

## **INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

At the Dutch Institute for War Documentation (NIOD) in Amsterdam a little seminar was held on June 8 and 9. Dr. Stein Larsen from Norway presented his research project comprised of children of German soldiers in Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands, and where possible, Belgium and France. You will find an article about this project in this issue of the International Bulletin.

Dr. Baard Borge, also of Norway, presented the preliminary outcomes of his research about the fate of NS-children in Norway at the same seminar. He also intends to do research in Denmark and the Netherlands. Some important passages of the paper he presented are published in this issue.

In Belgium a group of independent scholars, the 'Voorwaarts groep', held a seminar in the Flemish Parliament on June 9. The proceedings of this seminar were recently published. You will find a summary of the lectures and discussions in the next issue of the International Bulletin because the topics deserve more attention and space than I can give them in this issue.

In the Netherlands a couple of historians are distancing themselves from the ethical and moralistic methods which have characterised the historical research to date and will focus on a more scientific view in which even the story of the collaborators will find a place. The 'Historisch Nieuwsblad' (Historic Magazine) will organise a research project among children of collaborators. In the March issue of the International Bulletin I hope to give you more information about these activities.

This International Bulletin is not dedicated solely to scientific researches. But since many scholars become convinced that serious study of the children of war is important for the target group itself and for society at large the readers may be interested to learn about this topic.

The Dutch organisation of collaborators' children, Herkenning, was founded 20 years ago. The chairman of the first board, Dick Woudenberg, wrote a moving text about his experiences and memories.

Arne Oeland, the very active chairman of the Danish organisation of children of German soldiers, translated Hanne's story which appeared in the bulletin of his organisation Rödder.

A 150 members of the 'Krigsforbundet Lebensborn' (Organisation of Children of the Lebensborn programme) put the Norwegian government on trial on October 29, claiming compensation for the suffering they endured because of their background. The BBC broadcast a programme about the Lebensborn children in May 2000 and you will find a text from the BBC News in this bulletin.

At the most unexpected moments the war can suddenly become all too present in our lives. Forgotten or unconscious memories come up and we don't understand what happened. I would like to share such an experience with you.

I hope that you will read this issue with interest. Remarks and suggestions are welcome.

All the best,

Gonda Scheffel-Baars

### **BIOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL IDENTITY: the importance of belonging**

by Stein Ugelvik Larsen, University of Bergen, Norway

My first encounter at mature age with the so called 'tyskerbarn' - i.e. children of German soldiers - was on a meeting at the Goethe Institute in Bergen in 1955. In cooperation with the local director of the institute I had arranged a meeting where a friend of mine from my early childhood would talk over his experiences as growing up in Czechoslovakia (Prague), Norway (Geiranger) and later return to Germany. His mother had married a German in 1933 - well before the Second World War - and thus he was not a 'tyskerunge' in the sense of having a German father who had come to Norway during the German Occupation. He was also born before the war.

To this meeting the director had invited several 'tyskerunger; now called 'war-children' in Norway. Some of them had for some time been in contact with the Goethe Institute, as a German cultural institution in Bergen. The story told by my friend was about his experiences first been thrown into Theresienstadt with his brother and badly treated by the Czechs. Saved from the KZ-camp by their Norwegian grandfather the two hungry stricken and deadly scared boys (they had on several occasions witnessed executions and maltreatment of the Germans), he came to Norway and was brought up as a normal boy in a small village in Western Norway. He therefore speaks Norwegian now with a rural accent and gave us in the audience a fine story of how it was felt as a dream to come to Norway and gradually being integrated in the close society where he lived. Late the family was reunited and they returned to Germany where he got his education, job and married.

His story was a story with a happy beginning (the German father had met his Norwegian princess) and a happy ending (his fine reunion and good life in Germany with many Norwegian friends). When acting as the convenor at the meeting I therefore invited to an open discussion of how other people of his age, who may know of similar stories, could comment on his talk. At first there came no comments and I said that I have been told that there were some people in the audience who had German connections and perhaps would have a different experience of having one German relative: I even suggested that if so, they would not be very happy to be identified as such and would also be inclined to deny their identity.

This was my fatal mistake. I thought that a Norwegian who had a German soldier as her/his father, would be the least interested to know about him and also do never

think of trying to find him altogether! A woman in the audience rose and she gave an emotional and strong story of her long time search for her German father and her German identity. She told us how she through various difficult stages of her life had tried to get information whom her father was, and eventually where her German family would be. The question of blaming the father either for having been an enemy of our country, or having left her mother at a very difficult time, was not a crucial issue. The main thing was the drive she felt of knowing who he was, where he came from and to get some knowledge if she had some 'half-brothers or -sisters' and grandparents in Germany. The strong sense of the direct belonging was the essential question. The need to satisfy the biological identity (who you are in sense of birth/parents) and its close connection to the social identity (who you are in family circles and social relationships altogether), was very important to 'solve' for most 'tyskerunger' she told us.

I had from my early childhood grown up in a 'normal' family. From the early days of my memories I had learned how bad the Germans had treated my country and murdered and tortured several Norwegians. The general attitude was therefore to take a strong stand against everything which could be connected to the treacherous Norwegians who had supported the Germans and also against everything which had to do with Germans and Germany. The former NS-members and their children were condemned and very strongly stigmatized, as were the 'tysketöser' (women who have had sexual relationships with the German soldiers) and therefore also their children. I still get some of the former stands against the last when seeing pictures taken in 1945-1946 of Norwegian women with the carriages: what a shame on these women and what could at all other than some low caste person become of those within the carriages!

I believe this attitude of mine was very common at the time. Being on the victorious side in the war, there was little mercy for the losers and among children this feeling is often stronger than among grown ups. However, as time went on, myself and the Norwegian society began to forget the 'war children'. They faded away in public attention when the periods of growth and prosperity came to Norway. I have also a suspicion that the government deliberately made us forget and towards the 'war children' acted in a typical paternalistic way of preventing them from getting access to information of their German heritage. It would be better for them to 'forget' their German identity and thus being well integrated into the Norwegian society. This policy of 'normalization' had been enforced towards the Laps in the North of Norway and the Norwegian gypsies with some 'success'. This homogenization trend was thus seen as sound policy in a small country which had not experienced much of influx of immigrants from foreign countries.

