

INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN

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INTRODUCTION

It is my sad duty to open this issue of the International Bulletin with the announcement of the passing away of two of our readers, Eileen O'Hara and Jürgen Schubert.

Martin Parsons sent me some lines on the new organisation "Beyond Conflict". Its aim is to support people with mental and psychological help who have fled from war ridden countries.

Dorothee Schmitz-Köster did research on the life story of Klaus B. and has published in her book "Raubkind" (Stolen Child) her journey to find his roots. I found some commentaries in the internet and like to quote them here, and I added some personal remarks on this interesting book.

Infrid Meyer-Legrand has published a book on the war grandchildren titled "Kriegsenkel". I found two interesting commentaries on her book in the internet, one written by Markus Blaschka and another one written by Manfred Neuhoff – I have made a summarizing translation of Neuhoff's text.

Henny Grahm of the Danish War Children Organisation sent me an impression of an event having taken place at January 24, 2019, at the Norwegian Parliament where representatives of DWC watched the film "Wars never end" together with the film narrator Liv Ullmann.

I came across an interview with Rien whose father had been forced to work in Germany during the war and who came back home traumatised by his experiences. Only after his death, Rien got to know this. From that moment on he could face the past and cope with it.

In the Newsletter of Aktion Sühnezeichen und Friedesdienste I found an interesting text written by Wilma van Hengel which gives us an impression of the motives that made her join ASF and commit herself to work in a Dutch project.

Recognition is the name of our Organisation of collaborators' children in the Netherlands. I wrote some lines on the importance of recognition to everyone who, in whatever circumstances, is confronted with denial of his/her dignity as a human being.

Baard Borge sent me a text about the gesture of the Norwegian government to make apologies to the girls and women who had been victims of the anger of the mob, just after the war, because they had had a (love) relationship with a German soldier.

The situation in the Netherlands during and after the war is very similar to that of Norway. But until now the Dutch government has kept silence on this topic. The board of our organisation is now in discussion with some politicians.

A couple of readers changed their email address without sending me their new account; it is a pity that I lost contact with them. So, please, inform me of any change in your address, I like to stay in contact with you. Commentaries and new articles are very welcome to me! The deadline for the next issue in autumn is October 15, 2019

Warm regards,
Gonda Scheffel-Baars

IN MEMORY OF EILEEN O'HARA

I met Eileen O'Hara at a congress in Reading. She showed interest in the International Bulletin and asked me to put her name on the mailing list. She received the issues for a couple of years.

In November I received a mail from her son, which I quote here:
"Good morning.

I received a re-directed bulletin, this morning, which was addressed to my mother, Mrs. Eileen O'Hara. [address]

Sadly, my mother passed away, on 13th March of this year. I know that her experiences as an evacuee, during the second world war, and her work with the Evacuees Association, meant a great deal to her, and I would like to thank you, on behalf of her five children, for helping to provide our mother with such an enriching experience.

I wish you all the best in the future with the great work that you do.

Sincerely,
Rob O'Hara (son of Eileen O'Hara)

IN MEMORY OF JÜRGEN SCHUBERT

by Anatoly Rothe

Dear Russian children and friends

We have the sad news that our club member Jürgen Schubert died last night.

Soon at the beginning of the website a few years ago, he asked if he could send me his book "Mundtot". I read it and was upset. His childhood and adolescence in a West German Catholic children's home with psychotropic drugs for restraint at an age in which other children were free to move and let off steam, beatings as a means of education, forced labor without decent pay, that was unimaginable to me.

I had a completely carefree childhood and youth in the East, was rather encouraged. I was deeply affected by his fate. Luckily, he found a sensible man who made sure he could escape this ordeal.

His family did not want to know about him until the end.

I vowed to do everything I could for Jürgen. No one could change that, of course, but our different lives gave me the opportunity to make a difference.

One day my phone rang, Jürgen was on it and told me that he and his friends are standing at the Brandenburg Gate and want to hand over a petition regarding the compensation to the Bundestag. I left everything lying and witnessed the delivery.

I met Jürgen again the next day and I showed him the memorial in Berlin-Treptow. We talked for a long time.

Together with his friend Thomas Hagen we began to think about what can be done for Jürgen. And so the search pages and the description of his fate arose on our website. Also, the language versions were created in this way by people who wanted to help him.

We kept in contact, discussed developments. Especially, it was always about the question of how to find his father. From this nothing has become in his lifetime.

Since he went to a hospice a few weeks ago, we talked on the phone every day. It was felt that his strength came to an end.

Jürgen was always a friendly person who did not let himself be oppressed by his difficult life. We lose a friend we will not forget.

Take care - Jürgen!

Anatoly Rothe

20 August, 2018

BEYOND CONFLICT

Dear Friends,

A couple of years ago, after a lecture I had delivered at Cumberland Lodge in Windsor Great Park, I was approached by Edna Fernandes, a Reuters Correspondent, and asked if i would be interested in establishing a new charity with her. After a couple of initial meetings to work out strategies, '*Beyond conflict*' was born.

We then spent the next few weeks creating a team of Trustees and Advisors from various professions and backgrounds to make sure that we would be well supported and well informed.

Beyond conflict is the British registered mental health charity for post-conflict zones. Our mission is to tackle the unseen psychological suffering of victims of war, terrorism and displacement. While many governments and Non-Government Organisations are committed to easing the *physical* impact on civilians, there is an urgent need to address the severe *psychological* damage. We aim to offer free mental health support to civilians, and train frontline workers in Iraq on how to identify and treat trauma. Research has shown that war-related trauma in children transcends three generations, so it is really important that we tackle the problems at the source.

