

## INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN

---

---

Red: Gonda Scheffel-Baars, Nieuwsteeg 12, 4196 AM Tricht

The Netherlands Tel/fax: (+) 345 573190  
e-mail: [scheffelbaars@wxs.nl](mailto:scheffelbaars@wxs.nl)

Sponsor: Stichting Werkgroep Herkenning  
[www.werkgroepherkenning.nl](http://www.werkgroepherkenning.nl)

---

Issue 21, Autumn 2005

---

### INTRODUCTION

Children are by definition the most vulnerable human beings and especially in traumatic circumstances. In the past, the impact of those circumstances on little children was often ignored. Many children of war, however, need a lifetime to work through their problems before being able to make the switch from merely surviving to enjoying life. This bulletin is a platform for all those children of war who like to tell their stories and share their experiences with each other, and for all those involved in studying the problems children of war have to cope with.

Gabriele Silten wrote a text about her heart-rending experiences in Theresienstadt.

Kirsten Luloff did research on the fate of the unaccompanied German refugee children in Denmark and England.

In Finland a statue was unveiled as a memorial for the Finnish children who were evacuated to Sweden. Pertti Kavén reports about the event.

More than 10 years ago the psychologist Jürgen Müller-Hohagen wrote a book about the psychological mechanisms of denial, of covering and suppressing the past. This year the re-publication of his book appeared. Since it was written in German I didn't make an English translation of the couple of paragraphs I quote in my short book review and I publish the German text, even though this is the English version of the bulletin.

For years Ebba Drolshagen has been studying topics related to women and girls falling in love with German soldiers and the way in which they and their children were viewed during and after the war. Her new book, 'Children of German soldiers' was published in this spring. Cora Stephan spoke with her and gave me permission to publish this interview (in a summarized translation).

Ebba Drolshagen participated in the conference 'The Generation of War Children and their Message for Europe 60 Years after the War' in Frankfurt, April, 2005, and shares with us some of her personal impressions.

Members of TRT (To Reflect and Trust) facilitated a 3-day course during the conference 'Dialog and Personal Stories', Florida, July 2005. Samson Munn reports about it.

Karen Baldner and Björn Krondorfer explore in their arts creations the possibilities and limits of dialogue, as two Germans coming from a Jewish and a non-Jewish background. They wrote a text about their projects and inserted pictures of two of their creations.

Although this bulletin focuses on the children of war and not on the adults, I would like to quote some paragraphs of a book review, discussing the re-publication of the book 'A Woman in Berlin'. Rape, one of the most important issues in this diary, influences not only the women in question, also their children and future children. Moreover, even girls of 13 or 14 were raped and the testimony of this 'housewife' gives them a voice. The book caused outrage in the 1950s and the re-publication of this year caused again a stir.

The Koerber Foundation and Dr. Dan Bar-On in Israel are planning a Dialogue Training Programme. Application deadline 15 November 2005!

I would like to invite the readers who have an e-mail address to send them to me. Please inform me about any change of postal- or e-mail address.

All the best,  
Gonda Scheffel-Baars

## CHILDRENS' WORK IN THERESIENSTADT

When World War II started, my parents and I lived in Amsterdam, Holland. On June 20, 1943, my parents, my grandmother and I were deported to the concentration camp Westerbork in the province Drenthe, in Holland, because we were Jews. Holland was then occupied by the Germans. I had just turned ten years old and had three years of war behind me, with all sorts of anti-Jewish rules and laws. We stayed imprisoned in Westerbork for six months, then were further deported to Theresienstadt, in what was then Czechoslovakia, now the Czech Republic. Theresienstadt is located about thirty miles (about sixty kilometers) North of Prague. It is also known as Terezin, in Czech. I know it by its German name, because German was the official camp language (although the different nationality groups spoke, of course, their own language amongst themselves). We were deported from Westerbork on January 18, 1944 but did not arrive in Theresienstadt until January 20, 1944. All adults had to work, of course, but at the beginning of my time there children did not. However, many transports left from Theresienstadt to what we then called 'Poland' or 'the East' in autumn of 1944, two very big transports left for Auschwitz and other extermination camps (as we now know). Because of that and because of the extremely high death rate in Theresienstadt, there were very few adults left to do the necessary work and therefore children as of the age of ten years old were called in to do the work the adults had previously done.

We children had been receiving the same amount of food (which was little enough!) as the adults and this did not change. We were to work the same hours as the adults, i.e. ten hours a day. By then I was eleven years old, so this new rule included me. My first job was as an *Ordonnanz*, or message carrier. This was an easy job. I had to carry oral or written messages to other people, both inside the barracks where I was stationed, the *Siechenheim* or Home for the Old and Sick, and outside the *Heim* to other barracks and other people. This included written notices to persons telling them that they were scheduled for the next transport, thus making us children into carriers of death notices, little Angels of Death. I did that job for quite a while, then was called up, by written notice, to a work group of children who had to gather horse chestnuts. Only children did this job. I did not know then and do not know now why these were needed. However, I have been told by an older friend who was also an inmate in Theresienstadt that the chestnuts were used as a component in bread making, i.e. they were used for filler (another component was saw dust!). Since the gathering of chestnuts was done outside of the camp, we were strictly supervised. That job lasted a few days, then I went back to being an *Ordonnanz*.

Another temporary job came up soon after the chestnut gathering. We children were called up, by written notice of course, to go to the crematorium. Theresienstadt had no gas chambers, nor was it what is now called an extermination camp, but the inmates died like flies all the same, from starvation, disease, pervasive dysentery, typhus and other epidemics, appalling hygiene conditions, and loss of hope. The dead could not be buried because, the ground being marshy, water would seep into the graves, or so I was told by someone at the time, therefore the bodies were cremated. The ashes were then put mostly into cardboard boxes (although some scholars say cardboard urns and some few say that very small wooden boxes were also used). We children had to stand in line, one by one, and pass these boxes from one child to the next, to the third and so on. This job, also, was done only by children. It was autumn and already cold. There we stood, in out-grown, raggedy clothes, without socks, without gloves, a line of too-thin, starving children who, from little Angels of Death, had now gone on to become the disposers of the last remains of the dead.

The boxes had names on them, though I do not remember whether they had labels or not. Perhaps the names were written directly on the boxes. In any event we children knew very well what was in the boxes, even if only because the boxes were very ill-made. They

had holes in them and the corners didn't quite close. Sometimes the covers would come off as well. Out of these openings, ashes and bits of bone would spill as we handed the boxes from one child to the next. Some of the children said that they recognized the names of their relatives, parents, grandparents, and so on. Whether this was true for all of us children, I do not know because, in order not to be different, I also recognized' my grandmother's name. This was not true since my grandmother had died in Westerbork and I knew this perfectly well. At that time, I did not know what happened to those boxes of ashes after they had reached the last child. Today I know that they were loaded onto trucks by the Germans and then taken to the river Eger which flows next to Theresienstadt. Once the trucks arrived there, the boxes were emptied into the river which carried the ashes away. Thousands of boxes of ashes were thus disposed of. We children were 'paid' for this job; I remember receiving a very small piece of some sort of sausage. In other cases, children received some few sardines instead of the sausage. I wanted to take the sausage back to my barracks and share it with my parents but I was too hungry and ate it all on the way to the barracks. I have borne that guilt, the guilt of not sharing with my parents, for many years, until the day of today. I do not think that it will ever go away.