This situation has changed a lot beginning from the early 1970s when the first immigrants came from Africa and Vietnam. Gradually we are now becoming a much more multi-cultural society with its pains and pleasures. It has become much more acceptable to welcome foreign ideas and people, even if we have parties of the right which strongly object to the present policy and situation. For the 'war children' the situation was also changing. First of all they grew up into maturity, got their own family and began much more seriously to care for their own identity: who am I, what is my true background? The children also began to ask about their grandparents and out of bits of information, often got from obscure sources, they had a feeling that

something was 'missing' in their parents story.

From the mid 1980s then the first stories of 'war children' came to public knowledge from media exposure of different kind. The 'war children' began to come forward and telling about thier life; often very sad stories and often with a strong claim of having being mistreated both publicly and particularly in the private sphere. Stories of cruelty when growing up in children homes and other institutions, as well ordinary mobbing and violent treatment in the family, the neighbourhood and at school came to the forefront. These stories led to strong empathy within sectors of the Norwegian population, the stories became topics of debate and inquiry within the Norwegian Parliament and finally led to granting the Norwegian Research Council with a large sum of money for a research project into the relevant conditions which could re-veal what happened and what the situation may be for the Nor- wegian 'war children' today. I am part of that project and I will below reveal some of the realities of the growing up of 'war children' which I hope to demonstrate through my research.

I began my project in 1997 with close co-operation with the board of the Norwegian Association for the 'War Children' - Norgs Krigsbarn Forbund (NKBF). During the first year I did send over 600 questionnaires to the 'war children' asking them a lot of questions about their childhood, their youth and their life as grown ups. I went into several types of situations trying to let the 'war children' - today in their late 50s - give a broad and detailed picture of their life story. The questions ranged from details of their early family placement till questions about their health and well being today. I asked them about their relationship to their biological mother as well as about their efforts to find their German father. Thus I have got a broad and well documented material to analyze and to compare with experiences of 'war children' in Denmark and in the Netherlands.

During my research I have often wondered about what does it really mean to be a 'war child'. I have often read stories of children who have had problems with the family, some coming from divorced families, others from families of weak economy and with disabled parents, some from situations of lost opportunities of various kinds. In all countries there are children who had suffered during their childhood and I have been in the local court as a jury member experiencing how the accused persons do report on all sorts of difficult backgrounds during childhood which led them into the trajectory of crimes and various social discrediting situations. There must be something very different with the 'war children's uprbringing and the various experiences from the life of 'non-war children'.

First of all I have found a very wide difference among the Norwegian 'war children' in their fate. Some have had a 'normal' life with few or no problems ever. They did not even know that they had a German biological identity before in their 50s. Others do report on very bad conditions, while many can tell isolated events and happenings where they had to 'pay' for their German identity with social stigmatization. A few do report how their 'war child' stigma had been transplanted on to their own children, while others do tell that the children never heard any bad remark or were never confronted with their father's or mother's background in their social surroundings. When being aware of the German identity of one of their parents they were never really interested to know more (if there was already a contact to the German family) and never asked questions about it. This diverse situation among the 'war children' s

life and experiences presents a special challenge when one shall try to find a common understanding what it has meant to be a child born by a German soldier in Norway. It also makes it hard to make a general judgement about how to characterize the situation in general for the Norwegian 'war children' since 1945: have they been badly treated or not so bad. How many have really suffered from their German identity and how large proportion has had a life much alike that of Norwegian children in general?

This way of asking the questions can in some way carry our attention away from some of the really sufferings and mistreatment of Norwegian 'war children'. If I may come up with an answer which says that only a minor proportion of the 'war children' had suffered really badly and that a very high proportion does report on a normal situation, this statement may lead to a conclusion that the Norwegian government does not have to pay much attention to the claims which a group of 'war children' this month is carrying against the Norwegian state in the Oslo municipal court. So, we cannot overlook the very serious mistreatment, when the overall picture is not so harsh. This would again be a fatal mistake and bring the results of research on the 'war children's life and experiences to use for negative and ill fated purpose. For me as a researcher it is therefore both important to demonstrate the wide differences among the 'war children' and their life stories as well as very explicitly underline the desperate stories of the most badly hit by their German background.

With this double purpose in mind I also have a very important question, yet unanswered, and which I want to call my readers' attention to. What has it really meant to the individual child to grow up with a German biological identity and with an established Norwegian social identity? What did it mean to him/her when the child gradually began to realize that her/his 'real' father was not around, when she/he was mobbed for some 'unknown cause' and when he/she began to speculate over the 'hidden story' in which she/he was a part? Many 'war children' had a suspicion that "something was wrong" when they were mobbed, but did not have a clear understanding what it meant. Others experienced a great shock when they found the papers telling that their 'real father' was not the father they had socially identified with.

The right understanding of living with a 'hidden identity' is therefore one of the very important results I hope to arrive at during my research. I will have to confront my own experiences of living through a 'normal' upbringing with the experiences of 'war children's. Thus, - in a close dialogue between us - be enriched in perspectives and wisdom of how true life presents us with very different challenges, the one which do not compare quite with the other, but thus forms us as different individuals of equal value.

Passages of the paper presented by Associate Professor Baard Herman Borge, Harstad University College, at Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie (NIOD), Amsterdam, June 8, 2001

**THE NORWEGIAN NS-CHILDREN:SOME ISSUES FROM A RESEARCH PROJECT IN PROGRESS**

*We still fear being condemned and rejected because of our parents, just like many of us have experienced throughout childhood.*  
(NS-child Karin Berle, 1996)

## **Introduction**

In today's Norway, as a minimum 100 000 countrymen are children of parents who belonged to Vidkun Quisling's collaborationist movement *Nasjonal Samling* (NS) during the years of German occupation from 1940 to 1945. It is generally believed that many of the so-called NS-children experienced difficulties while growing up in post-war Norway, solely because their parents once were branded as *quislings*, that is "Nazis" and "traitors". Also, it is claimed that numerous NS-children suffer from health repercussions caused by exposure to heavy bullying during childhood.[]

So far, the notion of their plight has been based on a limited number of individual, often tragic stories presented by the media or in autobiographies. To what extent are these accounts representative? Up until recently the collaborators' children have not been subject to empirical research. In this paper, I will present some preliminary findings and observations from my own ongoing postal survey among NS-children born in the years between 1930 and 1960. How do these people, in hindsight, evaluate what being a NS-child has meant for their lives? Do they, for example, think that their particular family background made their childhood more thorny than that of other Norwegian children who grew up in the same period as they did? And if so, for what reasons?