Our work begins in Iraq where decades of war and terrorism have wreaked grave damage on the mental health of millions. Our first project will be centred on the sacred city of Najaf, working with our world renowned and respected partner on the ground, the Al Khoei Foundation's widows and orphan's charity. AKF has long worked in the field of interfaith co-operation and understanding around the world and is a highly respected organisation.

Beyond conflict and AKF will work together to deliver on site training to frontline Iraqi workers in Najaf: medical professionals, nurses, NGO staff. We will send over trained psychiatrists and trainers from the Royal College of Psychiatrists in London to deliver four weeks of training per annum in Najaf. In between there will be online supervision. Our training is based on the same model used by the International Medical Corps, as recommended by our advisor Professor Mohammed Al Uzri, who was an early pioneer of this trainings model.

We believe this work is urgent.

We have had great support from many professionals, including the Iraqi Ambassador in London and the Royal College of Psychiatrists and together we hope to begin helping Iraq's most vulnerable civilians. Monies raised by our charity will go towards starting a pilot scheme in Najaf which we will then roll out to other cities, and indeed other countries, with the AFK over the years.

Right now, we need more people to be aware of the problems facing the inhabitants in this war zone. Something which many of you can empathise with on a personal level. If you would like more information and see the background of our team of Trustees, please visit our webpage: beyond-conflict.co.uk

Martin
(Prof. Martin Parsons. PhD.FRHistS. Beyond Conflict Co-founder)

HURTED

I want to get the war out of my mind,
by watching the waving of the reed,
the ditch in which the ruffles flee,
but I can't blot it out completely.
I surrender to intense enjoying
this year's first sunshine day,
the small buds of the hazelnut tree
and the thin air dropping some drips of rain,
the layer of white frost on the fodder beet leaves.
Will I ever recover from what the war let me go through?
Milk white hazes rise up from the soil
and blow their coolness into my mouth:
o heart, that still hasn't found rest,,
please be one day, this day, a place of joy.
Will I ever recover from what the war let me go through?

(Summarized poem of Henk Fedder)

[Wars Don't End](#)

[24. januar kl. 12.12](#)

This week we screened [Wars Don't End](#) (De Uønskede) at the Norwegian Parliament in Oslo ([Stortinget](#)) in co-operation with [UNICEF](#) and [SV - Sosialistisk Venstreparti](#).

The Film narrator [Liv Ullmann](#) was with us, showing heartfelt commitment for the topic introducing the film together with director [Dheeraj Akolkar](#).

The screening was followed by a panel discussion on the topic of Children Born of War.

In the panel was former prime minister Kjell Magne Bondevik, now working at [The Oslo Center](#), Professor Ingvill Mochmann with the international research network for Children Born of War (CBOW)/[Peace Research Institute Oslo \(PRIO\)](#), Ivar Stokkereiit - Head of Policy and International Law for the Norwegian Red Cross ([Røde Kors](#)), Karin Andersen - Parliament member for SV, and human rights activist and leader for [Selvhjelp for innvandrere og flyktninger \(SEIF\)](#) Gerd Fleischer who also has a central part in the film. Moderator was [Kim Noguera Gabrielli](#), assistant Executive Director at [UNICEF](#) Norway.

Among other guests was representatives from [Norsk filminstitut](#), [Stiftelsen Fritt Ord](#), [Rådet for psykisk helse](#), [ExtraStiftelsen](#), [Kulturtanken](#), [HL-senteret](#), [Norges institusjon for menneskerettigheter](#), the [Goethe-Institut](#), [Flyktninghjelpen](#), Krigsbarnforbundet Lebensborn, [Universitetet i Oslo \(UiO\)](#) [Universitetet i Bergen](#), [Westerdals](#) and [Tysklands ambassade i Oslo - Deutsche Botschaft Oslo](#) among others.

Thank you to all who listened and contributed. We are honored and grateful to have had the opportunity to take this significant step in the outreach of 'Wars Don't End', in order to add our efforts towards the protection of children born of war all over the world.

DOROTHEE SCHMITZ-KÖSTER: RAUBKIND;

Von der SS nach Deutschland verschleppt.
ed. Herder Verlag, ISBN 978-3-451-38389-9

Inspired by a book about the SS family Schäfer, who had adopted as a foster child a boy, Klaus B., from a Lebensborn home as, the journalist Dorothee Schmitz-Köster starts the search to uncover the fate of this child. Klaus B., now 75 years old, has long resigned himself to knowing nothing about his early childhood before the Schäfers era. The author, who is always called "the journalist" in the book, finds out, piece by piece, through searches in archives, with the help of the International Tracing Service and the Polish Red Cross, that Klaus B. was born in Poland in 1943 as Czeslaw B. Moreover that thousands of other Polish children have been selected by "Nazi racial specialists", have been taken away from their family and deported to Germany for "Germanization" in a Lebensborn home. From there Klaus met the loyal Schäfer couple who give him a new identity. In addition to disclosing these facts, Schmitz-Köster explores the question of how Klaus B., as well as the other victims, cope with the late discovery of the truth. She gently shows how Klaus B. mixes rejection, anger, shyness, fear with joy, curiosity and openness, and how, ultimately, the reality and the certainty of wanting to continue his life despite his Polish roots, prevail. Interesting and worth reading!
(Book review from the Borromaeusverein)

Klaus B. is in his mid-seventies when his decent life gets out of hand. He learns that he was a victim of a crime as a child. He himself cannot remember anything. With the help of a journalist, Klaus B. finds out that he was born in Poland. That he was robbed of his family in 1943, presumably by the SS. That his name and his ancestry were forged with the help of "Lebensborn", which then housed him with lineal loyal German foster parents. Klaus B. and the journalist learn: this fate was shared by tens of thousands of children from Poland and other Eastern European countries. They were selected by National Socialist "racial specialists", snatched from their families and deported to Germany for "Germanization". To date, many "robbery children" know nothing of their origin. Klaus B. sets out to find his roots and finds a family that has been missing him for seven decades.