That job lasted about three days, then we were dismissed and went back to our previous jobs. I don't know how long it took to dispose of all the ashes but it must have been more than three days, since Theresienstadt was a hell hole and hundreds of people died every day.

Eventually the Russian army happened to come upon the camp and liberated us. We could not go home right away, though, because a typhus epidemic was raging through the camp. So we had to wait six more weeks before we were able to return home. Then we were transported back to Amsterdam, Holland.

R. Gabriele S. Silten  
October 8, 2003

Copyright 2003  
R. Gabriele S. Silten

# THE UNACCOMPANIED GERMAN REFUGEE CHILDREN IN DENMARK 1945-1949 AND EMIGRATION TO ENGLAND

Kirsten Lyloff

## The Historic Context

In January 1945 the Russian army made its definitive attacks on the Eastern Front and in the following few months conquered the territories south and west of the Baltic coastlands, but not the coastline itself from Königsberg to the Hela peninsula. Millions of Germans from the Eastern provinces of Germany were now isolated from the Western part of Germany and the only way to escape was over the Baltic Sea. Two million civilians were evacuated by the German navy to the western harbours of Germany. But the chaos in the German harbours was catastrophic, and subsequently a quarter of a million refugees were sent not to German harbours but to Denmark.

## The Refugees in Denmark

The Danish authorities protested vigorously to the German occupation power, claiming it was against international law to allow refugees to "invade" Denmark. In the same spirit the Danish authorities refused to help the refugees in any way, forcing the Germans to confiscate what they needed such as lodgings, food and rationing marks. Most of the refugees, especially the small children arrived at the Free Harbour of Copenhagen in a terrible physical condition. Therefore the German authorities in Denmark asked for medical help and hospital care for the refugees. At first the Danish Medical Association agreed to help the refugees, if the conditions for the Danish prisoners in Germany were improved and if the 2000 Danish policemen, who had been deported to German concentration camps in September 1944 were returned to Denmark. But the negotiations between the German authorities and the Danish Medical Association came to a halt on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1945, because of the massive protests from Danish doctors, who didn't want to offer any kind of medical treatment to Germans. The death toll among the refugees was great. In 1945 more than 13,000 refugees in Denmark died, 7,000 of who were children under the age of 5. In total a third of all children under the age of 5 years died.

On May 4<sup>th</sup> 1945 the German troops in Denmark surrendered , and from that point the refugees were totally dependant on the Danes. The initial British plan was to set the German refugees on a route march back to Germany, but in July 1945 the British military mission in Denmark changed the plan, deciding instead that the refugees should stay in Denmark for an indeterminate period of time. The Germans were interned in camps with armed guards and surrounded by double barbed wire. Their food was sparse and the first year of internment insufficient, especially for the small children. 80% of the children died before they reached their first birthday. Housing conditions for the German refugees were very poor.[]

The Danish authorities tried hard to persuade the four occupation powers in Germany to allow the German refugees in Denmark to resettle in their zone of occupation in Germany. The areas, East and West Prussia, Danzig, and Pommern, where most of the refugees had come from, were no longer part of Germany, but were now part of the new Poland and USSR, and at that time the Poles expelled millions of people from these areas to Germany. This meant that there was no way that the German refugees in Denmark could return to their homelands.

In 1947 the Danish pressure on the allied powers for repatriation of the German refugees was at last agreed to and the repatriation started. Most of the refugees were returned to the

French and English occupation zone. The Russians agreed to take a contingent of 100,000 German refugees to their zone, but the talks went into a deadlock, and only 36,000 refugees returned in 1947 and 1948. Many of the refugees were terrified to return to the Russian zone, remembering their flight from the Russian army, and many of them had heard of or had already been the victims of the many atrocities against the civilian population committed by the Russian troops in 1945. But the refugees were not given a choice and the Danish authorities sent them to East Germany. Despite fears to the contrary there are no reports of any Russian persecution or atrocities against German refugees returning from Denmark.

A country's ability to receive and care for such a large number of refugees depends to a great extent on the residents' willingness to help. And the problem in 1945 was that after 5 years of German occupation the Danes didn't have this will. 175,000 refugees were staying in Sweden the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 1945, including 70,000 unaccompanied Finnish children, but no one has ever mentioned that as being unmanageable for Sweden. The real problem for the Danes wasn't the number of refugees, but the fact that they were Germans.

About 80,000 of the refugees were under the age of 15. No one knows exactly how many of these children were on their own, without parents or close relatives. But my undocumented estimate is somewhere between 5 and 10,000 children, 10,000 being the most likely figure. The central registration of the refugees was very insufficient.[] In all the larger camps there were barracks, where only unaccompanied children lived. In a few of them, the camp leader gave a figure of between 80 and 100 children per camp. There were over one hundred camps.[] In addition there were dedicated children's camps in Sealand, Lolland and the southern part of Jutland, where about 2000 unaccompanied children lived.

#### Reasons for being unaccompanied

Some of the children had come to Denmark with a whole group of children from places such as German paediatric hospitals or Kinderlandverschickung (an Institution to bring children from the bombed cities to the countryside). Some had got separated from their relatives during the chaotic flight, and many of these children had left their mother or other close relatives in Germany. Others had seen their relatives, often their mothers, die either during the flight or in an internment camp in Denmark. Some of the children had in fact relatives in Denmark, but had been separated from them, either because the relative of the child had been ill and sent to a hospital or left in an internment camp, when the rest of the camp were moved to another location, which often happened in 1945 and 1946. Because of the lack of central registration of the refugees, and the lack of proper identification methods for the small children, it was very difficult for relatives to find their children again, and some children simply disappeared for good.

#### Missing children

Some of the German children disappeared in Denmark and many were never found again, although a few reappeared many years later. The most likely explanation is that they died, like so many other German children in Denmark, and were buried as "unknown". Many children were transferred from one hospital to another one or from one camp to another camp without any form of identification papers.

Some children were taken into care by Danes, who having taken pity on them when they arrived in Denmark in such a desolate condition, and had, before the Capitulation, taken them to their private homes. In July 1945 a police order was issued stating that all such illegally housed refugee children should be returned to the refugee camps. Some were returned, but a few stayed with their foster parents for many years, and were found many

years later by coincidence.[] In the end 11 German refugee children stayed permanently in Denmark and became Danish citizens.

