

INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN

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INTRODUCTION

By chance, most of the articles in this issue have to do with dialogue, a phenomenon dear to my heart.

Dr Florence Kaslow sent me an article she wrote in the Journal of Family Psychotherapy on the Dialogue group she facilitated. Interesting information, so I asked her to give me permission for summarizing her text.

Yaacov Naor and Hilde Goett sent me the announcement of the psychodrama project they will organise in July in Krakow and Auschwitz. I summarized their text 'Confronting the Holocaust through psychodrama, sociodrama and rituals', a text explaining their motives and goals.

I came across the speech of a member of the Dutch organisation Sakura that he held in Japan, the homeland of his biological father. In Sakura and in JIN people born from a relationship between a Japanese father and a Dutch, Indonesian or Dutch-Indonesian mother meet and exchange their experiences.

Famous books are very often only famous, many people know the title and that is it. Remarque's novel 'All Quiet on the Western Front' deserves to be read by all of us.

The Bar-On International Dialogue Center is now legally established, Sakino Sternberg informed me and Martin Parsons invites members of organisations of war children to send material to the Archive of his Research Centre in Reading.

In the 80's I met Meintje van Tijn in a workshop on Hebrew written Bible texts. She published quite a lot of books, but her short autobiography still impresses me most. I would like to share with you a paragraph of this book and one of her poems.

I would like to draw your attention to the interactive website: www.forumkriegsenkel.com.

I hope that you will inform me of any change in (email)address and will enjoy the articles presented to you in this issue. Comments and articles are very welcome!

All the best,
Gonda Scheffel-Baars

What happened in my childhood
smells like moist wood,
wood soaked in water for years and years
and now pulled out;
it has a colour,
gloomy, dull,
dark green,
a colour of long ago;
as if one looks through greenish glass,
through still waters of bottle green,
through a mirror turned green,
flowing and glittering
quivering images, falling apart.

But still they are true,
profoundly real and true.

Meintje van Tijn
In: 'Ik heb niet de Jodenster gedragen'
(‘I did not wear the yellow star’)

Dialogue Groups Between Descendants of Holocaust Perpetrators, Victims, and a Liberator: A Retrospective Account

This abridged article is based on the original article written by Kaslow, Florence W. and published in the *Journal of Family Psychotherapy*, (2008), Vol.19, number 3, pp 205-241. The abridged version is written by Gonda Scheffel-Baars with permission and editing by Dr. Kaslow.

HISTORY OF THE HOLOCAUST DIALOGUE GROUP

The spark of the idea for the Holocaust Dialogue Group was ignited in 1973 in a conversation with a Jewish psychiatrist colleague from Israel. We were both in Amsterdam, attending the International Family Therapy Association (IFTA) Conference, which was a gathering of hundreds of family therapists and other mental health professionals from dozens of countries. There were numerous participants from both Germany and Israel. My Israeli colleague stated, in a somewhat challenging manner, something like, “The Israelis all know you have a strong commitment to Israel and to your Jewish heritage; therefore we do not understand why you go to Germany to lecture. It really is very disturbing to us that you are willing to go there and work with and for them.” That strong, terse statement had a “pow” impact.

I caught my breath, thought a few minutes, and then responded, “I think it is very important that we keep lines of communication open with German colleagues and that we have a chance to interact with one another. My personal ‘mission’ is to ensure that in my work in Germany I make references to the Holocaust whenever relevant; for example, in discussions of loss and grief connected to divorce and death, and extend this to the horrific, pervasive grief experienced by Jewish people who lost relatives, friends, and neighbors in the Holocaust”. She became pensive, and then replied something like, “Perhaps it is time to bring together the German and Israeli members of IFTA who are descendants of perpetrators and victims alike to talk to one another and try to bring about some mutual understanding

and ability to work together. You are the only one I know who is trusted and respected by therapists from both countries. Would you consider doing this at next year's conference?" Her question was almost a compelling request. How could I possibly refuse to do something that sounded so potentially valuable, even vital, for a number of colleagues? Thus, I consented to try to bring Jewish and German mental health professionals together to engage in what could potentially be a profound dialogue.

We agreed to talk to the chairperson of the IFTA Conference for 1994 that was scheduled to be held the following year in Budapest, Hungary. I realized it would be essential to limit the group to 25 participants and envisioned a group comprised of one-half Israeli and one-half German therapists so it would be balanced and everyone would have a built-in support group. However, after we spoke with the Hungarian Conference program chairs, the affirmative answer they gave us was contingent upon the group being re-subdivided to include one-third Hungarian colleagues. Their rationale, was that some Hungarian therapists had been finding out that they were of Jewish origins—a fact that had been carefully hidden from them by either their parents or grandparents—thus, they had changed their identity and become non-Jewish. Now these therapists were struggling with learning that they were, in fact, Jews. In addition, non-Jewish Hungarian therapists were trying to deal with patients and colleagues caught in this dilemma and did not know how to go about it. Thus, the proposed Holocaust Dialogue Group appealed to them as an ultra timely forum in which such pressing issues could be discussed. By mutual concordance, the dialogue group was placed on the program for the 1994 conference.

As I quickly realized that facilitating such a group would require great sensitivity to grief, pain, horrific memories, and legacies of enormous family disruption and dislocation, I decided it would be prudent to see if I could find a simpatico and qualified coleader. Martin Kirshenbaum, PhD, immediately came to mind. An outstanding clinician and professor of family psychology/therapy in California, he is of German-Jewish descent and had for many years run various training programs throughout Germany. He had also done therapy with perpetrators and their families during his visits there. He accepted my invitation to serve as coleader for the first session and did so again in Düsseldorf in 1998.

To prepare for facilitating this group, I reread Sichrovsky's book, *Born Guilty: Children of Nazi Families*. Reading this helped me comprehend more about the probable fearful mind set of the German participants and what courage it would take for them to risk attending.

I also read the writings of Bar-On, an Israeli therapist, who had conducted several meetings of children of survivors on both sides of the Holocaust. The main difference was that his group members were not mental health professionals or engaged in treating other descendants but rather an assortment of adult children. As the process he used seemed adaptable to our purposes, it was incorporated with the sensitivity training, group therapy and group facilitation techniques I planned to use.

Dr. Kirshenbaum and I conjectured that the majority of participants had been exposed to severe posttraumatic stress suffered by their parents or grandparents, as well as having been recipients of the intergenerational transmission of the hurts and incomprehensibility of the shoah era. We knew we had to create a protected and safe milieu for any meaningful catharsis and true emotional outpouring to occur.

GROUP PROCESS

Beginning with the initial session, chairs were arranged in a single circle, so everyone present would be visible and included. Only individuals with a Holocaust legacy were permitted to attend. There have never been any observers nor visitors, as we were very clear that the major goals were as follows: (a) catharsis leading toward greater selfunderstanding and healing; (b) greater knowledge of and perhaps even some empathy for the descendants of the "other," so that as individuals and mental health professionals they might achieve some respect for one another and ability to work collaboratively toward reconciliation and moving forward; and (c) the development, through this experience and the new perspectives

so the participants might become better prepared and more adept at treating other survivors, perhaps descendants from those involved on both sides.

Prior to their entry into the group, anything Holocaust related may have been deemed unspeakable and shunted to the zone of silence. Senior relatives found it too painful to plumb those submerged regions of the spirit, mind, and body. Yet despite the veil of verbal silence, much was transmitted about the atrocities and outrageous happenings. Having respected the taboos that cloaked their family's history, and been reprimanded when they defied these to ask burning questions, many participants were wary about attending. Just doing so seemed disloyal to the family's mandate. Some fretted that in speaking out they would be betraying their family's code. Frightening yet compelling opportunity beckoned from inside the room.

