father with no more information than his name. I asked for information and help from the Dutch Consulate and the Red Cross and some other organizations, but nobody could help me to find him. The Archives in Berlin did not give much assistance either. I learnt the existence of an organization of children of German soldiers and contacted one of its members. They had acquired expertise in searching for unknown fathers. A couple of representatives of this organization paid a visit to the office of the German assistant Minister of Civil Affairs and they gave him some dossiers, expressing their surprise that these unknown fathers could not be found. Was it a question of unwillingness on the part of the German authorities? This man promised them to promote our case with the employees of the Berlin Archives and he did. I was among the first who received a positive answer.

I learnt that my father, Alfred Wiedenhöft, was born in Neustadt/Danzig and died in May 1969 in the town of Wesel, where two half-brothers and one half-sister were still living, as a German newspaper man, committed to finding missing persons, found out in March 2002. They were born after the war. Until now they refuse to receive me.

My marriage ran aground because of my restlessness and depressions. After 29 years Thea and I decided to divorce. But over the last few years we have developed a friendship that satisfies the both of us.

The aftermath of the war brought me a lot of problems and I did not solve all of them, but I found a way to live with them and at present I feel better than ever before.

Albert van Aldijk

+++

## **WORKING GROUP OF CHILDREN OF WAR IN FINLAND**

The aim of The Association "Tammenlehvän Perinneyliitto" (The Oak leaf Tradition Union) in Finland ([www.tammenlehva.fi](http://www.tammenlehva.fi)) is to take care of the traditions and remembrance of veterans regarding the wars Finland waged against the Soviet Union during 1939-1944. The Union made a decision in December 2008 of founding a body made up of six groups of children who suffered because of the war more than other children. It is necessary to gather all the information and their experiences in the Finnish nation's collective memory with respect to the years of war. The chairman of this working group is Ph. D. Aura Korppi-Tommola. The working group includes representatives from the following special categories:

### **Children of the Evacuated Families**

This is an association founded by children who had to leave their homes together with their families because of the war during the Winter-war 1939-40 and the Continuation-war 1941-44. During these wars about half a million Finns were forced to leave their homes.

### **Children of the Internees**

Finland agreed in the armistice with the Soviet Union and Great Britain on 19/9/1944 to intern German and Hungarian civilians living in Finland. It concerns about 700 Finnish women who were married to Hungarian and German citizens. They had about 80 children, who were also interned. The internment lasted from October 1944 to March 1946.

### **Children of German Soldiers**

During the years 1941-44 there were in northern Finland more than 200,000 German soldiers. German soldiers and Finnish women had romances and also children were born. An estimated figure about the number of children with German fathers is about 4000.

### **Civilian Veterans**

The association represents civilians who were in immediate mortal danger because of Russian partisan attacks on the unshielded villages: mothers, children and the elderly, as well as young boys who were taken in the military service. The aim of the international cooperation is to discover the concealed facts of this partisan war in a spirit of openness and reconciliation as seen from both sides of the border.

### **War-children**

They are children who were sent to other Nordic countries to save them from the horrors of war. Their total number is about 80 000 and they were sent during 1939-1946. Some of them stayed permanently in Sweden and Denmark.

### **War-orphans**

During the Winter-war, Continuation-war and the war in Lapland 1944-45 against the Germans more than about 95 000 Finns were killed. The number of war-widows is about 30 000. The number of war-orphans in Finland has never been recorded or officially registered. The estimated numbers range between 53 000 and 70 000 children.

### **Children as prisoners of war**

During the Winter War 1939-40 about 2000 Finnish civilians were taken as prisoners of war by Russian forces. These people lived mainly in Suojärvi and Salmi in Karelia. The vast majority were children and a smaller part children's mothers. The child PW's have not so far organized themselves as an association. They have got the status of disabled soldiers.

The aim of our working group is to highlight the children's experiences and sufferings in the same way as the experiences of adults. In many cases it's a question of a silenced history we want to bring to public consciousness. Regarding Civilian Veterans it's also a question of reconciliation with the Russians who committed the partisan attacks. This work closely resembles the reconciliation work Kombi does in the Netherlands.

Pertti Kaven , Hanko Finland, [pertti.kaven@iki.fi](mailto:pertti.kaven@iki.fi)

Member of the Group of Children of War

Chairman of the War-child Association in Helsinki

## **THE BEST REVENGE**

Hitler was a failed artist,  
in chagrin destroying all beauty,  
since he himself could not create it,  
turning then to dominion  
in a frantic, frenzied flight  
from his own humiliation and shame.

I have been a fearful artist,  
afraid to fail  
or to be found wanting,  
for decades not daring  
to test my soul  
on the unforgiving page.  
turning efforts elsewhere,  
chasing dreams  
not quite my own,  
only to wonder  
why they remained  
just beyond my grasp.

If words like these, placed on paper,  
capture some small measure  
of beauty or truth, then  
they can survive scrutiny,  
and outlive persecution.

So if this poem displeases,  
accept my regrets that  
we cannot communicate as I might wish,  
but know that my art  
at last, and at least,  
does comfort me,  
thereby confirming that  
creating beauty is, indeed,  
the best revenge.