### The Children Camps

There were 4 large children camps – Kastrupfortet, Berritzgaard, Hohenwarte and Vingsted -, each containing hundreds of children. Besides there were smaller camps on Sealand, Kregme and Ølsted, with 30 – 100 children and some camps on the island of Als in the Sønderborg-Aaben area and around Kolding. The children were normally better off in the smaller camps than in the larger ones. Unlike the large camps the small camps were unguarded and the local population had some contact with the children, though officially this was strictly forbidden.

### The Psychological Trauma of Refugee Children

Almost all the refugee children in Denmark have suffered from very severe traumatic experiences. They had all fled in front of advancing armies, been in mortal danger themselves, had seen grown-ups die nearby and some had been wounded by bombs or been on board of wrecked ships.[]

For the German refugee children all the conditions for developing PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) actually existed. Because of the total isolation of the camps and the lack of written records about the singular child, we don't know how the PTSD children were managed inside the camps.

The well-being of the German refugee children was not a point under much discussion in Denmark, either by the authorities or by the public, despite the latter's interest in children from Norway, Finland, Belgium, Holland, France, Poland and Austria, who were at that time invited to Denmark for recreation. Their war experiences were one of the reasons for inviting them to Denmark and were used to persuade the Danes to give money to assist their stay in Denmark. It was different with the German children. They were already in the country, but it was not permitted for ordinary Danes to help the German children in any way, be it by giving clothes, food or mental comfort. They were a foreign body in the Danish society, and as such had to be isolated and expelled as quickly as the Allied occupation forces in Germany allowed it.

### 54 Children to England

Through the years 1946 to 1948 there were several enquiries both from official authorities and private charitable organisations from countries outside Denmark and Germany, as to whether refugee orphans could be allowed to emigrate to these countries. The Danish authorities always refused, but a single organisation, the World Council of Churches, succeeded in getting permission to send 55 children to an orphanage in England, one of the homes of the organisation National Children's Home and Orphanage (NCHO).[]

The children should be in "destitute circumstances and either orphans or the children of Lutheran pastors". The agreement was confirmed in a letter from Alexander Maxwell dated the 16<sup>th</sup> January 1947.[] The letter says, that the purpose of the children's stay in England was "to select promising children (boys and girls) who are likely to profit by an education in England, and to return eventually to Germany or Austria, where, it is hoped, they may help in the re-education of their countrymen".

From the English side, the plan to bring German children to UK for education, was carefully prepared with a clear-cut purpose, 5-6 years schooling at a Grammar school to A-level. The

organisers of the plan had made final agreements with the British authorities, so that those children who couldn't return to Germany, could stay in Britain for good. They had planned to introduce the children into British society by placing them at first together in the same building in the same home. After a month they were dispersed to different homes. The NCHO had employed a German doctor who could understand the childrens' language, and he followed the children during their whole stay in England, or if they stayed for good, to their adulthood. There is no doubt, that the children were far better off materially than if they had stayed in a Danish refugeecamp. They got better food, better clothes, pocket money they could use as they liked, and most of them got a bike. For their first breakfast in England they were offered an egg, a luxury meal they had not had during their three years stay in Denmark, although it is probable that the eggs originated from Denmark. They got a warm bath, an unusual luxury. Shortly after the arrival two of the children got the medical treatment they should have been offered in Denmark.

But the operation of sending the children to England was not an absolute success story and most of the children returned to Germany after 2-4 years stay. None of the children reached the A-level of Grammar school and none of the children could fulfill the requirement of going back to Germany for re-educating their country-men. There were several reasons for this.

The selection of the German children in Denmark was done without any consideration of the plans made by the World Council of Churches. For the Danish authorities it was simply a matter of getting rid of some of the refugees in Denmark. Therefore children without any knowledge of reading or writing in their own language were sent to England to attend the Grammar school. Some of the children were indeed very intelligent, but they couldn't stand up to the demands of a Grammar school education.

Generally speaking, the children were restless and their social behavior, which had been of some use for them when surviving their flight and their stay in refugee camps in Denmark, did not always fit into the way of living of a Methodist children's home. The staff had difficulties getting in emotional contact with some of the children, who formed gangs and bullied the smaller children.

None of them spoke English at their arrival, and this language problem was underestimated by the NCHO. Those children who were sent to homes where no other German children lived, learned as a rule the English language faster, but, at the same time they forgot their German language and when, after a few years they returned to Germany, they could not communicate with their own family members.

The children had all suffered severe mental traumas that were not really realised by the staff of the homes. Now and then anti-German remarks were written in the records, when the children's behavior seemed too odd, and the opinion that German children could only be raised in Germany were sometimes expressed.

For the 13 children staying in England the general impression is, that reaching adulthood they were restless and unstable and had difficulties acquiring a professional education. At least four of them emigrated abroad. Most of the 13 children had no family members back in Germany and although some of them had siblings in England, the contacts between siblings in adulthood were scarce.

The greatest surprise for me studying the lives of the children was, that most of the children, both those who stayed in England and those who went back to Germany, with one exception – a mental disturbed boy, suffering from kleptomania, who I have mentioned earlier – managed to become normal citizens, neither criminals nor social outcasts.

## THE UNVEILING OF THE WAR-CHILD STATUE 'SEPARATION'

April 26<sup>th</sup> 2005 a memorial to the evacuation of tens of thousands of Finnish children from Finland to Sweden during WWII was unveiled by His Majesty the King of Sweden, Carl Gustav XVI, and the President of Finland, Tarja Halonen, in Haaparanta Sweden. Haaparanta and Tornio are border cities, Tornio on the Finnish side and the river Tornio between the two cities.

There were about 500 war-children from Finland, Sweden, Denmark, United Kingdom and even from Australia gathered for the unveiling. A train was taking visitors from Helsinki to the border-city Tornio, a train that reminded about the long train journeys during the war. Now it took one night, during the war it could take one week and you had to be afraid of the Russian airplanes all the time. When the air-raid came, the train was stopped and children with their escorts run into the forest.

The war-child organisations and Sweden and Finland had worked hard for this celebration. The whole audience in Haaparanta was about 4000 people.

The king of Sweden held the unveiling speech and unveiled the statue. In his speech he mentioned his mother, who had several times spoken about the Finnish children in Sweden and how important it was that they felt safe. President Tarja Halonen held a speech in the main jubilee, where she –among other things - thanked war-children for the scientific work done in research of the consequences of separations.