I opened each meeting with a brief welcome and statement about our objectives, the process we would follow, the general goals alluded to earlier, and a few simple rules. We would go around in the circle, and each person would tell his/her own story in about 5 min. Everyone else was expected to listen quietly and respectfully; there were to be no interruptions and no cross-discussion. The story belonged to the narrator; only he or she had had the specific experience being recounted.

Many of the testimonials were quite emotional. Some people sobbed and/or trembled the first time they told their sad story of persecution, hunger, being a hidden child, or growing up hearing constant talk of their family's plight during the Holocaust and how the family was decimated. Others barely whispered, as they had never before been able to talk about what was unspeakable, or they had been admonished to leave the past buried as it was too tragic, and to live in the present and build a future to make up for all of the lost lives. Others choked as they tried to speak, overcome by anguish, guilt, and shame over the unthinkable deeds of their Nazi ancestors. Jewish members have screamed, "I don't know if I can be in the same room as Germans; it is so painful, almost like violating a taboo"—yet no one ever left! Invariably at the end of or after the session, people who had self disclosed and ventilated so much long-festered feeling around their memories, expressed a sense of relief from the tremendous internalized burden that had been expiated—with permission, not criticism or ostracism. And most realized as the sessions evolved that they had been privileged to "bear witness" to honest, heartfelt accounts of real-life stories and their continuing influence. Many were overwhelmed by the almost sacredness of what transpired, the empathy and compassion that were evoked, and often by the unanticipated and unlikely bonds that were forged.

MY STORY; MY VOICE

Every time the group convened, each individual heard at least several other stories with which he or she could identify. This helped lessen the sense of isolation or alienation many members had long experienced, the continuing message not to talk about this catastrophic era, and the realization that others had survived a similar tragic past. The process of divulging one's story, uninterrupted, to an audience of listeners who had also lived with the intimate details of some part of the same bitter historical saga of a genocidal epoch in history, had a profoundly healing effect. Both ventilation and catharsis occurred, bringing great relief from maintaining the continuing burden of secrecy and repression. According to participants, articulating the guilt, shame, hatred, revulsion, and other strong usually unacceptable emotions produced enormous and welcome relief from the crushing burden that had been transmitted to and internalized by them.

It is essential to keep in mind that members had not been screened; rather they gravitated into the group because of its particular foci. If they met the criteria of having a personal Holocaust legacy and were of German, Austrian, or Jewish descent, or married to someone who was, they were eligible to participate. As the group evolved over the 11 sessions, the majority of participants were from Israel, Germany, and the host country in any given year, Hungary, Mexico, United States, Brazil, and Norway. In addition, there were participants from Argentina, Denmark, Poland, South Africa, and United Kingdom.

My role was to serve as convener and facilitator/leader. I was empowered with no formal authority except that which the members voluntarily bestowed. Because the group only met annually, everything had to be handled immediately. Clearly, each separate dialogue group had no tomorrow and no next week. Many of the members had a next year, but in a group with a slightly different composition. Whatever was evoked was dealt with as necessary in the here and now, in keeping with the objectives of diminishing the pain and anguish, building on each individual's strengths, and slowly replacing despair and negativity with a more optimistic outlook rooted in each person's idiosyncratic reality.

At the inception of each session members were told they could relate anything about their own life experience vis-à-vis the Holocaust, particularly looking at how they had first learned about this gargantuan genocide, who has talked to them about their family's involvement, how old they had been, and what this history had meant to them initially, throughout the years, and now. They were encouraged to feel free to say anything that came to mind and that it would be heard nonjudgmentally. Throughout, as the leader, I (and Dr. Kirshenbaum when he was present) have had the group's permission to intervene when we deemed it important to do so—to encourage someone to go deeper and further, to comfort, to hold someone, or to move over and sit close to them, as they trembled, cried, or screamed. The restrictive North American caveat "thou shalt not touch" was as inapplicable in this setting as it was in the encounter groups of the 1960s. Our participants have at times literally needed to be held together, nurtured, and physically reassured of the group's acceptance and "being with" them, symbolically through the leader's action. To not have done so would have been unthinkable cold, led to a further sense of rejection and alienation, and left them bereft of comfort as the pent-up anguish gurgled out. Members at times resonated openly to one another through tears, or by putting an arm around the person next to them who was reexperiencing inner demons and nightmarish memories. They became able to take cognizance of each other's plight. The real-life dramas that invariably unfolded were surreal as well as horrifying. In the "sacred space" created, we affirmed our common humanity, acknowledged each other's pain, despair, and grief, and recognized that healing, rapprochement, and even some reconciliation are possible and essential.

As part of the flow of the process, both Jewish and German members who had attended previous sessions were asked to tell about what had happened in their lives since they had last participated vis-à-vis the core themes of the group. Some reported they had been motivated to communicate in depth with their siblings or other relatives to find out more about their family's Holocaust history. Others had found the strength to approach parents and grandparents who were still alive and gently ask them about what previously had been taboo subjects. They had made a concerted effort with their own children to be more outspoken and candid about the Holocaust, their ancestors' involvement, peripheral or direct in it, and the short- and long-term influence they thought it had had on them and their immediate family. They had become more accessible to their own children in terms of willingness to answer their questions. Some of the Jewish members made pilgrimages to their parents' or grandparents' birthplace cities; some of the Germans went to see the remains of concentration camps or to visit Holocaust museums. One German man who had rejected his father returned from the United States to visit him and try to find a rational way to reconnect with him.

During the groups' existence participants from Argentina, England, Germany, Israel, and Poland began groups for survivors in their own countries. All groups shared a common goal of becoming actively involved with others who were determined "it shall not happen ever again."

There were a total of 11 sessions on which this summation is based. Between sessions I continued reading Holocaust-related literature to keep my perspective fresh, to enrich it, and to deepen my understanding. *A Wolf in the Attic: The Legacy of a Hidden Child of the Holocaust*, by Richman (2002), raised questions like: "Who am I? Who do I want to be? What do I want my children to know? What do I want to keep secret forever?" These are the same questions that surfaced in a variety of the narratives retold in the dialogue sessions.

RELEVANT THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS

Multigenerational Transmission Process

In this construct, formulated by Murray Bowen (1988), he defined the principle of projection as one through which varying amounts of lack of differentiation, equivalent to degrees of immaturity, are transmitted to one's children. The stronger the unresolved symbiotic enmeshment between parent and child, the more the child's development revolves around the needs and worries of the parent. This type of symbiotic relationship entails a *mutual projection process*. Bowen also posited that a child marries someone at the same level of differentiation from their family of origin as he or she is.

The constructs of *multigenerational transmission process* and *mutual projection process* illuminated many of the bewildering dilemmas that dialogue group participants poured out. They were haunted by such terrors as "given that my father was a mass murderer (i.e., an S.S. guard at a concentration camp), what am I?" Just what heinous crimes were their ancestors guilty of, and were they vicariously guilty for sins perpetrated against humanity before they were born?

On the victim side there were profoundly distressing questions about what their parents or grandparents did that enabled them to stay alive when so many of their compatriots and cellmates were murdered. Much of the Jewish history of the Holocaust period has been handed down in fragmentary fashion, shrouded in secrecy because it was too awful to disclose. Or the opposite may have been the case; that the survivor parents talked repetitively about the Holocaust, so obsessed by it that the children could not develop separate identities, desires, and goals. If they tried to find pleasure outside the family, they were warned darkly not to trust anyone and to suspect anti-Semitism and persecution everywhere. Group members spoke poignantly about the helplessness and hopelessness this pattern wrought in them; they wanted desperately to separate, but dreaded the thought of retraumatizing their survivor parent(s) and appearing disloyal ungrateful, or unsympathetic to them.