It all starts with a call from a journalist who calls Klaus B. by telephone to say that he came to his family in 1944 as a foster child, from the Lebensborn home in Bad Polzin. Could he remember this home? Did he know why he had been there? She would like to talk to him about that. They occupy themselves with the Lebensborn, also with the home in Bad Polzin. He himself learned only at the age of nineteen that the family had taken him from a Lebensborn home. That was all. No word about why he was in this home and what Lebensborn means.

Klaus B. is torn between curiosity and the desire to let the past rest. Although in recent years he has repeatedly wondered if the information that the stepparents gave him was really right. Why does not he have a birth certificate, for example? As a young lad, he had only one refugee card, that was all. And at some point the ID card was gone, misplaced, lost, in any case he could no longer find it. It may be that the document was really lost on the run, as his stepmother said. His step-siblings Inge, Uschi, Volker and Gero, however, have birth certificates...

After the invasion of the Wehrmacht and the occupation of Poland, the new rulers destroyed the Polish state and its structures. Politicians and military men, lawyers, clerics and scientists - classified as opponents - were chased away, persecuted, murdered. In October 1939, the German occupiers divided the country into two parts and Hitler announced a "hard national struggle" to "cleanse the old and new territory of the Jews, Polacken and rabble." In this context of discrimination, deprivation of liberty and expropriation, of violence, terror and murder on the one hand and "clean" bureaucracy on the other, there was the kidnapping of Polish children. It was also about "racial politics" - but with the girls and boys who came into the hands of the National Socialists, one had something else. Heinrich Himmler propagated the plan, without mincing words. It will bring out children of "good blood" in the east from their environment, if necessary, "rob and steal" and bring to Germany. After examining all available sources, the historian Isabel Heinemann expects 20,000 abducted girls and boys. To date, this is the most resilient number. In spite of everything, Poland remains the country that has lost the most children to the Nazi Germanization program. Known are child robbery and kidnapping to Germany but also from Slovenia and Czechoslovakia. To the recognition as a victim of the national socialists and for a compensation for the injustice suffered in the past years repeatedly so-called robbery children in court - so far unsuccessfully.

The story of Klaus B. is representative for the fate of many other children.

(Book review on Bücher.de)

A couple of personal remarks

In most books about the search of a woman or man to find his/her roots, it is the man or woman himself/herself who starts the journey. Very often, they planned to find out their real identity, but had to collect courage to begin the research, knowing that the results of their research could be a deception if the aim could not be reached or if the actual story could be hard to bear and understand. In this book, *Raubkind*, it is the journalist Dorothee who starts the journey and that is an atypical approach. In my opinion, it explains the zigzagging of Klaus between the wish to know and the wish to stop, his emotions that are less intense than those of the family members who did know that he had been stolen and longed for him for years and years, whereas he was not aware of his real origins.

At some moment Dorothee is so involved in her research that she in fact wants to push Klaus who is in her opinion too hesitating. When she recognizes in her attitude towards the issue at stake that, more or less, she has made Klaus' research her own, she corrects herself. I appreciate her honesty very much, since it is known in the circles of historians how easily one can annex another one's story.

GSB

INGRID MEYER-LEGRAND: DIE KRAFT DER KRIEGSENKEL (THE POWER OF WAR GRANDCHILDREN)

by Markus Blashka, November 14, 2017

You know that I see myself as a "war grandson" and often work with other war grandchildren in coaching [...]. There are many books on the subject, but one thing particularly impressed me: "The power of warlords" by Ingrid Meyer-Legrand.



Thanks to Facebook, you can now contact some authors quickly. In fact, through a war-grandson group on Facebook, I quickly got in touch with Ingrid. Thus, we are friends for some time on Facebook. But you know how it is with Facebook friends, somehow the personal impression is missing. Therefore, I was very happy that Ingrid finally arrived - after several appointments in Berlin and Hamburg - for a reading in Munich. A must for me. Ingrid was initially amazed at the low number of participants (around 20). There are always about 100 readers in Berlin or Hamburg. But then it was a quite personal evening with many examples from our circle of participants. In the course of the evening, Ingrid presented several key topics that we warriors often struggle with but from which we can also develop our strengths:

- A common belief is that relationships always require work and performance from us. We do not deserve to be loved as we are, but always have to do something in relationships. This often causes us to take great care of other people, almost always in helping professions (or interests). The trap is here to take care of ourselves enough.
- We were never really son or daughter, but now we are finally allowed to be adults. Often we have experienced problematic identification with the parents, that is, out of loyalty and because we felt the neediness of our parents, reversed the roles with our parents and cared for the parents. But then we were not allowed to be a child - a child is protected by the parents. It is probably a topic that affects many war grandsons with parents in old age. Since my parents died early, I know the topic only from clients.
- In general, we are often concerned with our roles in life. Ingrid emphasizes that we can and should consciously accept and live our roles. Sometimes that's a challenge, we found readers. But it is also an important point.
- We all pay too much attention to how others are doing and care too much about the others. We do not pay enough attention to ourselves and spend too much emotionally / mentally / physically. With the parents, we can at least demand that they be friendly to us, if we take care of them even in old age. In other relationships, we should at least pay attention to a fair relationship of give and take, that is to say, is there enough of the other person's return for me?
- Often we fight warlike grandchildren with disorientation and believe that we are not capable of a relationship at all. However, we are not incapable of relationship but may recognize that relationships can take many forms. We often have a very good circle of friends. And even in intimate relationships, it does not always have to be the classic marriage in which one lives together under one roof. It is also okay, for example, to live apart in relationships and to see that as an advantage. So everyone has a retreat option.
- We often have a biography with several professions and tens of trainings. From the point of view of Ingrid we can finally arrive at work and in life and do not have to be on the run anymore. It is precisely this point that has appealed to me very much: Should I show you my list of training courses?
- Other than perhaps our parents' belief that it's always dangerous in the front row (at war), let's just go to the front row, show ourselves and claim our place in life.
- We can expect the world more, the way we are.