Joseph Henry Albeck, M.D.  
In: Songs for the Last Survivor (1989)

+++

## **THE LEGACY OF WAR AND THE DISTORTION OF CULTURAL MIRRORING**

Teresa von Sommaruga Howard  
(Excerpts from the chapter published in 'Children: the Invisible Victims of War', edited by Dr  
Martin L. Parsons, DSM 2008, ISBN 0954722949)

World War I was dubbed the war to end all wars, while World War II, following only 21 years  
later, was the most brutal in history. These two wars, so close together, signalled a  
disastrous inability to learn from experience and provided almost no time for any recovery. In  
their immediate aftermath, whole populations were up-rooted, displaced and bereaved in

unprecedented numbers. A step-change in the number of fighting casualties and the number of people who were systematically murdered also occurred. Huge numbers of the people of Europe were left brutalised and homeless. Millions upon millions, although surviving physically, were left emotionally broken, without homes, country, family or friends. As a result, at least two generations were directly, severely traumatised.

My parents' generation, growing up after the First World War, learnt from their parents that the best way of coping was not to give in to grief. Instead, they learnt to direct their energies towards the future by building a new life with great energy and hope. As they tried either to put together the remnants of their former lives or to build new ones, a way of coping developed into a hidden and ubiquitous cultural phenomenon. The shame of being turned into a victim was buried under a mask of heroism and survival, reinforced by 'Poppy Days' that gave little space for mourning what was lost, or facing the shame of survival. With the pressing business of needing to build new lives taking precedence, an indelible, enduring legacy has remained that persists as a subterranean force influencing our lives.

Often physically removed from their original historical and cultural context, many of my parents' generation had the additional burden of being emotionally stranded as well. All the accompanying assumptions, belief systems, rituals and expectations that were integral to life as it had been lived previously, no longer applied and no longer had the same relevance or meaning. The new social context could not resonate with the experiences they had had. It was this confusing, traumatised and traumatising context that set the scene for the birth of my generation. Our childhood was often full of confusion. Its disconnection from the past made it very difficult to give meaning to present day experience, and provided a fertile vessel for receiving the unfelt trauma of my parents' generation. It led to what is often referred to as the transgenerational transmission of trauma. The devastating losses, that both preceding generations had to face, were buried, as the inability to mourn created a distorted cultural mirror that in turn prevented the possibility of remembering and healing.

Our family stories were largely kept out of awareness in a kind of 'then and there space' unconnected to the 'here and now' and when I recently suggested at a conference that most people of my generation had similar tales to tell, many people spoke movingly for the first time never having made any connection with these experiences before. These stories had been locked away in the family story box and had not been taken out to become a conscious constituent of their current identity. We had all been taught not to draw attention to a history that might precipitate grief or distress.

So often we were told: 'Isn't it time to forget and to leave the past where it belongs, get over it, move on...? After all it was more than sixty years ago and even longer ago back to the First World War!' I think the idea that we 'should move on and forget' was intrinsic to the prevailing coping mechanisms of the immediate post war era of the First World War and it has continued ever since. The focus has been on actively making the world a better place in which to live. Until recently very little attention has been paid to the lingering after effects that lurk like a giant time bomb. According to Yolanda Gampel (1) untouched trauma has a radioactive quality that transmits itself and lives on in all of us.

For those who survived the mind-blowing terror of war, or the concentration camp and subsequent displacement, their experiences could almost never be talked about. Such trauma usually renders the survivor without words and there was usually little encouragement from those they so thankfully returned to, to talk. But, who wants to hear about murder and violence? The two worlds were so completely incompatible it seemed better to try to forget, despite the inevitable recurrent nightmares and the feeling that so many people had of becoming 'outsiders' in their own homes. The cultural expectation that sent them to war was not concerned with hearing how it really was. Little if any acknowledgement was given to the traumas they were carrying, further reinforcing the

personal shame of first being a victim and ultimately for surviving. Their continued existence was also potentially a constant reminder of what many were trying to pretend had never happened.

Evidence of the lasting effects of war is now emerging as people retire, and find themselves unable to cope with the suppressed details from their past lives. Veterans report high levels of breakdown realising that as they pass into old age that war robbed them of their youth. For those who survived the Holocaust, showing signs of vulnerability, often cast as a sign of weakness, continue to be impossible. This is a lingering residue of the probability of certain death in a concentration camp selection for example.

Despite the strong social pressures to put these times behind us, I keep noticing the way the destructive aspects of their legacy live on. In a workshop on the theme of 'War and Peace' we discovered that many of us born during or after the World Wars are suffering under a cloud so engulfing that we are unable to see it or to understand its effects. Those in our families, who lived to tell the tale, were unable to talk about their terrible losses and experiences and unable to really mourn them. For many, the very fact of surviving was at the cost of burying their emotional reactions very deeply and, unwittingly, passing them on to the next generation. The problem was they had been there and understood what had happened. We had not! Our experience was that we often had to make sense of strong feelings that could not be made sense of in the present because they had been triggered by a past that we knew little about. The present became further disconnected from the past as we employed the same mechanisms of burying the pain that our parents and grandparents used. We followed their example!

Even when we know that our parents were probably traumatised, we often don't quite know how it has influenced our lives. Ernestine Schlant (2), in the Language of Silence, describes how the second generation in Germany 'inherited not only the unmourned traumas of the parents but also the psychic structures that impeded mourning in the older generation in the first place'. Most importantly her work demonstrates how what happens to the individual may not be purely individual, but may be bound up with larger social, political, and cultural processes that often go unperceived.

It isn't until we have the opportunity to work these experiences through together in a contained reflective space such as a large group, that we can begin to make sense of our own often-incomprehensible reactions. Even then, with the benefit of consciousness, we might still not be able to recognise how much the unacknowledged past can distort our present. The following story from a group visit to Nürnberg illustrates what can happen despite our conscious intentions otherwise.