Ventilation, Abreaction, and Catharsis

Psychoanalysts believe that in the context of treatment patients have the chance to talk about whatever comes to mind that is troublesome and bewildering, and to ventilate their feelings about what is transpiring. Through unearthing unresolved painful memories within the safety of the therapeutic milieu, the traumatic relationship(s) or event(s) are allowed to resurface. Consequently, abreaction can take place, resolution can ensue, and mastery can be achieved. Catharsis can occur when one is listened to attentively and empathically. Each individual in our group was encouraged to relate his or her own story. Everyone was listened to as they poured out their angst, in the quest for some solace and peace through the reliving, and the realization that they were being heard, even by those who were identified as descendants of the enemy.

Recounting One's Personal Life Narrative

A contemporary approach to treatment is narrative therapy. Adherents of this school believe that one's narrative represents their construction of reality and that when one's story is told in therapy the individual can be helped to reinterpret their story and/or rewrite what the next chapters of their life will hold more optimistically. This approach builds on the patient's strength, resilience, and possibilities of mastery, as does positive psychology.

Within the dialogue sessions, usually subliminally, all were encouraged to reflect on how they might let go of the huge burden they carried, heaped on them from the outside and then internalized, and to replace these sad, mournful scripts with different, more appealing stories for the next chapter of their lives. They were assured that this could be done, at least to some extent, while they still remained loyal and concerned adult children.

At both the first session in Budapest in August 1994 and the seventh session in Porto Alegre, Brazil (October, 2001) Jewish members brought along teenage daughters. This turned out to

be a fortuitous decision, then and later, as seen in the discussion regarding the German psychiatrist's children.

When it was the Hungarian teenagers' turn to present her story, she told that there was a renaissance of the Jewish community and that she was attending a new Jewish day school. We heard similar stories in Porto Alegre, where two mother–daughter pairs attended as did another solo young adult mental health student, who regretted that her mother and grandmother were not present. There was a strong indication in their stories that one child, usually a daughter, was designated, consciously or unconsciously, to learn about Jewish history and traditions, discover how to observe the holidays and Sabbath, and help the family return to embrace Judaism and their ancestral roots.

A Cultural and Religious Collective Unconscious

A personal and impersonal or collective unconscious were both posited by Jung. The contents, unknown but contained therein nevertheless, might trigger a response to a stimulus word (or action), often to the astonishment of the person making the response. Many memories and feelings that have been repressed are stored in the personal unconscious; they may fuse together to form a symptom. Jung also delineated the “collective unconscious” and hypothesized that it is not a personal acquisition but that each mind contains “much that is indistinguishable from other minds because all minds have a common sub-stream or foundation”. He believed that there is a certain universality to the archetypes that comprise the collective unconscious.

Throughout the 11 sessions of the dialogue group, many themes repeatedly reemerged. For those of the German third generation, there was great consistency in their stark disbelief that the Holocaust really had transpired. Yet this was tempered by the remorse and sorrow expressed by the older German participants. Much resentment, anger, and even hatred—plus the desire for reparations—was blurted out on the Jewish side. They had learned divergent facts in classes, in church versus synagogue, in youth groups and other social gatherings, and by living in the overall weltanschauung of their respective communities and traditions. All had to have been influenced by the force of their own communal collective unconscious, plus by what they were deliberately taught, told, and shown.

Reflections on the Dialogue Process

There was a gigantic leap across the huge schism when the dialogue group met in Israel in 1997. Some of the Israelis stated they were hesitant about going to the IFTA Conference in Germany in 1998. They harbored images of being picked up by authorities and dragged off to concentration camps. Some believed setting foot in Germany was a supreme act of betrayal to their murdered relatives. German members listened sadly and pensively, upset that these fears were prevalent enough to prevent stalwart IFTA and dialogue group members from attending.

To the surprise of their Jewish peers, they responded that they had been frightened about coming to this conference in Israel as they were worried about the kind of reception they would receive. Their fears were intensified when they arrived at Lod Airport in Tel Aviv and had a long, trying time getting through passport control and customs. They had attributed this to the fact that they were traveling on German passports. The Israelis clarified that this was not the reason for the delays; rather it is slow for everyone because airport security is so tight. As a result of this meaningful exchange, some German members volunteered to meet the Jewish members who so desired at the airport the next year and to help them feel both safe and welcome. And they did.

FORGETTING AND/OR FORGIVING?

Forgetting was not a group goal. To the contrary, there was consensus that history and the lessons learned from history should not be forgotten. Over the course of three sessions, Dr. L., a German psychiatrist, brought three of his adolescent young adult children to sessions.

These bright teenagers sat in the mid section of the circle; after hearing some of the Jewish members tell their stories, they challenged them with “It all happened so long ago. We’ve paid reparations. Why can’t you just let go of this Holocaust thing?” Several Israelis answered sharply, with profound emotion, that one cannot forget and let go of deliberate mass murder, the building of concentration camps and gas chambers, the intent to annihilate a whole population. They expounded on the treachery, leaving their families decimated. Some almost shouted “How can we not remember all of our murdered relatives? We can’t have family reunions; there are no prior generations. How would you feel growing up without grandparents, aunts and uncles, and maybe no parents?” They were stunned! It became evident that the fallout from people-instigated disasters does not get dealt with like the sequelae from a natural disaster, such as an earthquake, that does not specifically target anyone’s family, ethnic, or religious group.

Over time, the young men and their younger sister, who accompanied them, all seemed to comprehend why letting go totally is not possible. Each became involved in countering neo-Nazi propaganda and skinhead activities and combating anti-Semitism in youth groups in their native country. The group became fond of these three young people who added a different and valuable dimension to the dialogues.

Another aspect of this was that their father talked about his own soul searching about the Holocaust and exhibited his consternation, profound grief, and angst in tearful explorations of his own life vis-à-vis this prolonged era. His children, along with others present, watched while he struggled to articulate and review his own personal purgatory. As he gradually came to grips with the long-term genocidal horror story and its still reverberating aftermath, he deliberately told other German colleagues about the dialogue group, what he had learned in and through this involvement, and about his fears of a resurgence of neo-Nazism. Witnessing their father’s excruciating pain was perhaps the most compelling and convincing part of the experience for his children and others who came to the group harboring doubts about whether the Holocaust ever occurred.

In terms of defense mechanisms, Dr. L. apparently had *repressed* his knowledge of the Holocaust. The return of the repressed in these sessions was overwhelming, yet he courageously unearthed the thoughts and feelings that had been relegated to the hidden region of the unconscious and brought them to the surface where he could examine and deal with them. There seems to have been a good deal of *reaction formation* against all that had transpired, so that there was a *denial* of this part of his personal and communal heritage. These same defense mechanisms were displayed by other members of the group as they sought to integrate their historic familial past into an acceptable identity and to achieve a sense of coherence.

The complicated issue of *forgiveness* was raised periodically by both the young adult children who attended and their parents. Some of the Germans almost pleaded for a kind of exoneration after their confession-like outpourings. Other members responded empathically, even compassionately, once they began to comprehend deep within what it must be like to be “born guilty” of crimes they did not commit.