It should be underlined that this paper is based on the first 100 completed questionnaires only. Thus, many potentially interesting research questions will have to wait for further analysis until all 350-400 questionnaires eventually can be included.[]

## **A new field of research**

During the last 10-15 years, research on the German occupations in Western Europe has taken a new turn. Traditional views are re-examined and new research questions are posed. Whereas the historiography of the period has traditionally concentrated primarily on the resistance against Nazi-Germany, historical interest now seems to be shifting towards the many forms of collaboration: "Who *were* the people who ended up on the 'wrong side' of the fence during the war?" and "What became of them *after* the liberation?"[]

In my view there is a considerable potential for comparative research within this field. As all the countries under consideration roughly share the same war-time history, a most-similar-cases design can be applied, under which possible differences in long-term social outcomes must logically be due to "societal effects" in one form or the other. Another point to be made here is that this kind of research is *not* only useful in terms of learning more about the more or less marginalised categories under consideration only, it could *also* help us gain a deeper understanding of society at large.[]

Until recently, I think it, at least in Norway, has simply not been *comme il faut* to bring up the life experiences of the particular social categories already mentioned. As the history of these people can not so easily be incorporated into the dominant understanding of the war years, as it is represented in popular memory, scientists have avoided the subject, perhaps thinking that they otherwise might be accused of running errands on behalf of the former Nazis.

Over the years, a gradual change of climate in the Norwegian public debate has taken place, a change mostly due to the influx of a new generation of scholars and journalists, a research project on NS-children is still provocative to some people. Apparently, some feel that giving public attention to innocent victims from the "wrong side" is for some reason disrespectful to more "worthy" victims of the war, such as former members of the resistance, kz-prisoners or sailors who were torpedoed by the Axis powers.

### **Why study the NS-children?**

In my opinion, there are several reasons why historians and social scientists of today could benefit from interviewing NS-children; one is that they represent a historical source that so far has hardly been utilised. Hence, to interview them on a large scale represents a new way of casting light on how the collaborators, and their families, experienced both the years of occupation as well as the immediate post-war restoration and the decades that followed. To what extent did collaboration leave a persistent popular memory? How long did it take to re-integrate former collaborators in society? When, if ever, did discrimination against them cease?

I believe that the NS-children could prove to be a good source, partly because some were old enough at the time to have trustworthy memory even of the war years and the liberation, but also because they may be reliable "barometers" for a study of social effects produced by Nazi Germany's occupations. It does not seem unlikely that the NS-children's lives have often been affected or maybe even shaped by their family background. Also, as the older NS-children are currently in their seventies, it is of vital importance that a survey should be carried out at this point in time, while they can still contribute with information.

In a way, the scholarly lack of interest in these children's alleged problems, as well as in other social consequences of World War II, is puzzling, as testimonies indicate that these corollaries may have affected the lives of many Western Europeans for a good many years after 1945. [...] it goes without saying that their plight ought to be reflected in contemporary Norwegian history as well as in our collective memory.

Additionally, we should not forget that research on NS-children, as well as on the other two social categories mentioned, is also important to these people *themselves*. As it appears, many have been the only NS-child they knew of in their local communities. Often growing up believing they were practically the only ones born with the "original sin" of collaboration, many have been unaware that the *quislings'* children actually make up quite a sizeable group within the Norwegian population.

My impression is that children of NS-parents often welcome it as a kind of recognition when public attention, after all these years, is now being paid to their childhood experiences.

One man wrote to me that he feels my research project is valuable, as it will reveal that there were *many* children in his situation (*It wasn't just me*). He continued by saying that NS-children should no longer have to hide their family shame, and the

Norwegian society should not once again be allowed to turn its face away from the entire problem.

I agree with this man's views, but would like to add yet another reason why my project *could* be helpful to some NS-children. A key point of mine is that their supposed troubles are *not* merely an individual matter, of significance only to themselves. On the contrary, their problems should *not* be "privatised". Rather, I think, we should consider them as an outcome of specific *political* decisions and processes, possibly also neglect from government authorities. The individual NS-child had no influence over the driving forces behind the social branding of former collaborators - and their children. This, in turn, is the reason why I think their childhood experiences should be a concern for the Norwegian society. It also means that responsibility for the hardships some NS-children undoubtedly suffered during adolescence to some extent could be placed.

### **The social legacy of war-time collaboration in Norway**

In Norway, everything identified with the "wrong side" during the war has until this day been a subject capable of stirring public emotion. Possibly, this issue may have been even more sensitive in this country than in most other countries formerly occupied by Nazi Germany.[I recognize, however, strong similarities with the Dutch situation; GSB]. Surveys indicate that the NS-stigma has been surprisingly persistent.[]

While little research has been done on the social re-integration of ex-collaborators after the post-war treason trials (*Rettsoppgjøret*), there is, contrary to what some historians maintain, reason to believe that many of them met discrimination in various forms for years to come, for example, they often had problems finding new employment and also proper housing for their families. The former Nazis in all probability constituted the most stigmatised group in post-war society, even in comparison with the situation of the Communists during the Cold War era.[]

It looks as if some Norwegians, if only for emotional reasons, have not been able to discern between the NS-members and their guiltless children. An elderly lady phoned me at the office after reading about my research project in the newspaper. After having presented herself as a former activist of *Hjemmefronten*, i.e. the national resistance movement, she said she was sick and tired of hearing about "those Nazi kids". As they had been indoctrinated at home by their "Nazi parents", they rightfully deserved the harsh treatment they got from other children, she told me.[]

### **A paradox**

Should it be true that branding of former Nazis and their families has had a particular tenacity in Norway, it is, in my view, paradoxical, bearing in mind that the Norwegians on the whole experienced less hardships during World War II than did many other peoples of Western Europe.[] To many NS-members, Quisling's regime was principally a buffer between their own countrymen and the Germans.[]

The NS' regime in war-time Norway had more leeway in relation to the Germans than did most of its parallels elsewhere in Europe, and Quisling and his men used

their power in an attempt to reshape Norwegian society (*Nyordningen*) in accordance with their own political ideals. As a reaction to NS'ambitions, the leaders of the national resistance movement decided to concentrate on fighting Quisling's 2 percent-strong movement and its ideology, instead of attacking German interests directly.