Before the visit to Nürnberg, we had in previous years visited three Third Reich sites together; Osthofen, a 'rogue camp' built almost immediately after Hitler came to power; Hadamar, one of the T4 euthanasia hospitals and Buchenwald, concentration camp alongside the historic town of Weimar. On each occasion I had noted that there was a tendency to organise a whole day confronting harrowing material without planning in times for eating. On our visit to Buchenwald I remember sitting in a café in Weimar in the late afternoon, after a morning walking around Buchenwald, waiting for what seemed an interminable time for lunch and shivering with a bitter cold that also came from deep within. It was an experience that I wanted to avoid repeating at all costs. But, it happened again and I felt that it was important to try to bring the 'forgetfulness' about food to light. Not surprisingly, my strong feelings were met with extreme defensiveness and it seemed that few understood why I was making such a fuss. It then became clear that, even with a detailed explanation, it was too painful to recognise that the residue of our joint traumatic history had been played out in our group. Learning about another time is one thing. Having it resonate in the present, as in this case through enduring cold and hunger, is sometimes just too much to bear. This

painful encounter has continued. So far the consensus is, even amongst the Jewish group, that I was rude and ungracious. By attempting to bring what had been buried to light, I challenged the cultural expectation that we shouldn't notice. The resulting tension in the group became so intense that it was almost impossible to talk to each other until we got some external facilitated help. Until then the deep hurt on both sides was blocking the capacity to think. Explaining away the expression of pain as just bad manners has become encoded into everyday life,

War brutalises and traumatises everybody involved and yet there is no ritual passage to mark the transfer from war to peace in our society. We pretend it hasn't happened. Even soldiers, who have often witnessed the unimaginably brutal, let alone those who have been displaced, are expected to rejoin society afterwards or settle into a new and unfamiliar social setting as if their experiences were a mirage. Even now, asylum seekers are expected to integrate without drawing attention to their experiences. What they have had to endure to leave their homes to seek asylum is almost completely ignored. It is interesting to note that along with many other rules about how to conduct war in the Torah, there is at least one clear instruction for the community to carry out a ritual to purge blood guilt (Deuteronomy 21:3). Many so-called primitive societies carry out such rituals in the understanding of how the delicate balance of what it means to be human can so easily be destroyed. In our society survivors of war are expected to manage, what to others are unimaginable, memories, alone without any cultural mirroring to enable them to have their heroism, and their trauma, publicly reflected, and reflected on. The very personal legacy of socially committed trauma is at the same time socially ignored. It is a ubiquitous paradox that creates a distorting cultural mirror.

With the focus on building the future, the pain of our war-torn past, remains hidden in the personal psyche and is disconnected from the wider socio-political culture. The problem is that the painful residue of these unmourned memories does not disappear. It remains embodied in the social unconscious and re-emerges in organisational life, in an unrecognised form, as we struggle for both personal and national economic security.

Almost everywhere I go I meet people in despair as they find their working lives becoming increasingly meaningless. Constant reorganisations, said to be improving efficiency, often turn out to be no more than expedient ways of saving money that inevitably precipitate enormous hidden suffering. Nowadays, excessive stress is considered an almost natural accompaniment to organisational life. A strange situation is emerging where more and more is being squeezed out of less and less, as skilled people are being expected to meet targets that appear to have little to do with their original vocation. Many colleagues find themselves frustratingly buried beneath mountains of time-consuming paperwork suggesting a lack of trust in their capacity to ensure a consistent quality service. There is a strange drift towards a lack of recognition as individuals are expected to behave as if they were replaceable 'numbers'. The luxury of being recognised as an individual with a name and a special set of skills appears to be rapidly disappearing. I notice increasing alienation in the true Marxist sense.

These days, public sector organisations seem to have become places where despite the oft-repeated mantra that people are our most precious resource, they are treated as if they were no more than robots. Even the most creative vocations have been reduced to a mechanistic procedure of ticking boxes. A kind of organisational false self is maintained where so long as the correct box is ticked, it doesn't really matter what the real achievement has been.

Although we tend to think of an organisation as a separate entity with a life of its own, according to Ralph Stacey (3) it only exists as an imaginative construct that emerges in relationships between people. If instead we recognise that we form our organisations as they form us, 'we might begin to ask such questions as, what is the dominant discourse, what ideology does it reflect, what patterns of power relations it is sustaining and what patterns of

inclusion and exclusion are evident.' We might also begin to gain access to what it is that people bring with them into their organisations.

If we remember that so many of us have been traumatised by our parents' and grandparents' experiences, is it too much to hypothesise that our organisations actually reflect the same immutable imprint of trauma? Research has demonstrated that people who rise to management positions have developed their capacity to manage by surviving childhood trauma without adequate support. It is also those people who are most likely to demonstrate the symptoms of post-traumatic experience and avoid attachments. They then rise to positions of 'power' and adopt influential cultural attitudes such as 'get on your bike' to find work. I suggest that increasingly the predominant assumption in work settings is that deeply connected attachments should be avoided and that strong emotional reactions are unprofessional. The expectation that feelings should be kept under control and preferably not revealed is inhuman. It might have its place in the battlefield but in the workplace it only serves to increase alienation through lack of committed relationship and attachment. The intention to deny the importance of committed relationships in the workplace is reinforced by a cultural assumption that seems likely to have a connection with the aftermath of the war. Recently, a very committed middle manager took the risk of telling her executive manager that she felt she wasn't coping. The executive manager told her that the organisation had to earn six million pounds to survive and that her team was expected to make its contribution. If she wasn't up to this, then perhaps she should leave! Where was the support or development of the 'valued people resource'?