But *forgiveness* was not theirs to bestow. The scars persisted just as the shadows of the Holocaust lingered in the hearts, souls, and “collective unconscious” of the Jewish members. To illuminate this salient issue further, I digress briefly to consider the work of Simon Weisenthal, who was imprisoned in a concentration camp. After his release, he assembled an impressive group of 53 distinguished people from various disciplines, plus survivors of different genocides, and asked them to address the question of forgiveness and what they would have done if they had been in his place. This research culminated in his provocative book, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness* (1997). Clearly, there is no easy answer, nor one that is right for everyone.

Others have addressed the power of apologies and forgiveness for a person’s own healing and improved functioning in relationships in such contexts as divorce mediation and child abuse. However, these situations are not really analogous. The magnitude of the *Holocaust*, in which the intent of the leader was to annihilate large target groups of population was so

much more calculated, vast, and ruthless, and devoid of the personal involvement that exists in families in which usually there has been love or some affection mixed in with the abuse. Within families, forgiveness is connected to the positive aspects of the relationship and the desire not to truncate all family ties.

A VARIATION ON THE THEME IS RECOUNTED

At the beginning of the ninth session in Istanbul, Turkey, a young looking man from the United States entered and asked me if he could please stay, although he had not the usual Holocaust legacy: he was the son of a non-Jewish *liberator*. His father had been so scarred by the unbelievable horrors he had encountered in the task of liberating the camps that he was unable to speak about this formative, critical era in his life. It was a taboo topic in the family; the liberator's son had grown up living under the same veil of silence that clouded the lives of the perpetrators and victims and kept their fathers unapproachable because there were many forbidden topics of discussion. He had never known any one he could and he hoped he could participate. Hearing everyone else's' stories and struggles and being able to finally share his own was enormously helpful to him. His presence also added a new dimension to our breadth of understanding of the scope of the Holocaust and its continuing deleterous reverberations.

MOVING TOWARD CLOSURE

The last meeting of the group took place in Reykjavík, Iceland, in October 2006. Very few Israeli or other Jewish members of IFTA were at this particular conference as their commitment to be with their personal family on the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur took priority over their involvement in their professional family organization. With the absence of almost all of the Jewish group members, only a half dozen individuals attended our group. Those present had all been to previous meetings and reported on their personal progress in their healing journeys. We all agreed the group had served its purpose and that there no longer seemed to be a need for this specific group. I indicated I thought we should consider this the final session and that if a group were to be convened in the future, it should include those involved in any *genocide*. Everyone concurred and that was the recommendation I made to IFTA. We parted wistfully, but content that our mission had been accomplished.

Feedback from the participants indicated that the group

- Enabled them to feel heard, understood, and not criticized
- Provided relief from their obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors
- Reduced the nightmares
- Offered a forum for expiating feelings of guilt and shame
- Provided an opportunity to "belong to" a group with colleagues who had had similar experiences and thoughts; countered some feelings of invisibility, isolation, and alienation
- Encouraged them to open up dialogues on this knotty subject with grandparents, parents, and other relatives, and learn more about their heritage
- Freed some of them up and gave them the courage to make a voyage back to their parents' home or homeland
- Motivated them to be more accessible to and honest with their own children about the Holocaust and its far-reaching tentacles
- Sensitized them to the urgency of being active in efforts to prevent future genocides

POSSIBLE ADDITIONAL CLINICAL APPLICATION

The dialogue group format might prove adaptable for use with families in which there has been incest, spouse abuse, or child abuse—either for therapy with an individual family alone or in multifamily group therapy with other families in which similar destructive behaviors have

been enacted. At the macro systemic level, it is posited that this approach might prove beneficial to antagonists who have been caught up in other communal, national, and regional genocidal events. If so, then these Holocaust Dialogue Group sessions will have exceeded their original purposes and will have served also as a pilot project for an approach intended for personal healing, which has been found to have therapeutic and healing effects, and implications on many levels for facilitating reconciliation and more peaceful coexistence.

ARREST

Meintje van Tijn, daughter of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother, told us at the beginning of the workshop where she introduced herself, that although she was a war child, the war did not affect her and that she was very grateful she had been obliged to wear the yellow star. During the workshop I sensed, as a war child myself, the scars Meintje received, obviously without acknowledging them herself.

I guessed that her commitment to the Bible texts written in Hebrew was her way to cope with the loss of the father she loved so much and who gave her her interest in language in general and in Hebrew in particular.

In connection with the texts we discussed in our group the issues of guilt and responsibility. Afterwards I wrote a letter to Meintje in which I told her how crucial these topics were in my life as a daughter of a Dutch collaborator with the Nazis. She reacted by return of post. That was the first time she spoke with me about Janny, the girl in her form, daughter of a collaborator.

In her biography, Meintje wrote a couple of paragraphs about Janny. She pitied her because of her being bullied by the children in the street and even at school without getting help of the teacher. But she envied her as well, when she walked in her uniform of the National-Socialist Youth Organisation through the streets, evidently belonging to the band of comrades.

Liberationday came and Meintje saw people gathering in front of Janny's house. Men with stenguns, members of the BS, charged with the taking in custody of collaborators, entered the house, soon to leave, together with Janny's father being pushed outside, his hands behind his neck, stengun on his back, his face pale and gray.

'Among the children watching this scene I suddenly saw Janny, his daughter, twelve years old, like me. The men kicked him and thumped him, the same way people had kicked and thumped my father, years ago when they came to arrest him. Janny's eyes were wide opened and she hardly blinked her eyes. I could not stop looking at her, looking at her face and how she stood there in her white-black checked summer dress – it was a lovely warm day. From now on she would not belong to anybody or anything. Her world had collapsed. And I thought:

'Who or what has been liberated, if the same brutal things still happen?'

GSB

**KRAKOW-AUSCHWITZ
PSYCHODRAMA PROJECT
TRACES OF THE HOLOCAUST IN THE PRESENT**

Monday, July 5 - Saturday, July 10, 2010

This project deals with the inter-relations between two parts within us: the aggressor and the victim. This is a professional psychodrama training process. It is a dynamic active unmasking group process using Psychodrama and Sociodrama in order to encounter the traces of the Holocaust in our present life. This experience may bring an encounter with the "other" and with the "different". It may not lead to reconciliation but can heal some of the wounds and open a dialogue.

It is open to international students, professionals and others who are interested in the theme. No prior experience in psychodrama is necessary. We chose the "Galicia Jewish Museum" in Krakow and "The Educational-Encounter Center" in Oswiecim as our place of working because of its symbolic powerful reminder of the Past in the Present.

This event is organized by the PSYCHODRAMA INSTITUTE OF EUROPE, PIfE.

The language will be English with different translations. The leaders of this workshop are living example of the fruits of this dialogue.

The directors are:

HILDE GOETT- Dipl. Soz.Pad. Born in Romania as a granddaughter of SS members whose wives were deported to Siberia. She is certified Trainer and Supervisor(DGSv) of Psychodrama for the "Psychodrama Institute of Europe" (PIfE) and serves as its Chairwoman. She is a Children and Adolescent Therapist, focusing on trauma and violence.
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CONFRONTING THE HOLOCAUST THROUGH PSYCHODRAMA, SOCIODRAMA AND RITUALS

INTRODUCTION

Since 1995 we are engaged in a special psychodramatic project of "Confronting the Holocaust". In this work we explore the different ways people internalize the roles of aggressor and victim. We include in this encounters with the other side. This project was offered especially to second and third generation descendants of victims and perpetrators.