Civil resistance against NS was organised in the form of an effective social boycott. Every "good" Norwegian was encouraged to establish, and uphold, an "ice-front" (*Isfronten*) against the NS minority.[]

To my knowledge, *Isfronten*, as *the* main form of resistance, was unique to Norway. Paroles from the Home front even extended this strategy to encompass the NS'members' offspring (*Your children shall not play with the traitors' children*). As a consequence, excommunicating children with known NS-parents came to be considered good, patriotic behaviour.

Following the peaceful liberation of Norway in May 1945, collaborators were arrested, put on trial and accused of treason, like in all the other countries which had been through a German occupation. Comparatively, the trials in Norway were nonetheless out of the ordinary, because every single NS-member, even those who apart from their membership had been totally passive during the German occupation, were prosecuted. [In Holland we see the same phenomenon;GSB]. Thus, having signed an NS membership form was treated as a criminal act in itself. Again, this led to a spotlight, this time publicly, on who the local "traitors", even the small fish among them, were.

It could be argued that the political decision to take legal action against *all* the NS members was a logical outcome of the way civil resistance had been organised during the occupation. In a way, the trials confirmed that the NS-members, as a collective, really *had* been the primary enemy of the Norwegian people. A corollary of the legal processes, not foreseen at the time, was that many thousand sons and daughters of the ex-NS members had to grow up in a transparent post-war society with a father or mother who were previously convicted of treason.

### **Victims of post-war restoration**

Another possibly important thrust behind the NS-stigma has yet to be mentioned. I believe that the phenomenon could be understood in the light of post-war restoration, as the social branding of so-called "un-national elements" is most likely to be closely knit to the unifying effect of World War II in our country.[] In the immediate post-war years Norwegians probably felt a stronger sense of belonging to the national community than ever before.[]

In Norway, the events that followed the German attack on April 9, 1940, has constituted a vital part of our national self-image until today. According to popular memory, nearly all Norwegians were strongly opposed to Nazism, which is plainly understood as evil itself, during the years of occupation, a period allegedly characterized by an unique national team spirit. Historians have emphasized national consensus as the single most distinctive feature of occupied Norway.[]

Undoubtedly, the war led to a high degree of national unity in Norway, which at that time still was a young nation-state, that had gained full independence from Sweden only 35 years prior to Germany's invasion. In itself the consensus-effect of

Norway's post-war restoration, which I think has often been underestimated, is of course a positive one. At the same time, though, the medal does have a reverse, as the war's contribution to Norwegian nation-building also meant that quite a few countrymen were defined as unworthy of belonging to the new found fellowship of "good" Norwegians.[] Therefore, I think one could argue that the former NS-members, and partly also their children, in a way came to pay the prize for national unity.

## The survey

From July 2000 and onwards I have distributed a tailor made 47-page questionnaire to NS-children, and so far approximately 900 have received it in the mail. All in all, the document contains close to 200 questions, of which many are open-ended.[]

When phrasing the questions I received invaluable help from a number of NS-children. Judging by comments from respondents and also by the thorough way in which many have answered my questions, the questionnaire has worked quite well as a form of interview, and most respondents who explicitly commented on the questions said they found them reasonably or highly relevant. All the same, such a postal survey among NS-children, or similar groups, necessarily meets with a number of methodological problems.

First, as there naturally exists no list of the entire NS-population, a random sample, which is statistically representative in the strictest sense, can not be drawn.[] I nevertheless think there is a good chance that my findings could be generalised beyond the 350-400 individuals who actually take part in the survey.[]

To ensure that the non-random sample comes as close to a representative one as possible, I have tried to make it diverse in terms of background characteristics like gender, age, profession and geography.[]

Secondly, as I will demonstrate later on, among NS-children a widespread fear of having one's dark secret revealed still prevails. One should be aware that NS-children must often overcome mental barriers before they are able and willing to fill in my questionnaire and return it to me.[]

A third group of methodological problems is how to decide in practice who *is* an NS-child, and who is *not*. For instance, sometimes the father was a *Waffen-SS* volunteer on the Eastern front, but *not* a member of Quisling's NS-party. In these cases, I think, the father definitely was identified with the "wrong" side, and his children were certainly treated in the same way by "good" Norwegians as NS-children were. Hence, I have no problem with including the front fighters' children.

Perhaps an even greater problem of definition is to choose the age groups that should qualify as NS-children. Some say that the only real NS-children are those old enough to have their own memories of the occupation. Others want the exact opposite; to include only NS-children born after 1940, while excluding those born before the occupation started.[] To me, it would seem the best solution to include both the older and the younger children of former *quislings*, primarily as this will enable me to compare the two categories systematically. In the questionnaire's introduction, the birth years 1930 and 1960 were mentioned as respectively the lower and the upper limit for taking part in the survey, but in practice I have nevertheless allowed some other NS-children to participate.

As for the oldest, we should remember that even those born in the late 1920s were no more than 13-14 year old children as the Germans came to Norway. During most of the occupation, they were children, i.e. less than 18 years old. And *if* they were in NSUF (the NS youth organisation), this was not necessarily their own choice, but often a result of their parents forcing or of their isolation. Ostracised in their own environment, many had to seek company with other NS-children. Conversely, I think the younger, post-war generations, also ought to be included, so that we may study the development of the NS-stigma, and its practical consequences, over time. As I have already mentioned, I think there's reason to believe that popular hatred and contempt lasted for years to come after 1945. What was life like for NS-children in the late 1940s or even in the 1950s or 1960s? When did things get better, when did the parents' past cease to be a problem for the children?