Although it is usual 'to keep a lid on things' in the workplace, I have discovered that when managers are encouraged to refrain from issuing instructions about how to deal with problems, providing a regular reflective space can help to build a cooperative and creative environment where feelings can be simply and directly expressed. It takes time and a lot of patience to deal with the inevitable apprehension but people *do* get used to it if managers are supported to stay with a mode of asking questions and expecting staff to work with them. In the beginning, people are usually taken over by an overwhelming anxiety that prevents them from speaking, so sessions need to be conducted in a way that legitimises everybody's natural fears.

Vulnerability is a natural state in the face of overwhelming forces, but we are taught to be ashamed of such feelings. Being faced with death and destruction early in life often leads survivors to feel deep shame for not being able to save those who died around them. This double process of feeling deep pain and shame but pretending that they don't exist is, I think, the lasting residue of a period in history that we can't bear to remember. It is making much of our current working life more unbearable than it ought to be and shapes a cultural mirror that often reflects back inhuman robot-like expectations of us all.

Brazilian anthropologist Carlos Rodrigues Brandao (4) reminds us that culture is the way we became human. It was by learning to live in a complex system of social relationships, governed by laws that made it mandatory for us to consider one another that we transformed the wildness of nature into culture. The key to being human is our capacity to be in on-going relationships that we can think about together and describe in words. For as long as we fail to remember and fail to talk about the losses from our joint traumatic past, we keep the origins of current traumatic organisational experiences buried below multiple layers of defensive coping. Unconsciously, by avoiding attachment to important people and places, we help each other to avoid facing our shared history. In the process, we create patterns of behaviour that might finally make us all, to some degree, inhuman. With this diminishing capacity to reflect on our own lives, to reflect on our shared past and to make long-term attachments, we contribute to keeping our cultural mirror distorted.



Teresa von Sommaruga Howard regularly co-conducts a workshop in Germany, 'Breaking the Silence: Mending the Broken Connections' for second and third generation after massive social trauma. She can be contacted on [Teresa@JustDialogue.com](mailto:Teresa@JustDialogue.com).

1. In paper given to London Second Generation Network National Conference on Transgenerational Transmission of Trauma
2. Schlant, E (1999), *The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust*, New York: Routledge, p14
3. Stacey, R (2005) 'Organised Identity: The Paradox of continuity and Potential for Transformation at the Same Time', in *Group analysis*, Vol. 38, no4, December 2005, London: Sage, p479
4. Brandao, CR (2006), *Ownership, the gift, the talent: Reciprocity in the origins of human experience*, at 'Groups: Connecting Individuals, Peoples and Cultures' IAGP Congress, Brazil, July 2006

+++

## **A BARGEE'S CHILD DURING THE WAR**

In 1934 I was born in the Dutch town of Arnhem, I am the second child in a bargee's family. The first-born was a boy and I have a younger sister and brother. Both my parents belonged to bargee's families and as a matter of course my father became a bargee himself. My grandfather made trips in particular to and from Germany, along the Rhine and the German canals. My father continued this tradition: the majority of the cargoes he transported came from Germany or were to be delivered there.

So we happened to be in Germany when the Germans attacked the Netherlands and the war began. All the Dutch vessels were confined to one harbour and German soldiers were in charge to prevent us from leaving the boats. We were in fact imprisoned and got permission to leave only for example to visit a physician in case of illness. We stayed there for 6 weeks, afterwards we were summoned to go back to the Netherlands and to pick up our normal routine. That entailed a lot of risks and dangers, because we were often anchored in harbours that were attacked. So at the very start of the war, we experienced shootings and air raids and we were in the heart of danger.

In Delfzijl where we had made anchorage in the inland port, I learnt what atmospheric pressure and blasts are all about. The Germans dropped fire bombs and the doors of our boat opened of their own accord because of the pressure, and these bombings continued for several nights. Crossing the IJsselmeer was a nightmare, because on this vast inland sea in the midst of the Netherlands ships were an easy target for German planes. We always hoped that the sky would be cloudy so that the German planes did not take off.

During the last months before the end of the war, the Germans shot at everything that moved and also at everything that did not move. My uncle and aunt had made anchorage in a low lying, flat area of meadow lands and on Sunday afternoon, when my uncle was reading a chapter of the Bible which he commonly did to end lunch, they suddenly were under attack. Their son, age 19, was shot and died on the spot, their daughter, age 12, was wounded and died 2 months later as a result of this attack.

Each time our family had been under attack I counted the people to verify that all were still alive.

I remember a trip across the Waddenzee, that part of the North sea that borders upon the coast of the northern provinces. The area was full of mines. I was 7 years old and I was to stay in the deck-house, together with my little sister, because my parents judged I was too young to locate these mines and retained this task to themselves and my brother. I was

scared, because I feared that our boat could explode at any moment and indeed, this could have happened, the danger was real.

In September 1944 the German Army confiscated our boat and ordered my father to transport a cargo from the Netherlands to Germany. He protested, but in vain, he had to obey. He put out of order the engine, but the Germans simply ordered a tug-boat to bring us to Germany. My mother had given birth to my brother and was too weak to work; no problem, the Germans placed two German soldiers on board to help my father. But, of course, they lacked experience and the trip went far from smoothly.

