

# INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN

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## INTRODUCTION

In this issue of the IB the core subject will be the conference 'The Lost Childhoods of Wartime' held at the university of Reading September 7-9.

A big quantity of high standard presentations was offered to the participants. You may find a couple of these interesting topics in this bulletin.

There is the story of the Basque children evacuated to the United Kingdom during the Spanish Civil War, Ruth Barnett's moving appeal drawing our attention to the ongoing discrimination of Gypsies and the heart-wrenching story of Peep Varju. He is one of the survivors of the massacres the historian Timothy Snyder has described in his book 'Bloodlands'. I found a number of bookreviews focusing on different aspects of Snyder's research study and I like to quote some of them.

There is the story of Sinikka, one of the people behind the project of striving for the proclamation of November 20 as the 'Day of War Children'. The small group of Finnish people that were evacuated when children promoting this project explain why they want to draw the world's attention to the fate and plight of war children.

The Children in War Memorial Project is another initiative worth paying our attention to. I would like to share with you some of my personal impressions of this conference.

Maria Marchetta, for many years a reader of the IB, reports on her experiences as an art therapist during her 6 weeks stay in one of the Swiss psychiatric centres. The German speaking readers will find her original text inserted in this issue, whereas the rest of the readers will have to make do with my translation.

I hope that you will appreciate the articles. Reactions and commentaries are very welcome! Feel free to bring to my attention issues that might be interesting to the readers. Please inform me of any change in (email)addresses so that contacts will not be lost.

All best,  
Gonda Scheffel-Baars

## **The Basque Children of '37 Association:**

The Association was set up in November 2002, nine years ago. Some of us who had got together, children of *niños vascos* or, in my case, a *maestra madrileña*, felt very strongly that the story of the *niños vascos* was largely unknown and that it was therefore very important to preserve the memory of the *niños'* experience and subsequent life in Britain for their descendants, thus placing it in its rightful historical context, so that the *niños* should not be "*los olvidados*", the forgotten ones, of the Spanish Civil War.

Membership is open not only to *niños* (who, with their spouses are exempt from subscription), but to anyone who is interested. To date we have around 250 members, roughly one third of whom are *niños* and their descendants, the other two thirds being teachers, academics, people who somehow came into contact with the *niños*, and other interested parties. Foremost of our aims is to preserve the memory of the *niños'* experience for descendants and future generations. To this end we encourage the collection and preservation of archival material for historical and educational purposes, thus facilitating and supporting research into the history of the evacuation of the *niños* who were sent to Britain. Another of our aims is the erection of dedicated plaques to commemorate the *niños'* stay in Great Britain. We have now unveiled seven plaques, at Aston, Caerleon, Cambridge, Hull, Worthing, Southampton and Montrose. We see the ceremony not only as a means of remembering, but also as a way of thanking all those British volunteers for their dedication in looking after the children. They are very happy occasions and bring together not only the *niños* concerned, but also many English people who were involved with the children in some way or other in the colonies. We are concerned with the recuperation of historic memory and with providing a cultural and social programme for our members, ranging from talks, visits and film screenings.

For several years now, we have had our own dedicated website, after having been part of a website with a wider remit. We have established links with many associations worldwide that deal with the exile and the Spanish Civil War.

It has been most exciting to be part of a new association and our mission that the story that the evacuation of the Basque children should become better known and passed on to future generations is becoming more of a reality. In the nine years we have been in existence, we have accomplished a great deal. I will try and give you an idea of our activities.

Amongst other activities, I can report that we have held two successful poetry readings in London and had talks by leading academics, including Professor Michael Alpert and Valentine Cunningham, on aspects of the Civil War. We have now formalised this practice and instigated an annual lecture which is held in London. The three we have had so far were given by my academics Dr Tom Buchanan from Oxford University and Professor Paul Preston from The London School of Economics and journalist Nicholas Rankin. In keeping with our concern about the educational aspect of the *niños'* story, Members of the committee have presented papers at international conferences and given lectures to all levels, ranging from the primary school to local history societies. Two years ago, two London boroughs worked on specific projects to do with the Basque children, thus gaining a better understanding of how conflict and migration impact on everyday life.

The Association now has a collection of 40 display boards mostly dedicated to the different colonies, with photographs and newspaper reports. Thanks to a grant in 2010 from the Spanish government, half of these have been digitised. The choice of venue for our first exhibition, Southampton, was deliberate, Southampton being where the *niños* first set foot on British soil. Other exhibitions have been held at Bradford, Nottingham Trent University, Wortley hall, Sheffield, the Instituto Espanol Cañanda Blanch in London, Sutton-on-Hull Resources Centre, Eastleigh Public Library. We have also participated through the loan of

artefacts, and other material, in the successful exhibition which toured Spain "El Exilio de los Niños", which started in Bilbao on December 2003 and finished in Madrid in June 2005.