### Concluding remarks

My data seem to verify that many of them in fact *have* experienced problems, though not always grave problems, related to their particular family background. Furthermore, my results also give reason to presume that being an NS-child in itself quite often has caused considerable psychological strain for the individual. Feelings of shame and guilt are seemingly widespread along with a fear of being found out as a son or daughter of "Nazis" and "traitors". Perhaps these stress factors are part of what might be termed an NS-child syndrome, that sometimes, as shown earlier, will lead to mental distress and need for therapy.

On the other hand, one should also note that a large share of my respondents report that under no circumstance have they felt their parents' war-time NS-affiliation as problematic, and so describe their own early days as normal.[] One respondent, an academic born in 1951, [] added that a few NS-children seem virtually obsessed by their alleged tragedy, and that this minority almost certainly will be over-represented in my survey.

I think his opinion is too simplified. As explained before, I feel that my sample could be fairly representative, but it can not be ruled out that the sample actually *is* biased, either in the above-mentioned way or in others.[]

One idea of mine that I, in due course, would like develop further, is that the lives of the second generation sometimes has been *more* influenced by their parents' war-time activities than what has been the case for the parents themselves.[]

To me it seems, that previous NS-members on the whole have been remarkably able to cope with society's scepticism or even animosity towards them in the years after 1945.[]

I think their robustness could be the result of a strong ideological conviction.[] Probably, their confidence that the NS-side in reality was the "right side" has often been upheld and strengthened by regular contact with former brothers in arms. In fact, the brotherhood of ex-NS members and SS-veterans has existed as a form of subculture ever since the early 1950s. Still today, 56 years after the liberation, the by now aging activists organise regular gatherings and even publish a newspaper [In Holland this would be **absolutely** impossible!!! In this aspect the Norwegian situation is totally different than the Dutch; GSB].

Their children, on the other hand, and especially the younger among them, were

simply *born* with the NS-stigma, i.e. it was not a result of something *they* quite voluntarily, had done during the German occupation, at a time when the younger NS-children were not even born and the older were too young to take a political stand different from that of their father and mother. In contrast to their parents, the children *neither* had an ideological conviction to back them up mentally, *nor* a supportive milieu of others who were in the same boat. Consequently, to me it seems that NS-children often were left to carry the weight of their parents' past all alone. Hopefully, my survey will eventually give us more secure knowledge about the various ways in which this predicament came to affect the lives of many thousand Norwegian children.

Copies of the report in full are available for those interested. Please contact Baard Borge: baard.borge@hih.no

### **HERKENNING: 20 years**

Actually we did not know what we loaded on our shoulders, we, the members of the first board of Herkenning, the self-help organisation for children of collaborators in the Netherlands. At least we did not know that the work we started would be so wide-ranging, so profound and so lengthy. We were idealists, determined, committed, but we felt at the same time like travellers entering an unknown land without a map and without landmarks to guide our steps. We felt supported by some people in the circle of pastor Klamer and especially by him, this humane giant, an example for many. Nevertheless...

In the first period there was little structure, although one cannot say that the start was chaotic. There was a lot to do and each day brought more work, far more than we expected. Nevertheless, a natural allocation of tasks emerged, because each member of the board did the work which came across her/his path and turned to those activities of which she/he felt capable. We made the best of it and worked together, notwithstanding the fact that we did not choose each other but saw ourselves by chance placed in each other's company.

Our task was immense: we had to organise meetings for other children of collaborators, to break the silence and the taboos, to enable each other to talk about our suffering and fears, to open up and find the courage to name our pain, our losses and shame and lack of self-confidence, to face our deceptions about lost chances, even lost lives. Furthermore, we had to describe all those emotions and the historical context that caused them in order to be able to inform people outside our target group: first of all those who were courageous enough to listen to us, later all those who had the power to bring about a change of mentality. That was our aim, a task far more extensive than we could ever have expected, a gigantic task.

We decided on a step-by-step process, the 'soft' method, because of the prejudices and the lack of understanding in society and actual resistance. We felt that it was important to make clear to ourselves and to others that we focused on the children, the second generation, not on those who took part in the Nazi-system or in collaboration. Likewise, at first, we did not want to pay attention to the question of how our parents came to believe in the Nazi ideology (historicity). We focused on

ourselves and that was difficult enough. Most of our parents had either been silent about the past, had tried to force their children to share their ideals, or had asked understanding of their children for their decision without paying any attention to the effects of their choice on the children's lives, their pain and fears.

Focusing only on the children was not always a clear path to everyone. At one of our meetings one of the participants wanted to tell the group at any price why he had chosen to fight at the Eastern front. I convinced ultimately him that this issue was not relevant in that meeting. He held out his hand to say goodbye. I grasped an iron hand, an artificial one. 'I left my right arm behind at the front', he said. I would guess that this man was the same age as my brother, 10 years my senior, who died at that same Eastern front.

We soon saw that we needed little groups in which people could tell their stories in more detail. Thus we founded regional self-help groups. This was not that easy, because the names and addresses and phone numbers of the co-ordinators of these groups would be published and for most of us the fear of being unmasked as the son or daughter of a collaborator was still very present. Here I would like to say, that I always admired the regional group leaders because of their difficult task, but most of all, I admired those courageous individuals of the first period. Moreover, the board learned a lot from their reporting in the special co-ordinators' meetings. The distress in the lives of collaborators' children was much bigger than we presumed...

Fortunately there were also moments of gratitude, of hope, of support and new vitality. We learned in the very first meetings that so many of us received help and support from people of whom one could have expected that they had more than enough to do with their own suffering, namely Jews and former resistance fighters. We discussed this phenomenon and could actually not understand it, especially because this support was not limited to some individual cases. Duke - one of the members of the first board - suggested: 'They, the Jews and the former resistance fighters, know about suffering. Their pain is so intense and honest that they don't want revenge'.