I remember this trip vividly, because it started in September and ended only in February. Soon after we had left the harbour, there was an air raid in the night and we found shelter in a ditch between two meadows. The convoy consisted of 7 vessels, but three of them were so badly damaged by the attack that they could not continue the trip. This was but the start! In Germany there were air raids almost every night, so that we hardly ever had a night of quiet sleep. I was always on the alert, I was always the first of the family to wake up when an air raid was to come. I functioned like an alarm bell. All of us had his or her special task. My mother and brother took care of the little baby in his cradle, I had to see to it that I and my little sister found a safe place to hide and my father took care of all of us in case we had to leave the boat. I got much experience in finding shelters: in ditches, in bed, in a man-hole or in the cellar of a house. If we could go to a real shelter, that was luxury. There were but a few in the areas where the boats were anchored.

After this rotten time we were sent back to the Netherlands. My mother preferred to look for housing ashore and after much effort she found an old woman willing to let us one of the rooms of her house. My father and brother stayed aboard and were summoned to go to the town of Groningen, where they were scheduled for a next trip to Germany. By then my father saw no other way than to perforate the boat bottom so that it could not leave. And he himself went in hiding until Liberationday, that fortunately came after only a couple of weeks.

My father and brother were in the town of Groningen when the Allies, after three nights of shell-fire, liberated the town. My mother, I and my brother and sister were in Lemmer, when the Allies, after one night of heavy shell-fire, entered the town and arrested the Germans. But Liberationday did not bring liberation to me. Only forty years after the war, after a successful therapy in the special clinic for war victims in Oegstgeest, I felt that I finally was free.

The psychic wounds are healed, but in periods of 'bad weather' I still feel the pain of my scars.

Atie

+++

## **WRITING HISTORY AT THE OPEN ARCHIVE**

Turning oral history into a public archive

*The history of the Dutch collaborators and their children is quite unknown. There is not much research done yet and the publications are few. A lot of relevant documentation is destroyed or lost. The Open Archive project aims to gather stories from the public related to collaboration, using the Internet. It started in 2008 and provides a platform for those who want to publish, reflect and do research on the subject. The future is uncertain though there are good reasons and interesting ways for further development of this archive.*

In the Netherlands at about 1.4 million people wish to write about their lives and publish it. So did I. In 1999 I sent a series of poems to publishers in which I wrote about my childhood being a son of a collaborator during WW2. The publishers were not interested.

At that time I worked at an ICT-firm. A colleague drew my attention to the possibility of publishing directly on the Internet. He made a website and within two weeks my poems were published and the result was astonishing: thousands of hits and over a hundred responses within a year. Among the reactions there were a lot of stories of other children of collaborators, sometimes with their rejected manuscripts enclosed. Suddenly I found myself corresponding with people from Winterswijk to Canada about what always had been our family secret.

A few years later the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD, Amsterdam) had the intention to research the children of collaborators. It organised a conference in order to be briefed on this subject from several perspectives in order to increase the quality of the proposal. One of the problems for doing scientific research appeared to be a lack of sources.

Several months later the Advisory Counsel for Science and Technology Policy (AWT, Den Haag) published my essay about the possibility of using the Internet in order to create public archives. I specifically referred to the opportunities this might bring to the researchers of NIOD.

The secretary of Werkgroep Herkenning, Paul Mantel, and I initiated a plan to actually create an Open Archive for all stories related to WW2. We were given the necessary finances in 2007 to start the Open Archive for the children of collaborators. The project is hosted by the Dutch expert centre on the (psycho)social effects of war, prosecution, aggression and violence (Cogis, Utrecht). The Open Archive went online in September 2008. The project will remain in its current form at least until June 2010.

The Open Archive actually contains about 150 stories, partly supplemented with photos and documents. Anyone can log in, create a profile and participate. Measures for possible abuse are taken.

There are some extras to support those interested. Dutch historian and publisher Chris Van der Heijden wrote an overview about the history of the children of collaborators including lots of references to interesting sources. This is interesting especially for those who discover a family connection related to this issue without having the knowledge for a proper interpretation.

There are general and specific writing tips and lists of literature, concepts, institutions and knowledge-centres. All in order to offer anchors for people to connect their interest or story to.

In addition to the site there is a point of contact at Cogis, writing workshops are given throughout the country for those facing difficulties in writing about this subject and interviews take place in order to publish the outcome on the Open Archive. A WIKI-part has been introduced in order to gather more specific information for instance about buildings and places related to this part of history.

The Open Archive is there, and it fulfils a public need. The interest is great (48011 consultations in the first year) and increases (now 138 per day). Legal problems have not occurred.

The number of stories however are not as much as the expected. That is partly understandable. In the opinion of community professionals it takes at least three years in order to develop sites like the Open Archive to independency and maturity. Furthermore, the children of collaborators who experienced the war and the first years after the liberation as an eye-witness are already aging and generally not that familiar with the Internet. And for those who can and want to participate in the Open Archive it can be expected it'll take some time in order to change from decades of silence to the openness and dynamics of the Internet. A key question of course for the future right of existence of the Open Archive will be the numbers of consultations and the increase of stories and their relevance.

The main target group is enthusiastic about the Open Archive. It is still too early to judge the usability of the stories in the scientific field. The NIOD research to the Inheritance of Collaboration is glad with its existence but considers the Open Archive in addition to other sources like letters, journals, minutes, interviews in newspapers, magazines, radio or television. In order to use the stories of the Open Archive scientifically additional information must be gathered. The media discovered the Open Archive as an interesting source of stories and connections in order to pay attention to this group as well remembering the war.