Just the last point I found very enriching. And so I went home satisfied and happy. More about Ingrid and her method "My Life Storyboard" can be found on her homepage.

The book " The power of war grandsons. [How wardens recognize and use their biographical heritage today](#) " with 254 pages has been published in 2016 by Europa Verlag, ISBN: 978-3-95890-008-0. Ingrid Meyer-Legrand works as a coach, supervisor and therapist in her own practice in Berlin and Brussels with executives from business and public service.

THOUGHTS AND INSIGHTS I ACCEPTED AS TRUE

Bookreview from Manfred Neuhoff in the internet

When I worked on my biography in the context of my study to be a coach in research for and writing of biographies, I came across the book of Mrs Meyer-Legrand. I recognized a lot of themes and issues (I am a man, born in 1951) that inspired me to look anew to my story of life. The author succeeds in explaining complex themes in clear and understandable words. I like to give some examples.

The author describes the attitude of many war grandchildren as a process of starting again and again new activities while, in the same time, trying to slow them down. She presents the reluctance of the parents to speak about the past, even if it could be done through watching a movie or documentation together with the family members. Manfred recognizes in his hyper sensibility to all kinds of existential problems the drive to help others and forget his own interests. In contrast, many war grandchildren do their utmost to fulfill their own wishes, because they could not do so in their childhood and youth. Even when they are successful in their job and feel satisfaction about what they reached, there too is the feeling that this success does not actually belong to him/her, because of the question: is this really what I want or do I, in fact, fulfill the wish of others? He sees that the restlessness of his father, his many changes of job and places of residence, influenced his life in childhood and youth and undermined his self confidence; although his friends never recognize this 'weakness' in him. The relationship with his parents and that of his parents with him are not strong. He recognizes how he took care of his parents (parentification) and struggled with their unspoken wish: please stay with us. There is a drive to do things perfectly, especially when it has to do with emotions. Making up the balance of one's life, there is still insecurity, although one sees clearly that the success is true and worth to be enjoyed. It is as if one has always to prove that one's life is OK.

It is important that the author describes many positive effects on the lives of war grandchildren. She identifies the strength to start new activities, the trait of character of never giving in, the wish to have harmonious relationships with other human beings and the conviction that the macho type of man is outdated. There is the ability of coping with crises, a special talent to overcome problems. Manfred draws our attention to the political opinion of the author that for remaining democratic the democratic society needs to be build up by people who developed their sensibility and have an open eye for their strength and weaknesses.

My overall impression of this book is that the author gives the war grandchildren a helping hand by describing the most important themes she found in their meetings with a couple of them, illustrating her statements with examples from the life stories of her interview partners. At least, this book gave me more insight in my own thoughts and feelings and inspired me to look deeper in my own story of life. I surely can recommend this book, it is an addition to other books on this topic which appeared during the last few years.

Other books about Kriegsenkel:

Michael Schneider: Nebelkinder: Kriegsenkel treten aus dem Traumaschatten der Geschichte (2015)

Mark Wolynn: Dieser Schmerz ist nicht meiner: Wie wir uns mit dem seelische Erbe unserer Familie aussöhnen-

Jens-Michael Wüstel: Traumakinder: Warum der Krieg immer noch in unseren Seele wirkt.

Matthias Lore: Das Erbe der Kreigsenkel: Was das Schweigen der Eltern mit uns macht

Katharina Drexler: Ererbte Wunden heilen: Therapie der transgenerationalen Traumatisierung (Leben lernen)

Sabine Bode: Die Erben der vergessenen Generation

APOLOGIES

On October 17 last year the Norwegian government, with Erna Solberg (cons.) at the forefront, gave the so-called "German girls" an excuse for the way they were treated after World War II. 'Thousands of women then called "German hussies" were detained, deprived of nationality and sent out of the country. Without law and judgment. The Norwegian authorities treated them in an unworthy manner. The rule of law failed them', said Erna Solberg.

In her official excuse for the treatment of thousands of women and young girls, the prime minister said that Norway following the liberation on May 8 in 1945 broke with basic principles of the rule of law.

'Our conclusion is that the Norwegian authorities violated the rule of law of the state of law that no citizen should be punished without judgment or sentenced without law', said Mrs. Solberg.

She admitted that it had taken a long time to get the excuse in place.

'The relationship that triggered the unfair treatment may have been a random flirt, sometimes just rumors that it should have happened. Other women met the love of their life and married, and many Norwegian-German couples had children together', said Solberg.

The excuse came after an investigation made by a research center, and was part of the celebration of the UN's human rights declaration which is now 70 years old. The excuse applies to documented abuse committed by the Norwegian authorities.

No one knows exactly how many Norwegian women had a relationship with a German soldier, but the number has been estimated to be between 40,000 and 50,000. There are between 10,000 and 12,000 Norwegian-German children registered in the German «Lebensborn» archive in Oslo.