One of the most emotional events, one of hope and inspiration, occurred at our first weekend meeting in the conference centre 'De Alerdinck'. We spoke about reconciliation. And suddenly, three persons spontaneously rose from their seats, walked to the centre of the room, laid their arms on each other's shoulders, forming a little circle and bowing their heads so that they touched each other. They stood there for several moments. All those present had tears in their eyes. The three people were a Jew, a son of a resistance fighter and a son of a collaborator. (The Jew and the son of the resistance fighter were present with our permission. The first, a psychologist, accompanied one of his clients and the second had a sincere interest in finding out why he was raised by his parents with hatred against the children of collaborators).

Several months later one of the board members was invited to an interview on the radio by Ischa Meyer, who was a child of Jewish parents and who spent the first year of his life in Bergen-Belsen. Interview partners feared Ischa because of his sharp tongue and biting sarcasm. Some members of our board were afraid that this interview would do our organisation no good, to make an understatement. But,

surprisingly, Ischa showed great generosity, understanding and empathy. After the broadcast Ischa was so overwhelmed by emotions that he burst in tears. It was the child of collaborators who consoled him. Ischa, who died in 1995, received an important award, the Nipkowschijf, after his death. At the ceremony, parts of the above-mentioned interview were presented again.

In the beginning we thought that the experiences of all the children of collaborators were more or less similar. That soon proved to be wrong. Apart from the fact that there were differences in the fate of our members as individuals, it became clear that the problems with which we had to wrestle were different for the post-war generation. But also the experiences of those born before the war were different from those of the children born between 1940 and 1945. As early as the first weekend meeting a group of 'post-war children' was founded, inspired by Hans Donkersloot, later our excellent chairman, who died too young, an incorruptible, active and humane man. This group gave us new inspiration, at that weekend and for all the years to come.

This way, through ups and downs, we always found anew the courage to continue the work. One of the highlights was the speech of our Queen Beatrix on Christmas Day 1994 in which she referred, in covert terms, to the fate of the Dutch children of collaborators. Prime minister Kok recognized in May 1995, in clear terms, that many children of collaborators suffered because of the negative attitude of society at large.

Since then, many things have changed in a positive way: people know us, they listen to us, they recognize us. Yet, there is still so much to do. Maybe we should go on with our original method: do the work which crosses our paths. The work is in fact without end as long as this world is full with children of 'wrong' parents or 'wrong' systems, with child slaves, child soldiers, war children and war orphans, far away and sometimes in countries where, until recently, we used to spend our holidays.

Many people found the answers they were searching for in our organisation, although not all the answers. Many found the inspiration and the strength to make their own choices. As one of our members expressed: 'I went through a lot of difficult events, through much misery, too much to mention, maybe too much to work through altogether. But it is also true that I learned a lot from this misery. I no longer accept that people judge me or put me down, not to mention humiliating me, treatment I accepted too long. I go my own way in life now with a solid self-confidence. Indeed, I am proud of myself.'

Dick Woudenberg  
chairman of the first board

## THE STORY OF HANNE

Deep in my heart I always knew that it was not the truth I was told in my childhood and youth. There was always this feeling of *'Is it really the truth?' - 'Could it go for the truth?'*

My mother told me that my older sister, eight years my senior, (Kirsten) and I have the same father. My mother was not married but she had been sort of engaged with my father (by the way, I never saw him, which is another strange thing). The eight-year gap between my sister and me did not fit with other stories which my mother told. That's why I always was so sceptic. Later I recalled, that I was labelled 'German-kid' during my early school classes, but at that time I didn't know what it meant.

In 1969 I married Kurt and we moved via Give and Frederica to Odense, where Kurt got a new job. He was actually born in Odense.

I often visited my mother in Vejle. Habitually we talked about 'our father'. Each time I visited my mother it was an issue. But in the beginning of the eighties something happened. As usual 'our father' was the topic and as usual he was incredibly glorified - in my imagination almost divine. Later that weekend my sister came around to see me to the train and she asked me how the visit had been. *'Fine, we talked about our father as usual'*, I said. *'Our father?'* My sister was astonished. *'We don't have a father in common!'* It should be emphasized that 'our father' was never mentioned when we were all assembled. It was strange but understandable since it was a taboo.

All of a sudden the pieces fit in. I asked my sister if my father was a German, which she confirmed. At that moment my world fell apart. I felt completely empty and the trip home was extremely long. When I arrived in Odense I had cried my eyes out. The next day I called my mother and asked her if the words of my sister were true. *'Yes'*, my mother said, *but it's none of your sister's business to tell you that'*. She was furious. I asked her to come to me the next weekend to talk it over.

My mother told me that my father had been married and had two children in Germany. His name was Hans and he came from Hamburg. Towards the end of 1944 he was sent to Holland. She did not tell me why. For a short period of time my mother and father stayed in contact, but later my mother didn't know what happened to my father.

In the beginning of the eighties I considered that it would probably be impossible to find the family of my father after such a long time. Maybe I didn't want to know because my mother was still alive. My mother didn't touch the issue any more and I let it be.

At the end of 1987 my mother died and Kirsten and I had to settle the estate. My sister handed me a knife, a token from my father with swastika and all that. The knife, the name Hans and the town Hamburg.....it was all I knew about my father. And again I let it be, although I deeply wanted to find my German roots. I talked very much about it with my family and when I learned about the Organisation of Danish Children of War, my grownup daughter said that I should do something about it. But I lacked the courage and threw it aside, although I really wished to know the truth. My daughter wrote a letter to Arne Oeland, the chairman of the above-mentioned organisation, in which she told him about my story. He replied that I had to write to

the Archives with information about my mother and myself, my name, my date of birth and so on.

After reflection and talk with my sister who found the idea OK - although she didn't actually understand the 'deep significance' - I wrote to the Archives. First of all I wrote to the church in Vejle where I was baptized and I asked for information from the parish register since nothing concerning my father was written at my certificate of baptism. There was nothing.

The next thing to do, according to Arne Oeland, was to write to the Rigsarkivet in Copenhagen and to the Landsarkiv in Viborg and apply for copies of the case of paternity. After a couple of weeks they answered me that I could get access to the case, but beforehand I had to sign a solemn declaration not to publicize the content of the paternity case. Some weeks later I received a copy of the documents.