There was also a seminar-day on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> April. Finnish male veterans told very openly about their experiences in war and a Finnish lady told about the life on the home front. A Swedish volunteer in Finland during WWII Orvar Nilsson held an interesting presentation about "Swedes and the Winter-war". Winter-war was a war waged 1939-40 as a result of the Russian invasion to Finland. This invasion was based on the Molotov-Ribbentrop-pact, where Finland and the Baltic countries were handed over to the Russians. Finland avoided occupation, but lost Carelia. Nilsson told about the war-experiences of the Swedish volunteer group of about 9000 men and also about the humanitarian and other sort of help Sweden gave to Finland. This war aroused great sympathy among Swedish people towards their neighbour country.

The sculptor of the statue, Anna Jäämeri-Ruusuvuori, was sent to Sweden at the age of 2-years. During the process of creating the statue, she was bound to work through her own feelings. The name of the statue is "Separation", showing the feelings of a little child being separated from her mother. The statue portrays a Finnish child on evacuation day. One interpretation is that she is hiding behind her hands the memories of her childhood that has come to an abrupt end.

The Chief Executive of the Evacuees Reunion association James Roffey said later in his greeting speech: " We may speak in different languages, but we all have in common the deep seated memories of being taken away as children from our families and homes to live with strangers and having to learn their ways, not knowing when, or even if, we would return home".

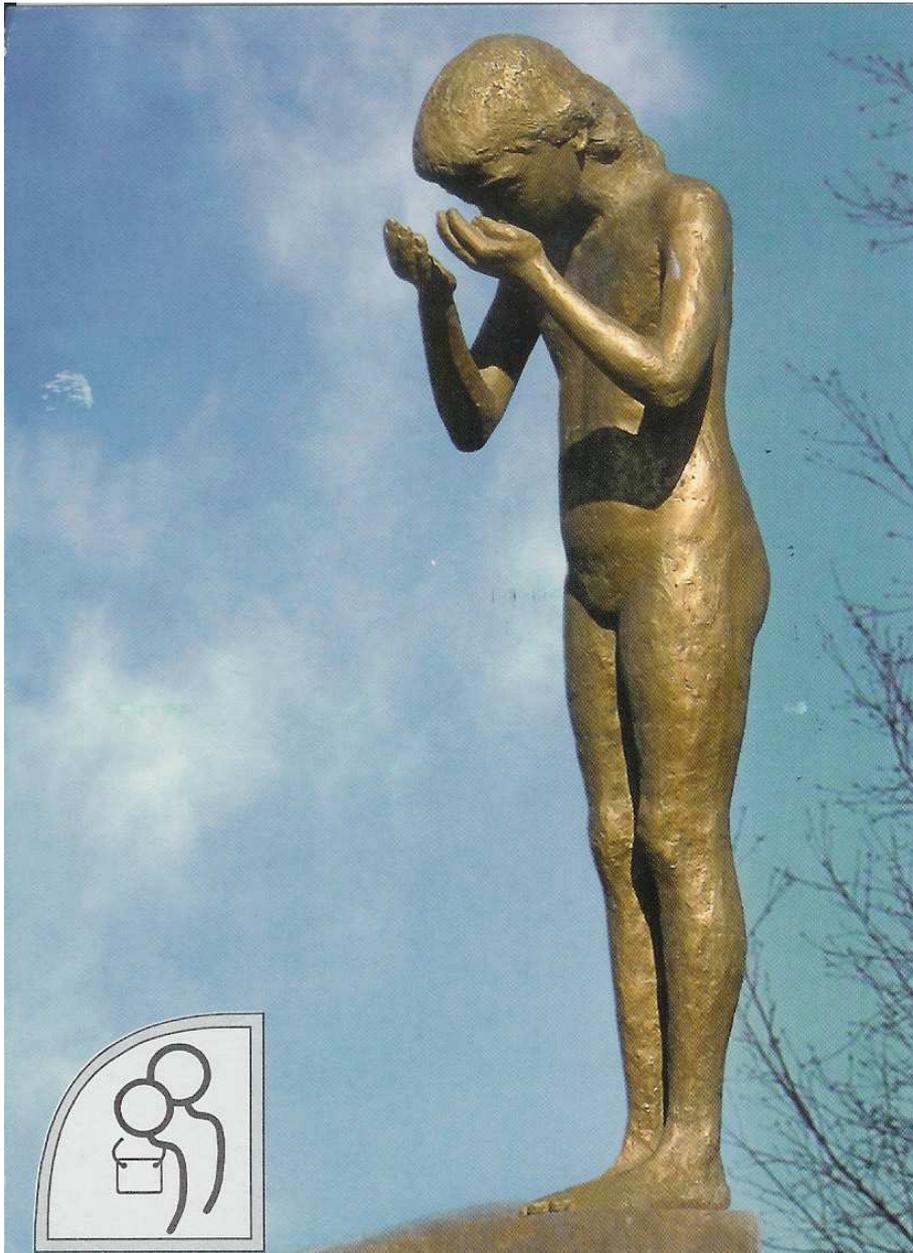
About 15.000 war-children out of 80.000 never returned to Finland.

The weather was fine during these days, which were very important to all war-children all over the world. English war-children (Evacuees) are planning a memorial of their own.

Pertti Kaven, vice-president of the Union of War Children in Finland

Address: Ahdinkuja 18 A 30  
10900 Hanko Finland  
Tel. 00358-19-2484066  
GSM 00358-40-5416702

E-mail: [pertti.kaven@iki.fi](mailto:pertti.kaven@iki.fi)



VERLEUGNET, VERDRÄNGT, VERSCHWIEGEN

Seelische Nachwirkungen der NS-Zeit und Wege zu ihrer Überwindung  
Jürgen Müller-Hohagen

Kösel-Verlag GmbH & Co, München 2005  
ISBN 3-466-30686-8

Einige Paragraphen der Einleitung:

“In diesem Buch wird gezeigt, wie wichtig es sein kann, bei seelischen Schwierigkeiten auch an Verursachungen zu denken, die bis in die NS-Zeit zurückreichen.[]

Die Perspektive dieses Buches ist die von psychologischer Beratung und Psychotherapie. Es geht um seelische Nachwirkungen der NS-Zeit, wie sie bis heute anzutreffen sind bei Menschen, die den Nationalsozialismus erlebt haben, bei ihren Kindern und Kindeskindern. Berichtet wird aus der ganz ‘normalen’ Arbeit an einer Erziehungs- und Familienberatungsstelle in München, an die sich Menschen angesichts von Problemen rund um die Familie wenden. Dabei hat sich wiederholt herausgestellt, dass Hintergründe aus der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus einen ungeahnt großen Einfluss haben können. Ein anderer Teil der hier vorgelegten Berichte stammt aus der psychotherapeutischen Praxis in Dachau, die ich nebenberuflich in kleinem Umfang betreibe. Hierher kommen mittlerweile überwiegend Menschen, die sich ausdrücklich mit Auswirkungen aus der NS-Zeit auf ihr persönliches Leben befassen möchten.[]