The purpose of our joint work is to gain better understanding and to recognize the moral, social and personal implications that the Holocaust left us with. In these workshops we explore spontaneous, expressive and creative ways of dealing with the relationship of the persecutor-victim roles within each of us and in the society. As a result the participants can learn to face their own history in a more genuine true manner.

The active work through the body allows an immediate safe opening of the inner emotional world and an encounter with the truth which lies within. The participants can share their memories, experiences, fantasies and feelings by giving voice to the suffering. It gives them an opportunity to win in the struggle against anonymity by telling and acting their stories and by breaking the family and social process of silencing.

The fact that as psychodrama directors we come from the opposite sides of the Holocaust is unique and special. In the psychodrama groups that we started to lead together we shared the same goals. We had the same drive to teach people how to respect the other, how to listen to the story, the narrative of the other, and the different one.

VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS

The trauma of victims and perpetrators from the Nazi period is passed on from generation to generation. Gabriele Rosenthal has investigated both sides and her findings have had a strong influence on our work. She clarified how closely the general lifestyle of the family, everyday expectations, the feeling of safety, acceptance and belonging, stems from the family's experiences during the Holocaust. She compared the problems of the descendants of victims and perpetrators and established both the things they have in common and the differences.

One of the things the two conflict groups frequently have in common is the silence, even if the motives for this are different on the respective sides.

Another thing in common is the terrible effect of family secrets, which in the institutionalised family systems work against a thematic consideration of the past. This is mirrored again in the fantasies of the descendants, which can be expressed in many different forms. In this way descendants of the victims pose questions about the guilt of survival, such as: what did the survivors do in order to survive? , whereas the descendants of the perpetrators ask questions of their own potential guilt, such as: what would I have done in the same situation?

We look at the real history of the Second World War, the cause of so much violence, sorrow and destruction in Europe and which led to so many radical changes throughout the world, and we investigate the individual consequences between different sections of the population who were partners in conflict. For us the aim is establishing a dialogue through the encounters between both conflict groups. We let the subjective truth of the respective sides be represented on stage with all the sorrow, mourning, shame, despair, horror, rage and feelings of guilt this entails. Thus a bridge is built connecting the fate of the participants with the family histories of the opposing sides.

We use sociodrama as a dialogue for dealing with the burden of trauma stemming from incidents of the previous generations. As a rule, the trauma of the Nazi period has not been personally or directly experienced by participants in our workshops. They are not survivors of the Shoa or the Holocaust and are not Nazi perpetrators, but the children, grandchildren and family members. In short, we deal with trans-generational trauma.

THE TRANS-GENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF TRUMA

Trans-generational trauma is simply the inheritance or passing on of trauma from generation to generation. Professionally, this concept has been increasingly discussed in the last 20 years. This is because researchers have increasingly focussed on the second generation of Holocaust survivors, due to the sufferings and emotional problems which they have. In the first scientific work on the subject there was an astonishingly high agreement concerning the unusual nature and high degree of emotional problems, which were very similar to descriptions from the survivors themselves. The theory of trans-generational passing on of consequences of the Holocaust resulted from this.

Germany lies well behind in this essential area of trauma and therapy research. It has been established that trauma of the victims and trauma of the perpetrators is inherited, but the deep feelings of shame and guilt hinder a constructive discussion on the trans-generational passing on of trauma. As far as we know there has never been an investigation in Germany into how the trauma of perpetrators is passed on. As early as 1994 Jürgen Müller- Hohagen (who has carried out psychotherapeutic work for many years) published assumptions based on his experiences, of the way trauma can be passed on. Identification with power, obscuration and the re-defining of perpetrators as victims are part of the characteristics that are passed on in the perpetrator families.

If we want to stop the passing on of trauma from generation to generation we must find an accessible and adequate way of dealing with and processing the trauma.

OUR BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

We start out with the premise that the experience of force or violence is innately experienced and that the trauma sits tightly in the body where it has found its place and is physically felt. As psychodramatists and advocates of an action-oriented method, we know that a lasting effectiveness occurs when the active analysis and discussion of a subject is deeply felt and penetrates the thought process, opening up new horizons and illuminating the problems. Thus our concern is to initiate deeply meaningful personal discussions on the stage and to find a language for this and to be aware of the different truths, in order to overcome the consequences of collective trauma during the Nazi period.

This means that during the work one's body must be in some way self-determined and attentively involved. The body- and encounter- exercises which we offer help make this possible and also help establish real contact between the participants in the group.

WHO COME TO OUR WORKSHOPS AND WHAT IS THEIR MOTIVATION?

The people who come to our workshops have an idea about the fate or the history of their families during the Second World War, or have concrete knowledge of what happened. Or they learned fragments which trouble them and which they cannot stop worrying about. The silence in the families weighs so heavily on them that they feel the need to decipher it. Others want to comprehend the sorrow, despair and mourning of the family which seems to have no apparent end. In all these areas the feelings of the participants are deeply involved and relate to themselves as individuals, their own complete family and not least with the respective "opposite side".

In this way Jewish participant take part, mourning over murdered members of their family, mourning about the losses of an intact family and a social network, enraged about the perpetrators who have burdened them with this sorrow.

The participants who come from families of perpetrators have different wishes. They would often like to choke the family history, are fighting the shame and feelings of guilt and often cannot distinguish between the personal and the collective guilt. They would like to have a better understanding of themselves and their families and break loose from their identification as perpetrator. Some also hope for atonement or even for pardon.

The participants who are baptised Christians and have a partly Jewish background, or who come from a family which has experienced persecution for political or religious reasons, or because of their sexual orientation, are also torn to and fro with the question of their identity and affiliation. We regard them as coming from "mixed families" because they share the experiences of both sides.

One thing they all have in common is that they are seen as "traitors" to their families. They betray the taboo of silence and confront the family with its troubled past. These "traitors" also seek discussion and analysis in the family and are seen as dangerous by the other family members. They become the scapegoats of the families.

In the perpetrator families and the mixed families, the ones who are given the role of the scapegoat are those who confront the families with their Nazi past, betraying the taboo and therefore being punished and excluded. They seek help because they cannot come to terms with the affection they feel for their father or mother who were perpetrators. In a similar way, traces are left on those who come from perpetrator families and who grew up in a state of fear, constantly afraid of punishment or violence and who now want to work through this in the setting of our workshops.

WARM UP

As usual in sociodramas we warm-up the group with a wide range of encounter exercises. These are exercises focussing on the body and the senses so that the participants in the group can encounter and experience each other. Warm-up exercises with and without music in groups of two, three or more help create the right atmosphere and a readiness for dealing with the sensibility and attentiveness of the subject.

In the exercises we teach the participants to have fun together, to mirror themselves, to build solidarity, to stick together and support each other or be supported, to combine forces to exclude others and also to try and break other small groups apart. Here the emotional states, feelings and instincts of the different groups are activated, those which the participants bring along to the workshop from the context of their real lives.

THE RITUALS

While we are in Auschwitz we work psychodramatically on the stage, but we also include a process of creating individual rituals. These rituals are carried out in Birkenau Death Camp with the help of the group. Some of these rituals take a form of memorial ceremonies and some become theater performances including movement and singing.

We know that words cannot express fully and accurately the story of our reaction to the Holocaust. It is phenomenological experience and expression. Rituals create psychodramatic and sociodramatic forms of sharing the human individual way of interaction. Beyond all it is a therapeutic act which cannot be done by oneself. It needs the community effect of holding and containing.