From an international point of view, as far as I know the Open Archive is the first of its kind and clearly differs from other communities by its aim, content and services. One of the interesting international aspects is the fact that many Dutch collaborators went abroad. Only a few of their children were told the real reason for this emigration. I had contact with some of them discovering this reason after the death of their parents reading successfully hidden documents. It is worth the effort trying to get in touch with them in an attempt to hear their stories and help them to connect to the history and family. The fact that in the Netherlands over 30.000 children were born from relationships with German soldiers also implicates an interesting international dimension. A lot of these children are still in search of facts and families.

Being one of the initiators, I am pleased by what has been achieved already. At the same time there are still some opportunities waiting to be explored. Paul Mantel and I deliberately suggested to start the Open Archive for all children of war, not only for those whose parents collaborated. Other post-war-generation-organizations agreed but we were financed to start for the children of collaborators with the argument that enlargement would follow as soon as its value had been shown. As I have been told there are no plans or ambitions to do so.

Another opportunity to be explored is the fact that the National Archive (The Hague) is not yet in the lead of this project and its future. The National Archive manages the most important Dutch archive collections from the public sector and has been working for many years to increase the interaction and participation of the public in its work using the Internet. The second most consulted archive of the National Archive is the CABR. This archive contains the juridical files of over 500.000 persons being officially suspected of collaboration. It is quite obvious that the Open Archive should formally become part of the National Archive collection. There are reasons to be concerned about the collection and its future as long as this is not the case.

Some things are worth trying. If we and future generations want to learn about the WW2, one of the most valuable treasures we have to cherish, explore and share are the stories about our families. Stories that have not been written, archived or even told yet. With the Internet we have a unique opportunity to do so with the help of the public. I can only hope that those responsible are able to make this happen.

Rinke Smedinga, October 2009, [www.hetopenarchieef.nl](http://www.hetopenarchieef.nl)

+++

## **DIALOGUE AS A HELPING HAND**

### **The beginning**

In the eighties, some people took the initiative to organise meetings between people who as children lived during the war in Japanese internment camps in the former colony of the Dutch East Indies and children of Jewish families. At the same time ICODO, the Service Centre of Information and Co-ordination for the Benefit of War Victims, became aware of the traumatization experienced by the offspring of war

victims, Jewish people and resistance fighters as well as people from the Indies, and started organising meetings for them. But the children of parents who had collaborated with the German occupiers were not invited. Two women, both survivors of the Japanese camps, experienced themselves the importance of those meetings and planned a weekend meeting where *all* war children would be welcome. When some collaborators' children subscribed, the organisers realised that if they were to be refused admittance now, the war would go on. Here was the opportunity to 'stop the war'.

This first 'mixed' meeting took place in April 1988.

The participants were afterwards euphoric about what they had experienced together. Some women wrote: *'....We felt true solidarity. This was most strikingly shown on the Saturday evening, when a number of women were dancing, each in her own way. A Jewish woman held hands with the child of a Dutch Nazi, a daughter of a German mother danced hand in hand with the daughter of a resistance fighter, a child of communist parents danced together with a woman who experienced the hardships of a Japanese camp. No one could ever have imagined that this was possible! They danced as if it was a matter of course, but it was actually excitingly extra-ordinary. Women, struggling with war-related problems were dancing together, beyond all boundaries.'*

A second weekend meeting was held in January 1989. The programme focused on facing opinions and prejudices through checking the information about "the others" that the participants had got from their homes and their surroundings. From the report of this meeting I quote the following lines: *'....Facing one's prejudices and those of others was rather shocking. Inevitably there appeared from behind the children the shadow of the parents and it took a lot of effort to continue to see each other as "allies".[...] If we want to hold on to our alliance and develop lifelong friendships, we cannot avoid asking each other difficult questions; we have to take seriously our feelings of fear and distrust, but also of warmth and recognition, and we need the courage to express them frankly'.*

A couple of participants of the first weekend meeting started a discussion group. They met nine times between October 1988 and March 1989. A report assessed the results of the group meetings, the successes and the failures, the themes discussed and those still to be addressed. I quote from the report:

*'We did not know if we would be able to hold on to each other also and even when this would demand a lot of our mental en emotional strength. But we could! It is possible: war children with different backgrounds can meet, accept and respect each other. It is not an easy road, but it is a practical one.'*

The weekend meetings and the discussion group showed the need to offer war children opportunities to meet, if possible in a more structured way. Supported by two members from the former resistance movement, Edith Nagel took the initiative to found Kombi, Children of the War for Mutual and Social Counseling and Integration. The deed was signed on 1 May 1990.

Opposition to Kombi's initiative remained strong in certain circles of the former resistance movement and in the Jewish community. There was no criticism of the fact that for example children from the Japanese occupation met children from a resistance family or children of Jewish origin. The pain and the rejection were caused by the participation of collaborators' children. Entering into a discussion with them was considered to be a betrayal of the victims. Hetty Voûte, a former resistance fighter, addressing her comrades from the past, said: *'From time to time mixed groups of all war children arise and their members speak and weep and laugh together. And they will be able to teach us to liberate ourselves from the hatred. It is of inestimable importance that they exist. We must learn from them how to curb our hatred, how to deal with our hatred, how to learn to liberate ourselves from it.'*

## The encounter groups

The central position of *the personal story* is supported by views developed by several researchers.

Van den Bout and Kleber remarked that people are forced to re-experience over and over again their harrowing traumatising experience as long as they don't tell their stories and integrate them into their own life-stories.

Geelen pointed out that by telling one's own story and listening to those of others (with similar experiences) the connections between occurrences from the past and reactions to them, and possible problems one faces at present, become clear.

The personal story is authentic and gives to the narrator a personal identity. Even though the others recognise much in the story, it remains his or her own story. No opinion is given or defended; there is no judgement or condemnation.