Suddenly I had answers on some of my questions asked so long ago. There was an exact name and a family. The old documents confirmed that I had two half sisters, twins, in Germany, ten years my senior!

Automatically the next question arose. Should I go any further? Should I dare to 'penetrate' a foreign family and say: "Here I am"? I had to evaluate many possibilities. There were so many things to be considered: my Danish sister and my unknown family in Germany. But all of mine - my sister, my husband and my children - urged me to take the next step. They felt I wouldn't be satisfied before I received some degree of certainty. The thought of rejection didn't occur to me at all. I had a name and a city I could ponder about. But I always wished to give my father a face. I am an artist - a painter - and I painted quite a lot of portraits of a person turning his head away or without a face (my father). Now I wished a face in my mind instead of the person turning away.

I talked with Arne Oeland and he suggested to me to contact Mr. Josef Focks in Germany.

I sent the necessary documents to him and after approximately two weeks the telephone rang. It was a Saturday evening I recall and it was Mr. Focks who called me from Germany to inform me that he found my family.

(He is so kind to talk with, very understanding and extremely considerate). He told me that I have two sisters, twins, in a little town, Geesthacht, just outside Hamburg. He had talked with one of my sisters, Marlene and her immediate reaction was: 'How exciting!

Now I have a sister more!' She wanted me very much to write a letter immediately, or better to call her by phone! Mr. Focks mailed me the address and telephone numbers of my two sisters. It was an immense relief and I wept for joy. My two sisters in Germany and I are very indebted to Mr. Focks - and we told him.

I wrote a long letter to Geesthacht and enclosed some pictures of my family here in Denmark. Shortly after that I received pictures of my father, my sisters and their families. I felt so overwhelmed. We agreed to meet in Germany in the beginning of December 2000. Kurt and I left for a weekend. We were received with open arms. Incredibly positive, but also very overwhelming! We arrived Saturday. Children, daughters and sons-in-law and grandchildren were invited to coffee in the afternoon and dinner in the evening. They were all so amazingly sweet. Sunday we visited the cemetery where I saw my father's grave and placed a wreath. My sisters told me that

my father died in 1982 leaving no hints about a daughter in Denmark. Afterwards they said that they would have searched to find me if they had known about me.

Today it is a wonderful feeling to be in contact with my father's family, although the very first meeting was so over-whelming that I shortly after dissociated myself from them in fact. The first day after returning home I fell sick and was hospitalised with a heavy pneumonia. I believe that my health suffered due to the strong emotional disturbances. I wanted to be alone and kept to myself. I wept and wept. It was a process to settle the new me.

Today I am fine and very grateful.

In February our children and grandchild, Kurt and I celebrated the birthday of my twinsisters in Germany - and the young generation became acquainted. In May Kurt and I went for a vacation in France and we visited Geesthacht and the family on our way, celebrating the birthday of one of my new brothers-in-law.

Last summer one of my nephews and his wife and children came on vacation In Denmark. They usually rent a summerhouse in Denmark. They are fond of Denmark and he was extremely happy when he realised to have family here. This time the destination consequently was Funen where my sisters (all of them) and their husbands visited them - and us of course! Kurt and I celebrated our birthdays while they were on vacation here and they all joined us. We are very happy.

Hanne

This text was published in an issue of the BBC News referring to the programme *Our Genes* which was shown on BBC2 on Saturday 6th May 2000.

## **NORWAY'S NAZI LEGACY**

Norway's outcasts from the Nazi past

For fifty years they have been Norway's outcasts. They grew up in shame, believing they were outsiders and bearing their guilt in silence.

They were the children born during the Nazi occupation whose mothers were local women and whose fathers were German soldiers. The Nazi classified everyone in terms of race and Aryan Norwegians were highly prized.

Those born of German fathers and Norwegian mothers were considered first-class Aryans. The Norwegians called them "Krigens Barn" (War children) and treated them with suspicion and prejudice.

Women who had personal relationships with Germans during the war were frowned upon in Norway. There was also official hostility against such women as the Norwegian government in exile in the U.K., via the BBC, broadcast that 'things would grow unpleasant for them .....They were right: these women were arrested and jailed after the war.

## **Lebensborn a product of Nazi eugenica programme**

During the German occupation of Norway some of the children were separated from

their mothers and cared for in so-called "Lebensborn" clinics ("Fountain of life" clinics).

They were to be raised as the conqueror's racial elite, part of Heinrich Himmler's Aryan inspired ideology of using eugenics to create racial purity.

After the Germans retreated from Norway at the end of the war, many of these children were subjected to humiliation and degradation. Some found themselves in childrens' homes and orphanages where they were bullied and tormented and even sexually abused.

Others were classified as "Retarded" and shut away in mental institutions due to the bizarre theory that their mothers must have been mad to have slept with a German - by definition subnormal too.

Werner Thiermann was born in October 1944. His mother was one of the local domestic staff working at a German base in Lillehammer. His father was a staff sergeant in the Wehrmacht and Werner was officially listed as a Lebensbornchild number 1242.

Werner never met his father - he disappeared very soon after his mother became pregnant and she never heard from him again.

After years of searching Werner found out that he had died in a Russian POW camp at the end of the war. After the liberation of Norway, Werner's mother had her head shaved and was interned with other "collaborators" on an island in Oslo harbour. Lebensborn children were the living symbol of German occupation and as such were often mistreated.

Young Werner spent his childhood in a succession of children's homes and orphanages where he was beaten and abused - both physically and sexually.

This legacy has left Werner bitter against his fellow Norwegians who, for fifty years, have closed off this chapter in Norway's history.

### **Official silence is breaking**

The official silence on Lebensborn children is beginning to break down as people like Werner Thiermann trace their parents and undertake legal action to gain compensation for their mistreatment.

Randi Spiedevold, a lawyer, has taken up the case of a group who endured the Lebensborn programme. Randi grew up after the war but until taking on this case she knew nothing of the Lebensborn programme or the suffering that children endured.