Baard Borge

THE NETHERLANDS: will the government follow the Norwegian way?

In two meetings with representatives of the Department of Public Health, Welfare and Sport, members of the board of Herkenning asked the Dutch government to follow the Norwegian example and make apologies towards the 'German hussies' and/or their children. The government has the intention to draw attention to the topic, especially by means of educational projects, and will look for an occasion to make apologies in a more or less official context. This will not be a ceremony at the Commemoration Day, May 4, because that would generate many negative reactions. My impression is, that the wish to do justice to those women and girls is present, but, as usual, politicians are reluctant to speak in honesty on controversial issues, afraid of negative reactions in the social media, the papers and in society as a whole. Unlike in Norway where the public opinion reacted in a positive way on Solberg's declaration as Beard Borge answered me on my question, the Dutch Department received already negative reactions.

THE WAR: I HAVE NOT EXPERIENCED IT, BUT.....

My Dutch grandfather and grandmother lived in Rotterdam South in 1940, with their 9 children. The eldest ones were about twenty years old, the youngest babies. Grandpa worked in the port and my father also went to work in the port as a young boy: as a ship carpenter. The first years of the war they have come through reasonably intact, but in 1943 all boys who were still living at home and who had a certain age were called to work in Germany. Many went into hiding, but my father did not. He was engaged at the time and his fiancé was terminally ill. She did not want him to become 'untraceable'. Furthermore, I think, that it did not fit his conscience to go into hiding. He was too righteous for resistance, obediently also to governments. He went to Germany as a carpenter for the well being of his fiancé. She died when he was in Germany.

There was a lot of work for a carpenter. All the bombing of the Allied forces caused a great deal of damage, especially to the roofs of houses, due to fire bombs. My father has been in several places, but till the end of the war in Braunschweig. There he worked in the Landes Krankenhaus (which still exists in 2019).

My German grandfather and grandmother lived in Üfingen in 1940, a small town near Braunschweig. For that time quite special: my grandfather and grandmother were divorced. Grandma took care of the five children only. She was a maid for a gentleman farmer. As a single mother, Grandma had little to do, as we would say now. There was no money for shoes, for example. The little ones went up barefoot on the land, harvested a quantity before school and then quickly to school! What was Grandma happy with Hitler! He provided clothes, shoes and entertainment. But when Bibles were forbidden, it was over for grandma. Translated into Dutch, she always said: no Bible in the house, is not fluff.

At the age of 12, my mother came to Braunschweig - again a little less to feed, at a butcher in the household. When a friend told me that she earned a lot in the hospital, my mother changed jobs and became a sister.

You guessed it? At the Landes Krankenhaus in Braunschweig. The whole war she was a sister there at the diphtheria department. That was pretty quiet, because everything was so contagious that nobody dared to come there. There was also enough to eat, because the patients could not swallow. So there were few controls. A number of Dutch boys, despite the scarcity, still got food and so my father and mother fell in love and married on May 8, 1945. As in love, they would never have been allowed to come to the Netherlands together, as a couple, but she have had a lot of checks to see if my mother was not a spy.

I have not experienced the war, but the war has always played a role in our family. The German girl who came with my father, Jan, was really not treated kindly. Especially not in the starved Rotterdam. That girl learned fluently in six weeks in Rotterdam, not to be noticed on the streets. That girl, as an elderly person, often did not dare to say anything on the street, afraid that her tongue would cause unrest.

At school I learned how bad the Germans have been and then I always kept my head down slightly. I knew very early that not 'all' Germans were like that, but I did not dare say it. Only in my high school time did I dare to say things.

How special is it that I can now guide ASF-ers at work when they are in Rotterdam for a year!? They have not experienced the war and usually there is no 'but'. Yet they are here and that for me keeps the memory alive to my father and mother and their stories. Especially to tell them! '

Wilma van Hengel, project partner at the Oude Noorden District Pastor in Rotterdam

SEARCH FOR AN IDENTITY

By Rien Timmermans

Rien lives in an old part of the town of Vught, in the south of the Netherlands; alone since his divorce. Rien was born after the war, a baby boomer, as the only son in a rather large Roman Catholic family from the town of Oss (in the same province as Vught). The relationship with his father was very important to him, but that relationship was not an easy one. Not until many years after his father's death did it become clear to him that his father was a war victim, as he had been a forced labourer in Germany for a long time. This insight changed his view of his father and had a positive effect on his own development. Participating in two weekend meetings of Kombi has helped him to come to grips with his feelings and thoughts.

'On the face of it, the war played no role in our family whatsoever. Just like in other families we simply did not talk about the war. And if we did, it was in general terms like searching for food and taking shelter in case of air raids. It seemed as if the war had just passed by our family. I do remember the fear of a third world war. I especially remember the invasion of Hungary in 1956. I was really scared then. So actually nothing special. I was just a child of my time.'

His father was unemployed and went to Germany early in the autumn of 1940 and stayed there until mid-1944. Once every so many days he came home on leave. They never talked about his time as a forced labourer. Rien sometimes overheard something, but he knew better than to ask questions. Because his father suffered often from a pain in one of his feet, Rien gathered through talks with the family doctor that his father had wounded himself and saw to it that the wound kept festering. Evidently he had hoped that the Germans would have sent him back to Holland because of this wound.

Only when his father was in a foul mood, did he speak about the war. Then he would rail at those 'lousy Krauts' and those 'lousy Jews' – obviously he had been influenced by the German ideas of the time. When Rien stood up for the Jews, his father really let him have it. He was embittered by the war and probably was not a very strong personality anyhow.