The personal story is unique, in addition to similarities the differences also stand out. Similarities form the basis for solidarity and empathy, differences are very important for the learning process of the group as such and for the participants personally.

Unconscious, disturbing factors are transformed into conscious problems so that coping with them becomes possible.

The context in which the burdensome experiences were incurred, becomes less relevant, the child was not responsible for them and is not to blame for them.

From then on prejudices can become a thing of the past: they (normally) concern groups and people belonging to these groups, but not individuals. The personal story places the individual at the centre, the stereotypes disappear.

The Kombi discussion group programme includes *breaking down prejudices, conquering fear and anger*, leaving behind the pain that the child experienced as a result of the war, the circumstances and the aftermath. Confrontations are painful for those who express their pain, but also for those who listen to it, knowing that it was caused or partly caused by her background group. If everybody can bear in mind, mentally and emotionally, that what is said does not imply an accusation of a person, but that it is an expression of the feelings of a damaged child, however inconsistent or incorrect, then the group remains the safe place where all misery may really be expressed.

Somebody once said: 'If there had been no Jews, I would still have my father.' If such an expression can be felt as the intense grief of a child whose father gave priority to rescuing Jews rather than caring for his family, if it can be seen as not being directed against Jews, but against the helplessness of a child feeling let down, then an expression like this can be enlightening for the whole group. It is the counsellors' task to analyse the meaning of what is said and to channel the emotions. However the counsellors are also damaged children and certain aspects of 'the other's' story may cause old pain to emerge in them. It is difficult then not to react to those hurt feelings.

A pitfall may be that group members and counsellors – partly without being aware that they are doing so – avoid confrontations to keep the situation agreeable. If that happens they collectively miss a splendid opportunity to work on certain problems and to put disturbing feelings and thoughts behind them.

One of the problems in a 'mixed' self-help group of war children is the '*hierarchy of grief*'. This means to say that war victims often make a distinction between the level of grief that was experienced and that they couple a value judgement to this level. People who went through a lot of misery may consider themselves greater victims or more important than the others and because of this feel superior.

Hierarchy of grief is wrong because of the value judgement associated with it and it undermines the equality in the group. However, thinking in terms of more and less is human

and as such is not wrong. For it is possible to determine objectively that there is a difference in experiences. This, however, does not say much about the consequences and the resulting grief. The grief experienced is real in all cases, it cannot be compared in terms of more or less.

Countering the phenomenon of rivalry in grief might have the undesirable effect that the differences in the experiences of the participants are lost from sight. The emergence of the phenomenon of hierarchy of grief is not only a pitfall or a problem, it can well be the starting point of an intensive process of growth of the participants individually and as a group.

Each background group has a number of words or *expressions that are highly emotionally charged*. When they are used unconsciously by others, a fierce reaction may occur, without it being immediately clear why. Some perfectly common words or expressions like 'selection' or 'transport', 'go into hiding' and 'confiscate'; or a perfectly normal noun like 'rucksack' may result in an emotional reaction. A Jewish woman born after the war, went with her cousin to camp Westerbork. She was carrying a small rucksack. Her cousin reacted fiercely: 'How did you get it into your head to go to Westerbork carrying a rucksack?! The rucksack reminded her cousin of the rucksacks her relatives were carrying when they were taken to Westerbork and from there to the German concentration camps. For her younger relative the rucksack was just a normal object. Coping implies that a rucksack can once more be looked on as a normal useful object, even when paying a visit to Westerbork. Avoiding allows the pain to fester and allows the past to direct one's current life. Coping and assuming control means breaking through the pain and liberating yourself.

#### **'Added value' or Kombi's uniqueness**

In 2005 a questionnaire was put to a large number of Kombi participants to gain insight into their reasons to apply and to make an inventory of what participation meant for them. The main theme behind the questions was whether Kombi's mixed approach played a role in their application to participate in Kombi and if this approach had an 'added value' for them when compared with experiences in their own background group.

The mixed background approach of Kombi was an important reason for three quarters of the respondents to join a discussion group; for the others it did not play a role. However, many of these latter people have also argued that the mixed approach was indeed very important for their development.

The respondents mentioned as positive effects of the *mixed meetings* among other things:

- the mutual recognition and acceptance
- the opportunity to look beyond their own background problems and to define the common features in their experiences
- the increase in insight into the impact of war on one's own development and on that of people in general
- to learn to put things in perspective and to differentiate, as a result of which the hierarchy of grief was countered
- to get rid of prejudices, distrust or fear

The *group process* as such provided effects like: respect, recognition, acceptance, security, 'coming home'.

Some respondents defined the *social relevance* of the discussions and they see dialogue as a model applicable in similar situations elsewhere.

A few mentioned the effects on a *moral level* in particular. They learned to see the dichotomy of right and wrong in another perspective or discovered that both categories are part of themselves.

When we compare Kombi with other self-help organizations, we see that people who sign up for Kombi because of the mixed approach, run the risk of sharp criticism and opposition from the people around them, because by joining Kombi they remove a social distinction between 'right' and 'wrong'. Taking this risk makes them different from the average participant in a discussion group.

Wallowing in self-pity probably occurs less in Kombi than in homogenous self-help groups, because next to the similarities there are also clear differences. Some of the problems, namely prejudices, distrust and fear, can only be worked through in direct contact with the people one fears or distrusts. For that reason, joining a Kombi group requires an active attitude.