Simon Evans and Adrian Bell have both been involved in BBC radio programmes on the topic of the niños' exile. Adrian Bell can be credited with first bringing the story of the Basque children refugees to the British public, with the publication in 1996 of his book "Only For Three Months". The Association recently paid for a translation into Spanish of this seminal book, and it has just been published at the end of September by a publishing house in Barcelona. Steve Bowles, one of our members and a filmmaker, has made two documentary films, the first for the Latin America Discovery Channel called "The Guernica Children" which focused in particular on the children being evacuated to Mexico. The second film entitled "The Guernica Children" was entirely about the niños' experience of coming to this country and it has been shown on British television about 8 times. We are proud that it won a Royal Television Society Award. For all these documentaries, the Association has helped by providing information and materials; it also paid to have the film dubbed into Spanish so it could be looked at by a wider audience. Since films had already been made on the niños who went to Russia, to France, to Belgium and to Latin America, and also books published in Spanish about all these, one of my personal aims in setting up the Association had always been to have a film made about the niños who stayed in Britain, so the making of this film and the publication in Spanish of Adrian Bell's book was the fulfilment of a dream for me.

The Association has produced fifteen Newsletters, which contain not only news and reports on its activities, but also articles and book reviews written by our members. These came out yearly at first, but we decided to bring them out every 6 months and we are not short of copy.

In keeping with our policy of collecting archives, we continually receive archival material, books, catalogues, photographs, cuttings from local newspapers, and encourage the niños to deposit them with us. We have provided archival information to research students and to date we have received copies of 4 Masters and 3 undergraduate theses. We have also produced a Bibliography of literature concerning the niños in Great Britain as a starting point for researchers. Our aim has always been to deposit our archives eventually in a central archive in Britain where descendants and researchers may have access to them since they will be together. We visited various archives and the decision was taken to deposit our archive in the Special Collections at the Hartley Library at Southampton University. It just simply was the best place to house our archives, and what better place can there be than where the niños first set foot in Britain!

One of the most rewarding and exciting aspects of my involvement with the Association in this context has been the wealth of unexpected new material which has been discovered: a collection of negatives in the basement of Oxford Public Library of niños at Aston taken by a professional photographer, himself a refugee, Cyril Arapoff; some 30 pencil drawings by Richard Murry, brother of the writer John Middleton Murry, of niños at the Langham colony; two short films of the niños in Hull and in an unknown colony; a series of photos taken at the North Stoneham camp by an English helper when he was 16. These were material discoveries. During the last few years, there have been further discoveries, physical, human. We have "found" some new niños, most of whom had completely lost contact with their fellow evacuees, including one of 88 in Wales who thought he was the only Basque niño left in Britain! His son found our website by chance and got in touch with us. Others included two sisters and another niña in the Southampton area, four niñas living near Caerleon, a niña who had gone to join her parents in France just after the war and who wanted to find out about her time in Britain. All of these wanted information about their colonies or the people running them, and in many cases we were able to provide this.

2007 was the 70 anniversary of the niños' arrival in Britain and the Association marked this with a spectacular event at Solent University in Southampton. A plaque was presented to the

people of Southampton, recording the welcome the town gave to the ninos and thanking that army of British volunteers who looked after them. There was an exhibition and speeches from representatives of the Basque and Spanish governments, as well as from ninos themselves. On the way to the official lunch, a camp had been set up on the green, resembling the camp at North Stonham which had been the ninos first "home" in Britain After lunch a team of danzaris which had come over especially from Bilbao performed typical dances and there was the opportunity to see Steve Bowles' documentary in Spanish. Thanks to various grants, the Association produced a CD of children singing from the Basque Children's songbook and Secretary Natalia Benjamin edited "Recuerdos", a bi-lingual book of testimonies from sixty-four ninos. At present, the Association is busy preparing for the commemoration of the 75 anniversary in May 2012.

In conclusion I think I can say that one of our aims to ensure that the story of the niños becomes better known and passed on to future generations is slowly but surely having an effect. I do not exaggerate when I say that every day I receive requests for information of all kinds, not only from former niños but also from teachers, researchers, students, media programme producers and many others. A large part of my time is taken up dealing with these queries and I try to respond to all. What is certain is that many people have learned more about their background and their early lives and it is rewarding to be able to help in this way. And to those detractors, and there are some, who would say that this work has come too late, I would reply that it is better late than never.