Some of the rituals became the best and most profound way of confronting the Holocaust. Few Examples: Walking barefoot on the rail trucks leading to the main crematorium, throwing glass bottles on the wall in the woman barrack while screaming and crying, listening to the quite harmonica music inside of one of the barracks, reading Paul Celan poem: Black Milk, sharing dry bread in a circle and eating it very slowly, participating in a dream like ceremony of burial of a young woman and more.

The Second World War and the Holocaust are a story of cruelty and infliction of pain and suffering which left scars on both the victims and the persecutors sides. It is a long lasting process and it has traces in the present. In our work we aim to give the participants a chance to confront the Holocaust without judgment, criticism or blaming. The rituals in Birkenau serve this attitude. These sociodramatic rituals have a therapeutic effect, a kind of psycho-social healing.

The rituals themselves are therapeutic. They can create a perspective, a liminal space that exists simultaneously in the past and in the present. It is a form of "Surplus Reality". It is a bridge between the individual's inner and outer world. It leads to catharsis, change and a sense of integration. The rituals also have a balancing effect between the individual and the group.

FROM ENCOUNTER TO DIALOGUE

Our work is based on Moreno's concept of the encounter which can lead to a dialogue. This structure include group and personal warm up, art making, trust building, empathy education, awareness and acceptance.

This psychodramatic and sociodramatic work and the special ritual performances allow the participants to move from projection, generalizations, prejudices, pre-conceptions and illusions into the process of learning to be in one's center, taking responsibility, look in the eyes of the other face to face with acknowledgement, empathy, respect and acceptance.

The encounter between Holocaust survivors and their perpetrators is most of the times painful or even impossible. The generation after and even the grandchildren are taking the risk to meet and confront one another in a safe way, working deeply on this theme in front of others in the group, especially from the other side.

As leaders we are aware in our work of the danger of creating false closeness which can lead to premature reconciliation or forgiveness. We do not aim to reach reconciliation, but at times it happens spontaneously and naturally, in a step by step, long and slow process.

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

by Erich Maria Remarque, English translation: Brian Murdoch, ed. Vintage 2005

Famous books – everybody knows about them, very few read them and many read them only if, by chance, they come across such a famous book. This happened to me and Remarque's novel impressed me deeply. That's why it is worthwhile to publish here a number of quotations from the English translation.

The translator wrote:

'The familiar English title of Remarque's novel was provided by A.W. Wheen in 1929. Although it does not match the German exactly (there is a different kind of irony in the literal version, 'Nothing New on the Western Front') Wheen's title has justly become part of the English language, and it is retained here with gratitude, and as a memorial to Remarque's first English translator.'

Remarque described his goal in the book's dedication:

'This book is intended neither as an accusation nor as a confession, but simply as an attempt to give an account of a generation that was destroyed by the war – even those of it who survived the shelling.'

The author depicted the experiences of the main character of his novel, Paul Bäumer, a German soldier and his small group of friends who volunteered together with him to take part in the trench-war on the western front. But in fact, Remarque put into words the experiences of all the soldiers in that war, soldiers' experiences in general. That makes his novel timeless, of current interest. He was one of the German soldiers himself (1916-1918) and his book appeared in 1928/29 to be forbidden only some years later when Hitler rose to power. What intrigues me is the different responses these two front soldiers found to their experiences. The one showed to be able to still see in the enemies the human beings they were, victims of governments' decisions and their power games; the other fed his hatred towards the others, dragging along with him a whole nation and plunging the whole world into a war more cruel and devastating than the one he lived through.

The author notes down the following about the parents and teachers of the young men: 'They were supposed to be the ones who would help us eighteen-year-olds to make the transition, who would guide us into adult life, into a world of work, of responsibilities, of civilized behaviour and progress – into the future. Quite often we ridiculed them and played tricks on them, but basically we believed in them. In our minds the idea of authority – which is what they represented – implied deeper insights and a more humane wisdom. But the first dead man that we saw shattered this conviction. We were forced to recognize that our generation was more honourable than theirs; they only had the advantage of us in phrase-making and in cleverness. Our first experience of heavy artillery fire showed us our mistake, and the view of life that their teaching had given us fell to pieces under that bombardment.[...] And we saw that there was nothing left of their world. Suddenly we found ourselves horribly alone – and we had to come to terms with it alone as well.'

One day the comrades remember their lessons at school, the importance their teachers gave to knowledge in general and they make fun of their efforts to rub this in the hearts of their pupils:

'Müller twitters back: "What is the population of Melbourne?"

"How on earth are you going to get on in life if you don't know that?" I ask Albert indignantly. But he trumps this with: 'What do you understand by cohesion?' We don't remember much about all that stuff any more. It was no use to us anyway. Nobody taught us at school how to light a cigarette in a rainstorm, or how it is still possible to make a fire even with soaking wet wood – or that the best place to stick a bayonet is into the belly, because it can't get jammed in there, the way it can in the ribs.[...]

Albert puts it into words.

“The war has ruined us for everything.”

He is right. We're no longer young men. We've lost any desire to conquer the world. We are refugees. We are fleeing from ourselves. From our lives. We were eighteen years old, and we had just begun to love the world and to love being in it; but we had to shoot at it. The first shell to land went straight for our hearts.'

Paul Bäumer reflects on the pre-war period of his life and its memories:

'But here in the trenches we have lost that memory. It no longer rises up from inside us – we are dead and the memory is far off on some distant horizon, an apparition, a puzzling reflection come to haunt us, something we are afraid of and which we love without hope. It is strong, and our desire is strong; but it is unattainable, and we know it. It is just as impossible as the chance of becoming a general.[..] Now we would wander around like strangers in those landscapes of our youth. We have been consumed in the fires of reality, we perceive differences only in the way tradesmen do, and we see necessities like butchers. We are free of care no longer – we are terrifyingly indifferent. We might be present in that world, but would we be alive in it? We are like children who have been abandoned and we are as experienced as old men, we are coarse, unhappy, and superficial – I think that we are lost.'

With an incredible deep clearness Paul is aware of the fact that the traumas they have to ignore now when they are at the front, will unavoidably come back and will haunt them:

'The horror of the front fades away when you turn your back on it, so we can attack it with coarse or black humour. When someone is dead we say he's 'pushing up the daisies', and we talk about everything the same way, to save ourselves from going mad; as long as we can take things like that we are actually fighting back.[..] One thing I do know: everything that is sinking into us like a stone now, while we are in the war, will rise up again when the war is over, and that's when the real life-and-death struggle will start.'

When he is on leave, many people, among them his father, like him to tell stories of the front: 'What he would really like best is a constant flow of stories. I can see that he has no idea that these things can't be put into words, although I'd like to do something to please him. But it would be dangerous for me to try and put it all into words, and I'm worried that it might get out of hand and I couldn't control it any more. Where would we be if everybody knew exactly what was going out there at the front? And so I limit myself to telling him a few funny bits.'

When he is on leave, he does not feel at ease, nothing is the same as before his volunteering, but in fact not his village and his family, but he himself has changed:

'Suddenly a terrible feeling of isolation wells up inside me. I can't get back, I'm locked out; however much I might plead, however much I try, nothing moves, and I sit there as wretched as a condemned man and the past turns away from me. At the same time I am frightened of conjuring it up too much because I don't know what would happen then. I am a soldier. I have to cling to that.'

He depicts with interest the prisoners of war, still recognizing in the enemies the human beings they are, people like himself:

'It is odd seeing these men – our enemies – at such close quarters. Their faces make you stop and think, good peasant faces, broad foreheads, broad noses, broad lips, broad hands, shaggy hair. They really ought to be ploughing or harvesting or apple-picking. They look even more good-natured than our own farmers from over in Frisia.[..] Their lives are anonymous and blameless; if I knew more about them, what they are called, how they live, what their hopes and fears are, then my feelings might have a focus and could turn into sympathy. But at the moment all I sense in them is the pain of the dumb animal, the fearful melancholy of life and the pitilessness of men.