Rien has five sisters. Four of them are older than Rien and one is younger. He was born in 1948. He often tried to talk with his mother about his father's behaviour and moods because he did not understand them. But his mother made a stand for her husband, always hushed up and said that Rien would understand things later. At the time, people were not used to reflecting and seeing a link between feelings and behaviour. His mother could not argue the matter, but unconsciously she probably understood,. She had known her husband before the war, had fallen in love with the man he was then and kept loving him, in spite of his moody fits of temper. In that way peace was kept at home, but the children could not express their emotions and be themselves. Rien felt frustrated and often fled the parental home.

His mother was caring and warm and embodied security, so Rien's frustration was not caused by her. 'She did not really cuddle us, but she often stroked us on the head or caressed us a bit. Actually, I felt well-loved.' Corporal punishment was not done at Rien's home. Mother made an appeal to the children's conscience, as a result of which they were so well-disciplined and well-adjusted that there was no need to punish. Mother was affectionate, father was not.

'When I was still a little kid, my father was to me a real hero. I still remember very well that sometimes I was allowed to come with him when he had to work somewhere. I remember me sitting in front and later behind him on his bicycle. Occasionally my father could be caring too. But already then I did not understand him and hated his unpredictability and his moody fits. I still knew, however, that he was fond of us, of me.'

When his father was not at home, the atmosphere was very pleasant. The radio was on, and they

sometimes joined in with the songs they heard. When father came home, however, the radio had to be turned off, the children had to keep quiet. The atmosphere was tense, threatening, as if a heavy blanket had been laid on them. Rien associated this with his father. 'He was the threat. He brought that nasty tension. I had to shut up. I had to be quiet. I was the one who, according to him, knew nothing: a 'snotty-nosed kid'. I felt belittled, humiliated. I had the feeling he held me in contempt. But I have never understood why. I did my best. I tried to measure up to his expectations, but did not succeed in getting his appreciation. Don't forget, I was his only son.'

Yet, his father was very glad when his son was born and he went to a number of pubs to celebrate it. In one way or another he must have become disappointed. Rien could not understand the reason and felt therefore uneasy. 'And that has actually become the story of my life: uncertainties, almost existential uncertainties.'

When Rien was about twelve his father had a serious accident. For some six weeks he was in a coma. This had an enormous impact on the family. At first, there was the fear that he would die, after that he had to rehabilitate for half a year. When his father came home, he had changed completely. Before, he had been energetic and strong; now, he was totally passive, quiet and withdrawn. Although he would start crying at the slightest pretence now, his fits and moodiness were still there.

While Rien was doing his military service and was spending a weekend with his girl friend, he received word that his father had died. He immediately went to the mortuary where his father was taken. 'I looked at him, and to my great surprise I didn't feel anything. Nothing at all. Only an icy chill.'

'I was always looking for explanations, because I did not understand the contradictions in myself and my feelings about myself. My father loved me – my father did not love me. It's clear to me now. But quite a different sort of clarity than what I'd been looking for. I used to be a person focused on reflections and thoughts. Now there is more harmony between my emotions and my rationality. I can accept the fact that there are things that will never be clear. I also accept myself the way I am.'

It is significant that only after I had been married for many years, I found out that I was homosexual. I really had no idea. I just did and felt what people expected me to do. School, training, work, marriage and a child. There was so few of these things that were really mine. I did not know where the other ended and where I began. But I have always tried to find out and I somehow felt that the relationship with my father played an important role in it. I think we were both ambivalent in relation to each other, and that only our annoyance, criticism and irritation became manifest. Reciprocally.' The discovery of his homosexuality brought about his divorce when his son was just ten. It was a difficult time.

Rien had no idea what profession he would choose and was employed in all sorts of jobs. Through working he noticed that people listened to him and appreciated him. He was taken seriously. That influenced his choice to study social work after finishing military service. He still enjoys this work that helped him also to look for answers to his existential questions.

During his work, he attended an informational meeting of the ICODO organisation. He saw a list on which was indicated who could be considered war victims. Among those listed were the people who had been forced to work for the Arbeitseinsatz in Germany. 'Bang! That hit me hard. By then, years after his death, I had formed an image of my father. But suddenly it appeared that everything I knew and thought about him would have to be changed. It gave me an enormous feeling of guilt. I am feeling the blow again now that I'm telling this. It hit me so hard. I just saw him as a negative, miserable man. There were quite a lot of things in my life that troubled me and I blamed my father for them. In my perception and analysis I still had them all hanging around his neck. They were an excuse for my own impotence and worries. Now I would have to reconsider my view of him. It was at the end of the '80s, twenty years after his death. I had judged him wrongly. I had never understood him.'

After the ICODO meeting, the memories of his father's death and the complete absence of feelings about this death came up again in Rien. He started to go deeply into his father's life and his being a war victim, which was a first step in coming to terms. Until then he had felt himself a victim of his father. At that time, he got in touch with Kombi. (A Dutch Organisation of War Children of All Backgrounds that was active between 1988 – 2010)

'I knew at once that this could be important to me. I wanted to deal with the war. I was dragging something along, but I didn't know what it was. I wanted to know to what extent the war had influenced me and the family that had produced me. At that moment I could almost forgive my father in advance.' Rien chose to attend weekend meetings rather than the – what seemed to him – less intensive approach of a discussion group. He was also afraid that, because of his profession, his attention would be too much with the group process as such, and that, consequently, he himself would not get his turn. 'What mattered for me was to get a clear image of what belonged to me and what to the other one, my father. I had carried along that uncertainty all my life. I was looking for the very essence of myself, my destiny, my life. I was the product of my context, but who was I?'