She feels shame for the way these people have been treated. 'I was really, really surprised because so many people had knew about this and never said anything.' 'And when you now look at Norway as the Nobel Peace Prize country and we are going out through all the world telling people how to behave in war, after war and how we have to excuse everything and behave in a proper way towards the suffering people. It's amazing why we had to do these things with our own children.'

Many of those children born to German fathers and Norwegian mothers face a continuing struggle over their identity and still feel misfits in Norwegian society. Today many feel they will never really fit in their own society unless they get justice. The Norwegian Prime Minister publicly apologised last New Year to the Lebensborn children for the way they had been treated.

After fifty years Norway has begun to acknowledge the terrible consequences of the Nazi's genetic ambitions. The case of compensation for the Lebensborn children is still awaiting trial.

Reporter:  
Isabel Hilton

On Monday 29th of October 2001 members of the Krigsforbundet Lebensborn have put the Norwegian government on trial and asked for compensation for the suffering they endured.

## **MY MOTHER'S PANIC**

Although the departure of my train back to Holland was scheduled for the afternoon, I went in the morning to Gare du Nord in Paris in order to make a seat reservation. The railway station was almost deserted and I soon found out why. There was a general strike. The man in the ticket window told me that probably the international trains would go, but he could not guarantee it.

Back in the hotel I discussed the case with the manager. He told me that I could always come back to the hotel for another day and, if necessary, for a few days more.

I felt relieved when my train left the station at the scheduled time. However, it stopped at several stations where it normally would not stop at all. I did not worry because I had 50 minutes to change trains at Brussels station. Just outside the station of Mons (Bergen) the train stopped and only twenty minutes later the driver explained why: a problem with the current-regulator had occurred, but was solved now. I looked at my watch. The train would arrive two or three minutes before the departure of the train to Holland. Would that be enough? It wasn't. Fortunately another one would leave within three quarters of an hour. I sat down, started to write in my diary and reflected on my stay in Paris.

Gradually I became aware of the growing number of announcements: the train to Oostende will depart from platform 8; the train to Turnhout will depart from platform 4; the train to....I saw that not only our platform had become crowded, the others had too. No train entered, no train left. There was a lot of noise at one of the other platforms and I guessed it were football supporters who shouted that way. But when they jumped on the tracks, they unfolded banners: they were students protesting some governmental decisions. The noise was so intense that I could no longer hear the announcements.

An old man looked at me and I saw terror in his eyes. A deep panic caught me. What if my train would depart from another platform? My husband was waiting in Roosendaal and did not know what happened - I already had missed one train -, he would begin to worry. I ran down the steps, maybe I could understand the announcements in the underground passage to the other platforms. No new messages. I was completely alone and in despair. I ran upstairs. It was much better to be in the crowd.

After a long, long time the train from Paris to Holland stopped at our platform. I felt relieved, now I was safe. People told me, that this was the very last train to the Netherlands. It was good to talk with them, because we shared the same fate. We had to wait another twenty minutes - "because of the dangerous situation"- and then, finally, we left Brussels.

My husband stood on the platform in the Roosendaal station. He told me that he learned from the news that there was a strike and when he called the hotel, the manager told him that I could come back if necessary. That's why my husband did not worry. Nevertheless I started to cry. All the tension of the last few hours came out. But I could not stop, although my husband tried to comfort me: 'Everything is OK now, why are you crying?'. I related what happened in Brussels and the panic that caught me. He wondered what could have been so serious that I was so upset. 'It was as if it was war', I said. My husband replied: 'Do you hear what you are saying?' And suddenly I understood that it had to do with the panic of my mother when she had to leave Holland with my sister and me at the approach of the Allies in September 1944 in order to seek refuge in Germany.

Together with 65,000 women and children of NSB-members (supporters of the Nazi government) we travelled in special trains, which sometimes stopped for hours and hours in the fields or in the forests, which were even attacked by planes. My father gave my mother the order to go to Lüneburg and not to stay in the cities like Hamburg or Hannover. She must have been haunted by the question how to reach Lüneburg: where had she to change trains, if there were trains at all...

The old man who looked at me in Brussels triggered a memory I never consciously remembered. I am sure that this old man had his own far more horrible experiences with crowded platforms and trains than I.

Gonda Scheffel-Baars



Dr. Baard Borge, also of Norway, presented the preliminary outcomes of his research about the fate of NS-children in Norway at the same seminar. He also intends to do research in Denmark and the Netherlands. Some important passages of the paper he presented are published in this issue.

In Belgium a group of independent scholars, the 'Voorwaarts groep', held a seminar in the Flemish Parliament on June 9. The proceedings of this seminar were recently published. You will find a summary of the lectures and discussions in the next issue of the International Bulletin because the topics deserve more attention and space than I can give them in this issue.

In the Netherlands a couple of historians are distancing themselves from the ethical and moralistic methods which have characterised the historical research to date and will focus on a more scientific view in which even the story of the collaborators will find a place. The 'Historisch Nieuwsblad' (Historic Magazine) will organise a research project among children of collaborators. In the March issue of the International Bulletin I hope to give you more information about these activities.

This International Bulletin is not dedicated solely to scientific researches. But since many scholars become convinced that serious study of the children of war is important for the target group itself and for society at large the readers may be interested to learn about this topic.

The Dutch organisation of collaborators' children, Herkenning, was founded 20 years ago. The chairman of the first board, Dick Woudenberg, wrote a moving text about his experiences and memories.

Arne Oeland, the very active chairman of the Danish organisation of children of German soldiers, translated Hanne's story which appeared in the bulletin of his organisation Rödder.

A 150 members of the 'Krigsforbundet Lebensborn' (Organisation of Children of the Lebensborn programme) put the Norwegian government on trial on October 29, claiming compensation for the suffering they endured because of their background. The BBC broadcast a programme about the Lebensborn children in May 2000 and you will find a text from the BBC News in this bulletin.

At the most unexpected moments the war can suddenly become all too present in our lives. Forgotten or unconscious memories come up and we don't understand what happened. I would like to share such an experience with you.

I hope that you will read this issue with interest. Remarks and suggestions are welcome.

All the best,

Gonda Scheffel-Baars