1988 habe ich bereits ein Buch fast gleichen Titels im Kösel-Verlag publiziert. Lange Zeit war es vergriffen. Immer wieder meldeten sich Stimmen, es erneut herauszubringen. Doch die Zeit ist nicht stehen geblieben.[]

Veränderungen solchen Ausmaßes in der Gegenwart beeinflussen auch den Blick auf die Vergangenheit, lassen unter Umständen Geschichte in anderen Akzenten erscheinen. Das war zu bedenken bei den Überlegungen für die neue Veröffentlichung. Und angesichts der Vorsicht mancher Formulierungen von 1988 wurde deutlich, um wie vieles die Auseinandersetzungen mit der NS-Zeit mittlerweile klarer geworden sind und dass Spannungen sich heute besser aushalten lassen. Auch das Wissen in erheblichen Teilen der Bevölkerung ist gestiegen dank vieler Aktivitäten, die bis in den Alltag reichen.[]

Hier liegen die Gründe, warum von der alten Ausgabe sozusagen kein Stein auf dem anderen blieb. Der gesamte Rahmen wurde verändert, die Gliederung völlig neu konzipiert, viele Erkenntnisse und Lebensberichte aus gut fünfzehn Jahren weiterer Beschäftigung mit diesen Themen hinzugefügt. Erhalten blieb von damals nur eine Reihe von Geschichten, die auch weiterhin sehr aussagekräftig sind.[]

Zum Abschluss dieser Einleitung ein persönliches Wort zur Frage, ob es nicht zu belastend sei, sich mit diesen schweren Themen zu befassen und das über so lange Zeit. Das stimmt. Aber es gilt auch das Gegenteil: Es kann befreiend wirken”

CHILDREN OF GERMAN SOLDIERS.  
In search of the unknown fathers

Cora Stephan about Ebba D. Drolshagen, WEHRMACHTSKINDER. Auf der Suche nach dem nie gekannten Vater. Droemer Verlag, München 2005

Not just murderers, whores and bastards.

We Germans are used to new disclosures of secrets about how our fathers and grandfathers killed people during the war and how they were involved in mass slaughters one hardly can imagine and one is afraid of to speak about. But what, if, instead, they practised what the flower power generation of 1968 proclaimed as the ultimate remedy against war - make love, no war? Can we imagine the German soldier as someone who gave love and received love from girls and women living in the occupied countries? Those women, who were they? Whores, collaborators? And their children born out of such relationships, are they Nazi bastards?

Ebba D. Drolshagen rises these questions in a new book; she writes about topics which she has studied for several years already.

Most of us have standard opinions about the German soldiers and about the relationships between the occupiers and the people living in the occupied countries. We view all German soldiers as people who were, or at least could have been, mass murderers, and we assume that this is the sole reason for their reluctance to speak about the past and to keep silent. In the occupied countries the myth of the massive support of the resistance movement is commonly cherished: most of the people did not collaborate and the handful who did are despised by all 'real patriots'. These standard notions stamped the lives of the soldiers' children: their fathers were beasts, their mothers whores and they themselves are 'Nazi bastards' as their schoolmates told them. These soldiers' children are afraid of being infected by the evil of the Nazi ideology and being doomed to the same misdeeds as their fathers. A heritage hard to live with.

Ebba Drolshagen is preferably interested in those topics which are systematically denied in discussions about the war and which people don't like to pay attention to. In 1998 she wrote a book about women in the countries of North- and Western-Europe having relationships with German soldiers, 'Nicht ungeschoren davonkommen' ('They did not escape unscathed'). In this book the author launched a topic that threw light upon an unexpected aspect of war: During the war, more happens than just war. German soldiers did not meet with hatred everywhere and from everybody. In the Netherlands, in France, on Guernsey and in Norway war was not only murder and domination by the Germans. The German soldiers were young, good looking, often naïve, excited about the new things around them. They fell in love. And were loved in return.

The men were not interested in the question whether their new love fulfilled the standards of the 'purity of race' required by the Nazi ideology. And most of the women did not see their new lovers as the enemy - he was a man wearing the enemy's uniform. In the midst of the war in which the distinction between 'we' and 'they' was vital, these relationships created a space in which individuals were seen as individuals. The woman and often her family were convinced that this special German soldier was a human being, not just a soldier and an "ugly German".

Some relationships continued after the war, many were broken off, frequently under pressure of the lovers' parents. Many soldiers denied the existence of their 'foreign' children, but there have also been many deeply moving reunions between the father and his child.

The author based her book on a large number of interviews with "Wehrmachtskinder" - Wehrmachts-Children, as she calls them - and their families, as well as on letters, documents and pictures. But she stresses that this is still not representative for all the children of German soldiers, because most of them don't want to speak about their past and their experiences. It is impossible to make valid statements about the feelings and problems of those who never expressed themselves.

It is assumed that there might be up to 2 millions of children of German soldiers in the formerly Nazi-occupied countries. Their fates vary with the context in which they grew up. In France they were, to all appearances, better off than in other countries. They were recognized as French citizens and authorities considered them as 'demographic enrichment'. In the Netherlands, those children did not receive the Dutch nationality and later the names and nationality of their fathers were erased from the birth certificates. In Norway the fate of the Wehrmachts-Children was much harder. They were seen as infected by the genes of whores and Nazi murderers. The authorities were afraid of their 'German blood' and even thought of deporting the children to Australia. In the Soviet Union reprisals fell upon the mothers, not upon their children.

Love in times of war not only interferes with the war, it also interferes with postwar legends about the war. It endangers the myth of the massive support of the resistance movement and that of a collective of criminal soldiers' in which the human being as an individual is absent. Those myths were vital for the peoples of the occupied countries in the first years after liberation; they helped to overcome the shame about the defeat and the misery of the occupation and saved the nation's honour. One wonders how long people will need those myths and when they will have the courage to face the past with an open mind. Public discussions about the country's own contribution to, for instance, the persecution of the Jews started in France, Poland and the Netherlands. The German crimes are, without wanting to gloss over the German crimes, in many respects a European fate. The fates of the European population are connected with each other, and now we will have to take 'love' into account as part of this interwovenness. This will complicate our view of the past, but reality is always complex and we will need to learn to live with this complexity.

This article was published June 18, 2005 in the German newspaper DIE WELT

»The Generation of War Children and Their Message for Europe  
60 Years After the War«.

Conference in Frankfurt/Main, April 14<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> 2005

In April 2005, the first German (and, for that matter, the first international) conference on the experiences of German Kriegskinder was held in Frankfurt/Main, the title was »The Generation of War Children and Their Message for Europe 60 Years After the War«. These "Children of War", the subject of the three day conference, are defined as Germans of - approximately - the age-group 1930 to 1945 who were children during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and its immediate aftermath.