An order has turned these silent figures into our enemies; an order could turn them into friends again. On some table, a document is signed by some people that none of us knows,

and for years our main aim in life is the one thing that usually draws the condemnation of the whole world and incurs its severest punishment in law. How can anyone make distinctions like that looking at these silent men, with their faces like children and their beards like apostles.'

The comrades discuss the causes and motives for waging war:

'Right, but just think for a minute – we are almost all ordinary people, aren't we? And in France the majority are workers too, or tradesmen or clerks. Why on earth should a French locksmith or a French shoemaker want to attack us? No, it's just the governments. I'd never seen a Frenchman before I came here, and most of the Frenchmen won't have seen one of us. Nobody asked them any more that they did us.[..] Nobody really wants it, but all of a sudden, there it is. We didn't want the war, they say the same thing on the other side – and in spite of that, half the world is at it hammer and tongs.'

When Paul has killed a man, his conscience is upset:

'The silence spreads. I talk, I have to talk. So I talk to him and tell him directly, "I didn't mean to kill you, mate. If you were to jump in here again, I wouldn't do it, not so long as you were sensible too. But earlier on you were just an idea to me, a concept in my mind that called up an automatic response – it was the concept that I stabbed. It is only now that I can see that you are a human being like me. I just thought about your hand-grenades, your bayonet and your weapons – now I can see your wife, and your face, and what we have in common.'

The author put into words the desolate state of mind of Paul in a heart-rending way:

'I am young, I am twenty years of age; but I know nothing of life except despair, death, fear, and the combination of completely mindless superficiality with an abyss of suffering. I see people being driven against one another, and silently, incomprehensibly, foolishly, obediently and innocently killing one another.[..] What would our fathers do if one day we rose up and confronted them, and called them to account? What do they expect from us when a time comes in which there is no more war? For years our occupation has been killing – that was the first experience we had. Our knowledge of life is limited to death. What will happen afterwards? And what can possibly become of us?'

When it is rumoured that very soon the war will come to an end, Paul tries to fancy what his life could still have in store for him:

'If we had come back in 1916 we could have unleashed a storm out of the pain and intensity of our experiences. If we go back now we shall be weary, broken-down, burnt-out, rootless and devoid of hope. We shall no longer be able to cope. No one will understand us – because in front of us there is a generation [..] who already had a bed and a job and who are going back to their old positions, where they will forget all about the war – and behind us, a new generation is growing up, one like we used to be, and that generation will be strangers to us and will push us aside. We are superfluous even to ourselves, we shall grow older, a few will adapt, others will make adjustments, and many of us will not know what to do – the years will trickle away, and eventually we shall perish.'

Paul Bäumer did not survive. 'He fell in October 1918, on a day that was so still and quiet along the entire front line that the army despatches restricted themselves to the single sentence: that there was nothing new to report on the western front.'

Remarque left Germany soon after the rise to power of Hitler, acquired the American citizenship but lived for years and years in Switzerland. The books he wrote later on did not get the overwhelming positive response as did his novel on the war.

GSB

SAKURA

Sakura is a foundation established through notarial act on March 2, 1995. It is an organisation of and for descendants of Japanese soldiers or civil servants and Dutch, or Dutch-Indonesian or Indonesian women, born between 1940 and 1948.

From 1940 until 1945 the Japanese occupied the former colony of the Dutch East-Indies. Soldiers of the occupying army socialised with the local population. Out of these relationships children were born.

The foundation has no intention of being a tribunal, but the members are wanting to know their parents and are eager to find out how the circumstances of their birth influenced their lives and those of their parents. It is important to the human being to know his roots.

Many of the Sakura members know nothing or next to nothing about the men who are or were their fathers. These men were sent by their government to occupy the former colonies of West-European countries and to give their contributions to the Japanese victory. They lived in a country with very different cultural traditions, far away from home. They met women, fell in love and engaged in relationships, forbidden according to the standards of the time and their society. Some of these men were married before they were sent to the Dutch-Indies and returned home after the capitulation in 1945. They had to remain silent about their relationship, because of an individually felt need but also forced on them by social conventions. They tried to pick up their lives and concentrated on rebuilding a social life focused on the future.

The women who engaged in relationships with Japanese soldiers were often disregarded by their own people, because they mingled with the occupiers. It is not up to the children to judge their mothers for starting such relationships. Each woman had her own motives, she followed her feelings or the need to live on with the children she had given birth to in her marriage before. After the war she had to live with the burden of a child 'of the enemy' and had to cope with feelings of guilt and shame. The children feel the need to respect the ways their mothers found to cope with this emotional burden.

The children grew up, unaware of the specific circumstances of their birth, but experienced nevertheless their influence. Only much later, as adults, they felt the need to find out about their ambivalent feelings, their Asiatic faces, their uncertainties and fears. Often they pushed away the problems till the moment these could no longer be ignored. Not knowing one's origins has important consequences for one's identity and ability to love one-self, one's partner and one's children. It is extremely important if people born in similar circumstances can give help to overcome the emotional problems of starting the search in the past. Many people are afraid that they will be pointed at if they are open about their origins and it helps them to learn about the positive experiences of others.

One of the goals of the foundation is to give mutual help, but it is important to keep in mind, that 'finding our biological father is the main goal, but not at any cost'. The foundation will provide a place where descendants of Japanese soldiers can feel at ease ('senang' in Indonesian), where they can exchange experiences, can support each other and help to work on establishing a firm identity.

The organisation is focused on the individual 'healing', but is aware of the fact that mature personalities function better in society, so in the end not only the individuals but also society at large can benefit from the organisation's activities.

Mizumaki , Tokyo

Your Excellencie(s), ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour and a pleasure to be your guest today. On behalf of my fellow companions I do thank you for your willingness and kindness to welcome us here. For this occasion I am the spokesman for the Sakura and Jin party and first of all I would like to introduce myself shortly. My name is Rob Sipkens. I was born in the former Dutch-Indies on april 5th 1946.

Tsumari....watashi.....wa..... inudoshi..... desu....

My mother is a Dutch-Indonesian woman and I have a Japanese father. He was in the Japanese army and was stationed in the city of Pekalongan (on de North coast on the island of Java Indonesia). At the end of the war – before I was born - my father had to return to Japan. He did not know that my mother was pregnant and she had no opportunity to tell him so. Therefore he had no knowledge of my birth.

When I was 6 years old my grandparents together with my aunt and my mother and I had to flee to Holland because of the Indonesian Independence. There she married my stepfather, a Dutchman, and he gave me his name - Sipkens.

In our family nobody ever spoke about my Japanese origin. As a matter of fact it was kept a big secret; it was taboo..... However as you probably all know, the bigger the secret in the family, the more it will be apparent that there is a big secret. And as so many others I grew up with the nagging feeling that something essential was missing in my history, that something was missing in me as a person and it did not feel right. But I was not able to figure out what exactly..... It took me a long time (until approx. 10 years ago) to bring up enough courage to persuade my mother to tell me the truth, and she finally did so.

This is not the time nor the place to elaborate on that story, since it was a sad story. Anyhow, my mother revealed the name of my biological, Japanese father. And since then I know that I am the son of Kawabata. And as I stand here and speak to you I realise more than ever that:I feel Japanese....