'In the search for myself, which had actually lasted all my life, Kombi has been very important. In the first place because I had to experience the problems (again), but in the second place because surely people consoled and respected me. During the meetings I could get back a part of my childhood, of the spontaneity that I had lost in the past. I wanted to recover that child, to feel as the child I had been. I wanted to make myself free. I stopped putting everything into pigeon-holes and explaining everything. I wanted to integrate. During two weekend meetings of Kombi I have succeeded in attaining that for the greater part. You re-define your childhood by being a child again.'

On the first day of the meeting, Rien got acquainted with the son of a German soldier and a Dutch woman. They became friends and to Rien it felt like having a brother, besides the sisters he has. The presence of people with different backgrounds has taught Rien not to judge or condemn and to see the child behind the person. He learned also to see what is his and what he had been talked into. It was important to him that there was room for emotions and consolation, that people had the right to be their individual selves with their own thoughts and feelings. Thus he found the way back to the childlike spontaneity that had lost in his life. At a certain moment, in a sub-group they focused on the theme 'What would you like to have from the others?' Rien wanted to feel the warmth and intimacy from both sides, from his mother's and father's side, and asked a man and a woman in his group if he could lie in between them for a little while. 'Security. I felt I was longing for it, and I felt my own vulnerability. I was allowed to have those feelings, to be vulnerable, to cry, to get angry. Everything that always had to be suppressed, adjusted ...it was *allowed* there to be expressed in complete safety and trust. Basic emotions. So, when I think back to Kombi, the first association is that of being a child. Re-experiencing genuine emotions has made it possible for me to define myself anew as an adult and a father. But now with a balance between thinking, analysing and feeling.'

Rien got out of the weekend meetings what he wanted. He was allowed to act with the egocentricity of a child. He took the space he was given. Granting that same space to others, however, was difficult for the egocentric child he was at that moment. The meetings meant to him a new beginning, something like a rebirth. The part of himself that had been restrained, could come out anew.

'From that moment on things went a lot better with me. And, consequently, I also wanted to be able to give something back to other people then. Together with Mies, I co-counselled a couple of weekend meetings. The enormous vitality of the people in the groups touched me deeply. It impressed me a lot how they tried to mend what was wrong in their lives and to accept the unavoidable.'

In Kombi, Rien saw how people developed some individuality for themselves, he saw how the essence of people manifested itself in meeting each other. If he would have participated in a background group specifically for children of forced labourers - provided there had been one -, he

would most probably have maintained the way of thinking he had learnt at home. At any rate it would have been much more difficult to shed it. During the meetings of Kombi, the universal aspects of the problems they had to cope with became clear: the participants were all children who had lived through the misery of the war. The specific situation in which that had occurred to them, did not matter.

Rien enjoys his new self-respect, and the spontaneity he has found again. He takes himself more seriously, but also the people he meets, for instance in his work. He has become more open and has been able to overcome a part of his distrust, which was mainly based on his vulnerability, and his fear of cruelty and meanness in the world. In his openness he is sometimes mistaken about someone, and then that hits him hard, but he accepts it as an unavoidable result of that openness.

'All my life I felt the longing for a father with whom I could identify. Fortunately, I have been able to develop a part of my independence and individuality inspired by my mother. Actually, I had only one parent.'

Rien did not have a real relationship with his father, did not understand him, remained aloof and was reserved. That was reciprocal. Only when Rien realised that his father was a war victim, could he learn to see him differently. Not everything in his father's behaviour can be explained by the war, but probably much.

'The frustration caused by never being able to get into contact with my father was great. I searched for him all my life and have never found him. That search I have given up, for I'll never be able to get to know him. His story died with him and cannot be retrieved. So I'm not going on and pursuing that, because what I can reach is only my fantasy, and in the past I have had already so many images of him, ideas about who he was. I have the papers of where he was forced to work.. I cherish them. I read publications about the Arbeitseinsatz. In the Ruhr region he must have experienced the usual air raids. Undoubtedly he was frustrated and embittered and was anxious. I will never learn more than that.'

'At the time that I participated in the weekend meetings of Kombi, I once went to a meeting for the commemoration of the dead at Oss. My father used to have traffic signs, striped red and white, in the carrier tricycle he had for his work. I made a flower arrangement in red and white in the shape of such a stop sign. Symbolic in a double sense. It meant that for him, many years after his death, and for me, it had to stop. I had to let him go, he had taken possession of me too much. It was a good moment to close this chapter and it moved me deeply.'

(A chapter from the book "Dialogue as a Helping Hand", ed. KOMBI)

RECOGNITION

Recognition is a word with a couple of different meanings.

'I recognize my mistake' means that I admit to have made a mistake.

'I immediately recognized him as the carpenter of the village' means that I remembered his face and posture and was aware of the fact I had met him before.

'I recognize that I am curious' means that I confess to be inquisitive.

'I recognize him as the victim of an assault' means that I accept him being the victim of an awful incident and that I feel sorry for him.

The Dutch Organisation of Collaborators' Children 'Herkenning' is called in English 'Recognition'. We have chosen this name for the double signification of the word: we recognize in each others personal story of life the same issues we have/had to cope with, but also: we hoped to be accepted by Dutch society as war children in the same way as the children of resistance fighters, of Jewish families, as the children who had been imprisoned in the Japanese camps in Indonesia. When we started in 1981, we did not know if we could reach our aims. We did.

I know how difficult it has been for a couple of categories of war children to obtain recognition in

their country, from authorities and society as a whole. Why is giving recognition so difficult for people who has been so lucky to come through the war without any problem or who have been born after the war? And why is recognition so important to victims, all victims suffering from whatever traumatic event?