Many of these children have suffered through highly traumatizing experiences - witnessing extreme physical violence, sometimes to close family members; months and years of bombardments night after night; hunger; fear for one's own life and those of parents, brothers and sisters; living through hardships when fleeing westward during the winter of 1944/45; absent fathers; mothers, many of whom were themselves just too exhausted and too powerless to protect their children in an adequate manner. Many such children did their best not only to survive, to protect their younger brothers and sisters or even their parents, sometimes »simply« by not complaining, sometimes by taking on responsibilities that were inadequate for a child that young. After the war, the overwhelming majority of the Germans - including the children, of course - lived for years in dire poverty. And many were orphans: Between 1939 and 1945, 2.5 million children lost one parent, 100.000 - 200.000 both parents.

It might be surprising for someone living outside Germany that for decades, none of this has been a subject of open discussion in Germany. The reason for the silence was not so much a taboo, as Micha Brumlik, one of the keynote speakers clarified, it was rather a matter of shame: Growing up with the massive weight of guilt from the crimes perpetrated by the generation of their parents, the German post-war generation felt that their own suffering "was nothing in comparison. Auschwitz was so much worse". So the psychological wounds were suppressed, not only as public topic, but very often also within the families. The German psychoanalyst Hartmut Radebold, who was one of the first to do research into the subject and to publish about it, estimates that 30 percent of the German children suffered "serious and permanent" psychological damage from the war.

How heavy the feeling of guilt still weighs, was obvious by the fact that the organisers and virtually every single person who spoke in Frankfurt repeatedly and painstakingly stressed that the conference was not meant to "relativise the Holocaust". As Marianne Leuzinger-Bohleber, director of the Sigmund Freud Institute and one of the organisers, said before the conference: "This will be a sensitive balancing act. The aim is to discuss in public the German post-war children's suffering, without, however, relativising the subject of the Holocaust."

The interest in the subject was (and is) so immense that more than 600 scholars, students and eyewitnesses came together at the campus of the Goethe-University to discuss the issue in panel discussions and 20 different working groups. The scholars included psychologists, writers, medical doctors, historians and sociologists, their interest in the conference differed sometimes markedly from the ones of the many hundred "children of war" present. While many of them felt a strong need to talk about their own experiences, to compare and exchange their own stories with the stories of fellow war-children, to recognize themselves in what they heard, for the scholars the conference was a welcomed opportunity to present and exchange their findings and to meet colleagues.

This rift was so obvious and so unsatisfying for everybody, that the organizers, who at the end of the conference announced their eagerness to arrange another conference, also announced that any further conference of this kind would have to provide the possibility of psychological assistance for the war-children.

A world congress for children of war (Weltkriegskinderkongress) will be held from May 26 -

28, 2006 at the Protestant Academy Bad Boll (45km south-east of the city of Stuttgart). For more information contact [Dierk.schaefer@Ev-Akademie-boll.de](mailto:Dierk.schaefer@Ev-Akademie-boll.de). This conference is not identical with the planned future conference mentioned above.

Further reading (most of which is, however, in German) ---

A more detailed report of the conference:

<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=766>

The homepage of the conference:

<http://web.uni-frankfurt.de/fb10/jubufo/index.html>

The detailed program of all working sections with the names of the speakers:

<http://web.uni-frankfurt.de/fb10/jubufo/kriegskindheit05/>

The homepage of the German Federation of War Children:

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

Ebba D. Drolshagen  
June 2005  
[ebba.drolshagen@t-online.-de](mailto:ebba.drolshagen@t-online.-de)

## RE-IMAGININGS ACCROSS THE ABYSS: JEWISH/GERMAN DIALOGUE THROUGH THE ARTS

Karen Baldner and Björn Krondorfer

How do two Germans talk to each other in a post-Shoah world if they come from a Jewish and a non-Jewish family background? We explore this question not only through verbal conversations but substantially through the language of the visual arts. Together, we have created works of art that take on the medium of the book, a format rooted in the German and the Jewish traditions. Our book-objects are not only catalysts for the deepening of our dialogue, but they also witness our intensely personal and artistic process. As objects, our art also invites the audience to participate in our personal conversations: In the face of the post-Shoah chasm between our communities, can we imagine spaces where genuine dialogue can take place?

Our work emerges from the intimate sharing of our family histories. It is the interpersonal and subjective dimensions that enable us to render the past as alive as our living experience in the "here and now."

We have individually explored themes related to the Holocaust for many years. Karen Baldner comes from a Jewish-German family persecuted during the Nazi era. She grew up in postwar Germany but today resides as a visual artist in the United States. She works in the media of Artist Books, addressing issues of victimization, empowerment and identity. She teaches Drawing and Bookarts at Herron School of Art & Design in Indianapolis, Indiana. Björn Krondorfer comes from a non-Jewish German family, grew up in Germany, and now

teaches Religious Studies at St. Mary's College of Maryland, USA. As a scholar, his research and projects center on the legacy and the intergenerational transmission of the Holocaust. We met in 1992 at St. Mary's College. Since then we have cultivated a friendship based on respect and inspiration for each other's dedication to addressing the legacy of the Shoah, National Socialism as well as larger issues related to violence.

Collaborating artistically has helped us to get through the sometimes arduous and emotional nature of such dialogical processes. By anchoring these processes in material objects, the art focuses our dialogue and serves as a "witness" to our process, while also establishing a forum for the wider community.

Our decision to work with book objects and installations is a result of our initial conversations: Books represent best our shared interests, skills and respective traditions. Books are central not only to Karen's previous artistic work ([www.kiva.net/~kambi/kambigallery](http://www.kiva.net/~kambi/kambigallery)) and Björn's scholarly endeavors ([www.smc.edu/users/bhkrondorfer/index](http://www.smc.edu/users/bhkrondorfer/index)), they have also been central for centuries to the cultures in which we are embedded.

Each of the objects emerging from our collaboration is the result of the circumstances of our work. Since we do not live in the same region and can see each other only a few times during the year, each art object, each "witness," has its own special genesis within our dialogical relation. One of our books, for example, is small enough that we have sent it back and forth through the mail. It is called "Heimat." It is constructed from handmade paper that contains pieces of European maps and lithographed family pictures. In "Heimat," we look at our identities through the lens of a most intimate part of our lives, our different "German" homes. Uneasy about the term "Heimat" (home; homeland) we have tried to wrestle with the worlds that this term evokes, often through juxtaposing conflicting bits of memories, ideas, quotes and claims. The book has a diary-quality; it unfolds page-by-page through concise, sometimes stream-of-consciousness entries. The book is bound in yellow leather, following a German medieval binding style, thus connecting our personal re-imaginings to a larger cultural history.