Jibun... ga... Nihon-jin... dato ... kanjimasu...

The background of all the members of Sakura and JIN is the same: *a Japanese father, mostly unknown and never met*. All members of JIN and Sakura have their own personal story about their childhood. A great part of these stories is sad. In the Dutch Indonesian society it was not done to disclose the existence of a Japanese child amongst their midst. However, despite this situation and our Dutch nationality – when we look in the mirror - we see distinct Japanese features in our faces.

The famous Japanese poet Matsuo Basho once wrote:

(quote)

Go to the pinetree if you want to learn more about the pinetree.

And if you want to learn more about the bamboo, then go to the bamboo.

And when you do so, leave your prejudice behind (unquote)

We are very grateful to have the opportunity to learn more about the country of Japan and meet its people. To learn more about our roots which genetically shaped our characters and influenced our lives so much.

Respect to others, strong principles, a great sense of honour and the urge for perfection are some examples of how we stand in life.

All members of Jin and Sakura have the urge to find their roots, to learn about their father's country. Being here in Japan is part of our search into historyand therefore a search for our identity. We have so many questions and are desperately looking for answers. We

are looking for recognition and acceptance. We hope to find some of the missing peaces of the puzzle in order to find basic references to our identity.

We also believe that it is of the utmost importance – not only for us - but especially for the next generation (our children) that they will be aware of the roots of their father or mother. And we do hope that one day our children may have the same opportunity to make acquaintance with the Japanese way of live.

We are very thankful for the efforts made by Jin and Sakura foundation. With the support of Sakura and Jin we hope that the Japanese government will continue to help us in creating ways for us and our children to meet Japan and its people, to see and feel Japan..... all for a better mutual understanding and a peaceful world.

On behalf of JIN and Sakura foundation, on behalf of my fellow companions I sincerely thank the Japanese Government – in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs - for giving us the opportunity of being here. We wish all of you and the Japanese people prosperity and peace in their hearts.

Thank you for your attention and your hospitality. We hope to meet you again someday.

Itsunohika.....mataoaisimashoo.....

September 2009- speech Rob Sipkens

WWW.FORUMKRIEGSENKEL.COM

War-descendants Forum Kriegsenkel provides a platform for exchanging and obtaining information about the after-effects of World War II on the descendants of individuals who lived during the war.

War-descendants – the generation born approximately between 1960 and 1975 – grew up in societies that tried to put WWII behind them. The Federal Republic of Germany celebrated the ‘economic miracle’ while the German Democratic Republic became the most economically-advanced member of the Warsaw pact. Many Germans emigrated to foreign countries to leave the past behind them and make a fresh start.

Yet behind the facades of these restored worlds, there was and remains a generation of children who have been affected in more subtle ways from the rise of National Socialism, the war and the genocide of the Jews. Fascistic violence, trauma, fear, low self-esteem and aggression have all been lived out and passed on in the private sphere of the family, beyond public perception.

Over the decades, the involvement of individual families and family members with National Socialism was and remains a taboo while war experiences have often been silenced. An entire chapter of German family history was repressed while problems were displaced onto the next generation. In this way, War-descendants often may suffer from recurrent psychological blocks, diffuse fears, heavy feelings of guilt or feelings of depression, yet without being able to explain the origin of such experiences.

We would like to help those who are interested in learning more about themselves and their family pasts in light of both society and history. We hope to provide a point of departure for grasping these negative legacies, for learning to understand them and, ultimately, for freeing oneself from them.

We are looking forward to exchanges with readers. We hope that, together, we can create a voice for our generation.

Jennifer Allen, born in Toronto in 1965, daughter of a German woman who was expelled from East-Prussia, and of an American soldier. Studied economic sciences and literature, grew up in Canada and lives since 1995 in Berlin as an art critic.

Anne Barth, born in 1970, daughter of a German refugee from the western province of Poland. Studied Pedagogy and Philosophy, her profession now is manager of cultural events.

Birgit Kaminski Weidt, born in 1962, granddaughter of people who fled from East-Prussia and Schlesien. In the GDR where she lived the topic of the 'expelled' was a taboo topic, those people were called 'settlers.' She is a journalist interested in the psychological aspects of life.

INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE CENTER

The "Dan Bar - On - International Dialogue Center" (DBO - IDC) has now taken a legal shape as an association in Berlin, Germany. The founding session with seven founding members took place on January 15, 2010, in Berlin.

Haran Bar - On, Dan's youngest son, who attended the meeting, expressed how happy he is about this development.

IDC has taken on its first big project, the German translation of the PRIME (Peace Research Institute in the Middle East) schoolbook, which contains the Palestinian - Israeli history of conflict as a dual narrative. This book was created by Palestinian and Israeli teachers under the guidance of Sami Adwan, Dan's Palestinian partner in PRIME, and Dan Bar - On over the past almost 10 years.

Further IDC projects and a symposium are in process of preparation.

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ARCHIVE WAR CHILDREN

The Research Centre for Evacuee and War Child studies at the University of Reading is fast becoming the central repository for all documents relating to World War Two evacuation and War Children in general. The archive would be pleased to have copies of any personal or official documentation pertaining to the plight of the West European children which could be used to benefit students and researchers. It would be very useful if personal documents could be translated into English wherever possible.

Our aim is to make people aware of the problems affecting all ex-war children across Europe, both at the time and throughout the rest of their lives.

Martin L.Parsons

Next issue of the International Bulletin: autumn 2010
Reactions and articles until the 1st of October 2010

WEBSITES

- Organisation of Children of Dutch Collaborators:
www.werkgroepherkenning.nl
- Organisation of Children of War of different Backgrounds:
www.stichting-kombi.nl
- Organisation of Danish Children of War, Danske Krigsboern Foerening:
www.krigsboern.dk
- Norwegian Children of War Association, Norges Krigsbarnforbund:
www.nkbf.no
- Organization of Norwegian NS Children:
www.nazichildren.com
- Krigsbarnforbundet Lebensborn, Norway:
<http://home.no.net/lebenorg>
- Organisation of NS-children Vennetreff:
<http://home.no.net/nsbarn>
- Risikoforbundet Finska Krigsbarn: (in swedish)
www.krigsbarn.se
- Organisation of Finnish Children of War, Seundun Sotalapset:
www.sotalapset.fi
- TRT, To Reflect and Trust, Organisation for encounters between descendants of victims and descendants of perpetrators:
www.torelectandtrust.org
- Organisation of children of victims and children of the perpetrators:
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
- Dachau Institut Psychologie und Pädagogik:
www.Dachau-institut.de
- Kriegskind Deutschland:
www.kriegskind.de
- Website for the postwar-generation:
www.Forumkriegsenkel.com
- Evacuees Reunion Association
www.evacuees.org.uk
- Researchproject 'War and Children Identity Project', Bergen, Norway
www.warandchildren.org
- Researchproject University München 'Kriegskindheit'
www.warchildhood.net
- Coeurs Sans Frontières – Herzen Ohne Grenzen
www.coeurssansfrontières.biz
- Organisation d'enfants de guerre
www.nésdelalibération.fr
- Organisation of Us-descendants in Belgium
www.usad-ww2.be
- Childsurvivors of the Holocaust in Australië
www.paulvalent.com
- International organisation for educational and professional development focused on themes like racism, prejudices and antisemitism
www.facinghistory.org
- Aktion Sühnezeigen Friedensdienste
www.asf-ev.de
- Organisation of German Lebensbornkinder
www.lebensspuren-deutschland.eu
(in preparation; in Vorbereitung)