In the NIW (Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad, the Jewish weekly in the Netherlands), March 25, 1994, Freek van Gelder wrote:

'The world has to understand, that we, the survivors, are not mad, we don't suffer from a psychological illness, but that we are harassed. The psychiatrist is to us very often the representative of a society which tells us: "There is something wrong with you, tell us what bothers you the most." But victims are not ill, they just suffer from their own ethical indignation. If someone says to us: "I don't share your indignation", it is a denial of all those people who have been murdered during the war. The psychotherapist can become, in that way, a part of the problem for which the survivor asks genuine help.'

Van Gelder states that what survivors and their (grand)children need is solidarity. For years survivors children in the Netherlands received money from the government to go in search for a good coach. That was unique in the world, but since long this kind of recognition has stopped. The most important was not the money, but the message it had given: "You are right that you feel harassed, that you suffer from the injustice done to your (grand)parents and yourself. We as citizens of this country, we accept your indignation and anger. We cannot bring back into live those who have been murdered, but we can say to you: you are right in feeling what you feel and you are not mad or ill."

In therapy, however, it is (often) exactly those words which are not expressed. The client does not fit in any therapy model, but nevertheless the therapist will try to model the client to what fits to the majority of the people. Survivors and their children, all children of war, experienced very in-normal events and situations and the existing therapy models are based on the behaviour and feelings of the average people. Therefore, self help groups score often much better than therapists, because the members understand each other and give support, share experiences and feel compassion.

I feel sorry for the Russenkinder that they meet very often with refusal and denial as I understand from their monthly newsletter, especially in Germany. I don't understand why they are not accepted as war children like members of other categories of war children. The child of a Dutch mother and a German soldier father, the child of an Austrian mother and an Afro-American soldier father, the child of a Dutch mother and a Japanese soldier father, the child of a German mother and a Russian soldier father, they all try to get information about their father. It is important to people to know their roots. Whatever those fathers were engaged in, the children are in search of his or her father, precisely because it is his/her father.

In the seventies I have written a letter to the daily paper 'Jerusalem Post' in Jerusalem, confessing in my fathers name his guilt as a collaborator with the Nazis. A guilt he himself always denied, but that I wanted to be expressed and shared with those Jews who had survived the evil measures my father had supported. Samuel Cohen from Nahariya sent me a letter, responding to what he had read in the paper. Nine years later I visited him in his house and we spoke very intensely and in all honesty. He said to me that I, as a child, had the right to love my father, because of the simple fact he was my father. 'No one can forbid a child to love his or her parent', he said. He added: 'Of course I know that your father, although not knowing me personally, would have seen in me as a Jew belonging to the Jewish people the enemy that should be eliminated. I know that these have been your fathers thoughts and feelings, nevertheless I tell you: you have the right to love him.'

We as children of war, let us accept each other in compassion and solidarity. If we exclude some groups of war children, we act exactly like so many people in our own countries that denied us our human dignity. Among us, war children, this should not occur.

GSB

WEBSITES

Organisation of Children of Dutch Collaborators:

www.werkgroepherkenning.nl

Organisation of Danish Children of War, Danske Krigsboern Foerening:

www.krigsboern.dk

Norwegian Children of War Association, Norges Krigsbarnforbund:

www.nkbf.no

Organization of Norwegian NS Children:

www.nazichildren.com

Krigsbarnforbundet Lebensborn, Norway:

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

Organisation of NS-children Vennetreff:

<http://www.nsborn.no>

Riskforbundet Finska Krigsbarn: (in swedish)

www.finskakrigsbarn.se

Tapani Ross on Finnish War Children (blog)

www.krigsbarn.com

Organisation of Finnish Children of War, Seundun Sotalapset:

www.sotalapset.fi

Organisation of children of victims and children of the perpetrators:

www.one-by-one.org

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

www.nach.ws

Dachau Institut Psychologie und Pädagogik:

www.Dachau-institut.de

Kriegskind Deutschland:

www.kriegskind.de

Website for the postwar-generation:

www.Forumkriegsenkel.com

Evacuees Reunion Association

www.evacuees.org.uk

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

www.warandchildren.org

Researchproject University München 'Kriegskindheit'

www.warchildhood.net

Coeurs Sans Frontières – Herzen Ohne Grenzen

www.coeurssansfrontières.biz

Organisation d'enfants de guerre

www.nésdelalibération.fr

Organisation of Us-descendants in Belgium

www.usad-ww2.be

Childsurvivors of the Holocaust in Australië

www.paulvalent.com

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

www.facinghistory.org

Aktion Sühnezeigen Friedensdienste

www.asf-ev.de

Organisation of German Lebensbornkinder
www.lebensspuren-deutschland.eu

International Network for Interdisciplinary Research on Children born of War (INIRC)
www.childrenbornofwar.org

Organisation Genocide Prevention Now
www.genocidepreventionnow.org

Basque Children of '37 Association UK
www.basquechildren.org

International Study of the Organized Persecution of Children
www.holocaustchildren.org

Partners in Confronting Collective Atrocities
www.p-cca.org

War Love Child – Oorlogsliefdekind
www.oorlogsliefdekind.nl/en

Children of Soviet Army soldiers
www.russenkinder.de

Stichting Oorlogsgetroffenen in de Oost
www.s-o-o.nl

Philippine Nikkei-Jin Legal Support Center
www.pnlsc.com

Austrian children of Afroamerican soldier-fathers
www.afroaustria.at

Organisation tracing American GI fathers
www.gitrace.org

Children in War Memorial
blog: <http://childreninwarmemorial.wordpress.com>