Another book was shaped from materials which emerged from our parents' family documents. Some of these documents were already in our possession, others were contributed by family members. "Obituaries/Nachrufe" is a book-object that most explicitly links the past to the present, forming a dynamic continuum between our respective stories and our current Jewish/German relationship. In this work, we call upon the memories of our unknown grandfathers. We had each one grandfather who died before we were born: on Björn's side, a Wehrmacht officer who died of cancer during the war; on Karen's side, a Berlin musician who died a year after the war from the effects of his camp experiences. As the grandfathers' personae unfold through the obituary materials, two different sides of German society come into focus through intimate and public remembrances. The aesthetic vocabulary in "Obituaries/Nachrufe" relies on light and relatively small materials, a collapsible structure that people are permitted to move and manipulate. Transparent plexiglass panels can be moved so that the fragmented obituary stories can be layered and differently combined, with the result that surprising synchronicities and non-linear chronologies emerge. There is not only one story to tell.

Our choice of materials (handmade paper, plexiglass, leather, hair, plastic, colored wire threads, rusted steel, lithographs, etc.) is based on blending contemporary sensibilities with cultural histories. We find ourselves choosing combinations which juxtapose the contemporary with the feel of the old. In a piece called "Who Am I In Your Presence/Wer bin ich in deiner Gegenwart?," our first work, we placed a scratched mirror into a strong, rusting

steel frame, with one plexiglass panel hanging on each side. Those panels showed the profile of our faces. Behind the mirror, a map of Europe reveals itself through the scratched surface; symbolic markers on the map indicate the geographical locations of the various roots of our respective families.

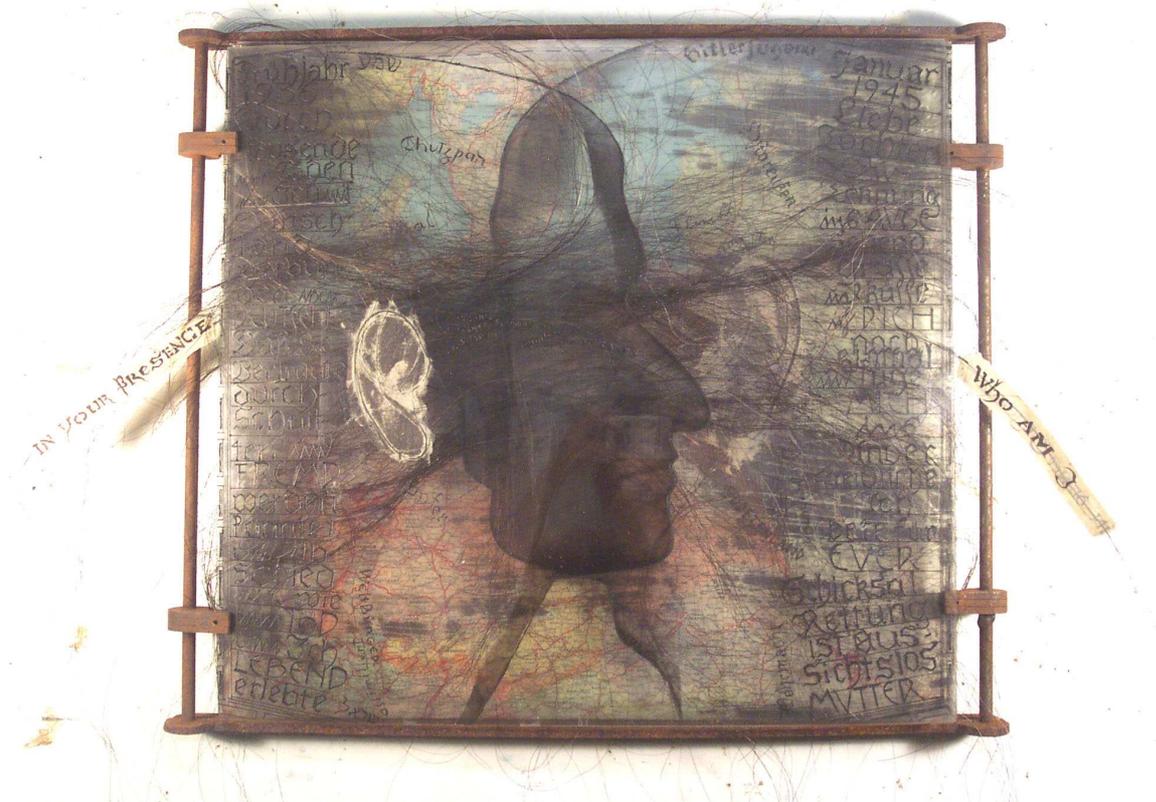
As our family backgrounds unfold in these works, they maintain their separate characteristics. Yet, the integration of two different stories into a unified visual art piece produces a blending and morphing effect. The structure of "Who Am I In Your Presence/Wer bin ich in deiner Gegenwart?" facilitates thus a simultaneous merging and separateness, which can be manipulated by the viewer through moving the plexiglass panels. The blending and crossing over of the visual is, in actuality, a reflection of our own dialogue: We have taken the risk to listen to each other carefully, moving beyond the inherited demarcations of victim and perpetrator. There is no longer a fixed and predetermined position from which we speak.

At times, the process of materializing our conversations, especially when they touch sore spots in our Jewish/German dialogue, help us to detach ourselves emotionally when needed. By stepping back, we are able to negotiate differences through the artistic choices we've made; we re-embrace the issues aesthetically and intellectually. By looking at the art-object--our materialized "witness"--, our conversation seems to look back at us, as if asking whether we have accomplished the level of honesty we are striving for. A topic may suddenly be accessible that has previously fallen through the cracks of interpersonal tension. Hence, the artistic-visual process can act as a mediator and facilitator.

There is a particular advantage for to work in the United States, far away from the pressures of our families and the dependence of our respective cultures. It is as if this "neutral" place allows us to meet as equals. Geographic location, we have learned, can open and strengthen the process of difficult dialogues.

Lastly, sharing our work with the public is important to our collaboration. We are still experimenting with what works best when inviting the public into our heart-to-heart, creative space. So far we have had three exhibits in the US (Jewish Community Center Gallery, Indianapolis; Indianapolis Art Center; Soho20 Chelsea Gallery, New York City) and one in Germany (Deutsch-Amerikanisches Institut, Heidelberg). Of those shows, the Heidelberg exhibit may have been the most vibrant and productive perhaps because so much of our artistic encounter is rooted in European culture. For that reason, we are currently focusing on bringing our work back to Germany.

The deeper we enter the dialogue process, the more we become aware that our initial questions may remain unanswered--at least in our generation. How do we talk to each other as two contemporary Germans from a Jewish and non-Jewish background? It is perhaps the nature of engaging our two sides in each other's presence that provides a haunted, unresolved space between us. It may be prudent to view our dialogue not as a place to find solutions but as a forum where cultural secrets can be exchanged, personal memories appreciated, the past accounted for, and the presence re-imagined.