When we compare Kombi with other, international, 'mixed' organizations, we see that the main difference is found in the background groups involved in the meetings. In TRT, AE and One by One, the meetings concentrate on the historically determined separation between the descendants of victims of the Nazi regime and descendants of the perpetrators. The parents were enemies; the children reach out to each other. The dialogue is used as a means to remove the differences that have been generated in a conflict situation. This model, provided it is made operational, is applicable in all former or current conflict situations.

In Kombi the meetings focus not only on the historically determined divisions between the children of victims and those of collaborators, because children from the Japanese occupation, the (children of) civilian victims, children of forced laborers, children of liberators and children of Roma and Sinti families also participate in the groups and weekend meetings. All of these groups are not or to a lesser degree involved in the historically determined conflict situation of the war in Europe, and therefore, from the start, attention is drawn to the child that became a victim of the war, regardless of the context in which that happened.

### **Sharing our hands-on expertise**

In 2001 some members struggled with the problem of how Kombi's ideas could be passed on to people in other situations and times. At the time, they could not find people to put time and effort into recording Kombi's legacy.

Moreover, priority was always given to the feelings of the new participants who kept coming and who were still struggling with their own problems. Directing more attention outside Kombi, might have caused a sense of insecurity in these people.

In 2007 the book 'Dialogue as a helping-hand' was published as an attempt to make Kombi's hands-on expertise available to others. I sent the email version of the book, translated in English, to a couple of people. Those of you, interested in having a copy, please tell me and I will provide you with one.

In 2008, Kombi organised a meeting where people born after the war told that they had not been aware of the possible link between their problems and the war experiences of their (grand) parents until other people drew attention to this connection or until they happened to come across a publication on this issue. They raised the question: how can we reach other people who don't know that their problems are probably linked to their family's war experiences?

We decided to explore the possibilities of starting a knowledge-centre accessible to internet users, providing them with information on war-related psychological and social problems. Scientific knowledge alongside stories will elucidate in particular the problems of the post-war generation.

The 'knowledge centre' will be a co-production of Kombi and Herkenning (the organization of Dutch Collaborators' Children), the organisation of the post-war Indonesian generation and the foundation of Japanese-Indonesian children. We will co-operate with Martin Parsons who



intend to gather in the Archives of his Research Centre in Reading all the relevant material on war children in an international knowledge-centre.

Gonda Scheffel-Baars

**Please send to me any change in (e-mail)address so that we can remain in contact!**

---

Next issue: Spring 2010

Reactions and articles until the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2010

---

## WEBSITES

Organisation of Children of Dutch Collaborators:

**[www.werkgroepherkenning.nl](http://www.werkgroepherkenning.nl)**

Organisation of Children of War of different Backgrounds:

**[www.stichting-kombi.nl](http://www.stichting-kombi.nl)**

Organisation of Danish Children of War, Danske Krigsboern Foerening:

**[www.krigsboern.dk](http://www.krigsboern.dk)**

Norwegian Children of War Association, Norges Krigsbarnforbund:

**[www.nkbf.no](http://www.nkbf.no)**

Organization of Norwegian NS Children:

**[www.nazichildren.com](http://www.nazichildren.com)**

Krigsbarnforbundet Lebensborn, Norway:

**<http://home.no.net/lebenorg>**

Organisation of NS-children Vennetreff:

**<http://home.no.net/nsbarn>**

Riskforbundet Finska Krigsbarn: (in swedish)

**[www.krigsbarn.se](http://www.krigsbarn.se)**

Organisation of Finnish Children of War, Seundun Sotalapset:

**[www.sotalapset.fi](http://www.sotalapset.fi)**

TRT, To Reflect and Trust, Organisation for encounters between descendants of victims and descendants of perpetrators:

**[www.torelectandtrust.org](http://www.torelectandtrust.org)**

Organisation of children of victims and children of the perpetrators:

**[www.one-by-one.org](http://www.one-by-one.org)**

Austrian Encounter, organisation for encounters between children of the victims and children of the perpetrators in Austria:

**[www.nach.ws](http://www.nach.ws)**

The Foundation Trust, international network of organizations and groups of second and third generations children of war:

**[www.thefoundationtrust.org](http://www.thefoundationtrust.org)**

Dachau Institut Psychologie und Pädagogik:

**[www.Dachau-institut.de](http://www.Dachau-institut.de)**

Kriegskind Deutschland:

**[www.kriegskind.de](http://www.kriegskind.de)**

Evacuees Reunion Association

**[www.evacuees.org.uk](http://www.evacuees.org.uk)**

Researchproject 'War and Children Identity Project', Bergen, Norway

**[www.warandchildren.org](http://www.warandchildren.org)**

Researchproject University München 'Kriegskindheit'

**[www.warchildhood.net](http://www.warchildhood.net)**

Coeurs Sans Frontières – Herzen Ohne Grenzen

**[www.coeurssansfrontieres.biz](http://www.coeurssansfrontieres.biz)**

Organisation d'enfants de guerre

**[www.nesdelaliberation.fr](http://www.nesdelaliberation.fr)**

Organisation of Us-descendants in Belgium

**[www.usad-ww2.be](http://www.usad-ww2.be)**

Childsurvivors of the Holocaust in Australië

**[www.paulvalent.com](http://www.paulvalent.com)**

International organisation for educational and professional development focused on themes like racism, prejudices and antisemitism

**[www.facinghistory.org](http://www.facinghistory.org)**

Aktion Sühnezeigen Friedensdienste

**[www.asf-ev.de](http://www.asf-ev.de)**

Organisation of German Lebensbornkinder

**[www.lebensspuren-deutschland.eu](http://www.lebensspuren-deutschland.eu)**

(in preparation; in Vorbereitung)