A WOMAN IN BERLIN

by Anonymous  
Ed. Virago, 0870 1557222

Book review by Cressida Connolly in: Arts Telegraph, July 2, 2005

In Vienna there is a statue of a Second World War Russian soldier (reputedly made from melted-down busts of Hitler), known locally as the monument to the unknown rapist. This grim humour would have been all too familiar to the anonymous author of *A Woman in Berlin*. In a diary running from April 20 to June 16, 1945, she and almost every woman she knows are repeatedly raped by the Russian servicemen flooding into the city.

The first time it happens is the worst. Dragged from the basement she and her neighbours have been using as an air-raid shelter, she screams for help, only to hear her familiars barricading the door behind her. Their betrayal seems even more brutal than the Russian's attack.

Such an account is one of the many in a book that caused outrage when it was originally published in Germany at the end of the 1950s. It was accused of 'beschmirching the honour of German women'. As Antony Beevor says in his introduction, rape and sexual collaboration for survival were taboo subjects in that post-war period. They continue to make very troubling reading. This is a book that does not go away when you've read the final page. The author of the diary was apparently a journalist of some accomplishment, and highly educated. When peace is established, she allows herself to read for the first time in months: "Rilke, Goethe, Hauptmann. The fact that they, too, are German is some consolation, that they were of our kind." There is precious little else to find comfort in. Homeless, jobless, without family, the author's future looks as bleak as her city's.

Having spent 300 pages in her company – pages that detail what are presumably the most traumatic days of her life – I longed to know a little about the rest of author's life. But neither the introduction nor an afterword by the German editor allow any such novelistic resolution. She may of may have not been called Marta Hiller, and after the controversy that surrounded the diary's original publication (in England and America in the mid-1950s) it appears that she refused to allow it to be reprinted. The current, newly translated edition has been made possible by her recent death.

Her identity is, of course, much less important than her remarkable account of Berlin's final days of war, which will be a gift of the utmost value to historians and students of the period. Her journalistic training is evident from her economy of language and eye for the telling detail, but her extraordinary lack of self-pity is all her own.

"Were we brave?" she asks herself. "Most people would probably say we were...In any case, I have to rethink my ideas about heroism and courage under fire. It's only half as bad as I thought. Once you've taken the first step, you just keep charging ahead."[]

This diary tarnishes the cherished ideal of people clubbing chummily together in wartime: here it is every man for himself.[] Without electricity, running water, transport and shops, the people are gradually returning to the habits of cavemen, notes the diarist. Sensibilities are coarsened. But experience remains shared even while provisions are squirrelled away. Rape, a lonely experience in civilian life, is collective in war: the women overcome its horror by speaking openly about it, making crude jokes that would have been unthinkable in bourgeois circles before the war.

*A Woman in Berlin* ends abruptly. Peace comes to the city and a semblance of order returns. The diarist's lover returns from the front, but it looks unlikely that the two will resolve the differences that have grown up between them. Echoing a heroine from Chekhov, she concludes: 'I have so much to do...I have to mop up the rain puddles in the apartment. The roof is leaking again...I don't have feeding time for my soul...I only know that I want to survive.'

German edition: *Eine Frau in Berlin*

Eichborn Verlag AG  
Frankfurt am Main 2003

Dutch edition: *Een vrouw in Berlijn*

Cossee, Amsterdam 2004

Storytelling in Conflicts or Personal Story-Collective Pain  
The Dan Bar-On Dialogue Training

From silence to dialogue: developing skills in practice and research across ethnic, religious and cultural dividing lines. Training programme in Hamburg with Dan Bar-On, Ben Gurion University, Israel

A dialogue training programme has been established for English speaking practitioners in helping professions, such as teachers, academics, social and community workers, therapists or nurses. Participants will learn how to use personal stories to bring people into dialogue - across ethnic, religious and cultural dividing lines.

They will discuss research methods to enable them to reflect on their work and to generalize from it. This learning process aims at creating a cadre of practitioners and researchers in Europe. The training is based on thirty years of experience of Prof. Dan Bar-On with his students in the German-Jewish aftermath of the Holocaust and in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and on his work with the group 'To Reflect and Trust' that included practitioners from the United States, Germany, Israel, Palestine, Northern Ireland and South Africa. This will be a three-year programme with bi-annual seminars of five days each at the Koerber Foundation in Hamburg.

#### Participation

The seminars are open to applicants who speak and write English fluently. Qualifications should include a Bachelor's Degree (BA) and applicants should have at least five years' experience in their respective professional field. The application deadline is 15 November 2005. Participants will be chosen by Prof. Bar-On in cooperation with the Koerber Foundation by 15 December; there will also be a waiting list. Payments must be made by 31 December 2005. Thereafter, participants will receive a detailed curriculum and a reading list.

The first seminar is set for 28 January – 3 February 2006, the second for 18-23 June 2006 (the third year February and June 2008). At the end of the three-year training program, participants will receive a certificate as "Facilitator of Dialogue in Conflict Situations", issued by the Koerber Foundation and signed by Prof. Bar-On.

Those who wish to register for these seminars should commit themselves to participate for at least two full years. Participants will pay a fee of € 950 per seminar (five days), in addition to their travel, meals and lodging expenses, which amounts to a total of € 1,900 per annum. Those who pay for a whole year in advance (i.e. two seminars), will benefit from a reduction of € 50. Participants who register for the initial two years at once will pay a total of € 3,500 (instead of € 3,800). Those registering for the whole three-year seminar period will pay € 5,000 (instead of € 5,700).

Payments must be made latest by 31 December 2005 respectively a month in advance of each seminar. Participants who cancel will be reimbursed 50 percent for each seminar booked.

Special subsidies for single seminars within the period will be provided for potential participants from less privileged areas who qualify for this seminar but cannot pay for it, or

whom the Koerber Foundation has an interest in subsidizing. Those who wish to apply for a subsidy should provide information that shows how the seminar will enhance their skills and how it will affect their work in their respective fields.

If you are interested in applying for this training program please contact the Koerber Foundation for more information. Applications should include a CV and a record of work experience (at least 5 years' experience required). State your interest in this training program and where you could apply it in future. Two recommendations from known experts from your fields in your own country are required. It is recommended that people from conflict zones should come with a partner from the other side of their divide, which will be helpful in the subsequent implementation process.

Koerber Stiftung  
Dan Bar-On Dialogue Training  
Kehrwieder 12  
20457 Hamburg  
Germany  
Tel. + 49. 40. 80 81 92. 161  
Fax + 49. 40. 80 81 92. 303  
e-mail: [bar-on-training@koerber-stiftung.de](mailto:bar-on-training@koerber-stiftung.de)  
[www.koerber-stiftung.de/bar-on-training](http://www.koerber-stiftung.de/bar-on-training)

Next issue: April 2006  
Reactions and articles till the 1<sup>st</sup> of March, 2006