However, it is never far from my mind that these niños were deprived of a normal childhood with their parents and family; it is almost impossible for us to imagine the trauma they experienced through this separation from their parents, leaving them behind to the danger of a country ravaged by civil war, and going, alone, to a completely foreign country whose language they could not speak. 4000 children came to Britain. But in all, some 30 000 children were evacuated from Spain. It is an awesome figure. Many did go back, but as for the rest, that they were able to survive and make their lives successfully in a foreign country is admirable. Their courage and determination are equal to none and I salute them. I feel privileged to know many of the ninos who live in Britain; I have aquired an extended family, for which I am grateful.

Natalia Benjamin

14 November 2011

### **Gypsy Children: the Part of the Holocaust that has not Ended**

Paper for "Lost Childhoods of War" Conference in Reading University September 2011

The Holocaust ended in 1945. Most Jewish survivors and their descendents have been able to achieve a measure of closure as their suffering and loss has been widely acknowledged and commemorated. Not so for the surviving Gypsy descendents.

My theme is that there is an unacknowledged war currently waging across Europe against Roma/Gypsy/Travellers. Wherever they go they are isolated, demonised and excluded by the hostility of the local population and disadvantaged by government policies that in many areas evict and/or deport them. Arson attacks and murder are common on the continent but, as yet, only sporadic in Britain, where eviction is more common. Nevertheless, Johnny Delaney, a 15 year old boy, was murdered in Cheshire in 2003, kicked to death by several attackers for no other reason than that he was a Gypsy.

With such constant harassment, the children have little chance of education or access to health care services. Gypsy children born today in Britain have an average life expectancy of 50 years compared with an average of over 70 years for the general population. Without adequate health and education, and growing up with parents who are traumatised and suffering poor health, these children have little chance of reaching a physical and mental state as adults in which they are capable of claiming a voice in policy making or even claiming their human rights.

Yet amazingly, and rather like the Jewish people, this people has been around in Europe, and most other parts of the world, for centuries and has survived virtually continuous persecution. The Roma Virtual Network ([romale@zahav.net.il](mailto:romale@zahav.net.il)) offers an email network connecting Gypsies in different countries and spreading news about them and their supporters. In spite of such constant persecution, Gypsies have contributed much to society, in itinerant crafts and seasonal work but also as writers, artists, footballers. Those who manage to get enough education to do well in such careers often dare not own their Gypsy roots for fear of persecution, and so, sadly, they cannot be role models for Gypsy children.

It is little known, and even less acknowledged that at least half a million Gypsies were murdered in the Nazi Holocaust. The Nazis regarded both Jews and Gypsies as 'people without a land' and therefore parasites on the rightful owners of the land in which they reside. In order to create a superior 'master-race' the impure blood of Gypsies, Jews and even Aryans with physical and/or mental disabilities, had to be annihilated to prevent their polluting the 'pure Aryan blood'. Whereas Jewish survivors have had acknowledgement of their loss and suffering in the Holocaust and considerable financial compensation, Gypsy survivors have been discounted and have had no compensation – only continued persecution. For them the Nazi Holocaust has not ended as the Nazi phenomena of negative propaganda and pogroms has been taken over and continued against the Gypsies by communities and governments, local and national, all over Europe. This amounts half way along the road to genocide.

The work of Genocide Watch, a website (<http://www.genocidewatch.org/>) founded by Greg Stanton gives plentiful information for understanding genocide. Stanton analysed all past genocides and found that every genocide had progressed through eight stages: six visible stages before the mass killing and a final stage of denial after the mass killing ceased. In fact the genocide continues until it is fully acknowledged by the perpetrators, memorials placed at the killing sites, and some attempt at reparation so that the survivors can achieve closure. The suffering of Gypsies in the Holocaust is, like the Gypsies themselves, being discounted and not remembered. Therefore, the whole of Europe is colluding in the eighth stage of denial and, ignorantly or knowingly, conspiring against their education and integration into the community of which they have always been a part.

The main problem is not racism/bigotry/prejudice as these can be contained once exposed. The biggest problem is the barrier of apathy and indifference behind which so many people are unaware of their failure to notice the injustice and suffering of the Roma/Gypsy/Travellers. The failure of the majority to notice and protest allows impunity for the few to act out their hatred against Gypsies. We don't even have to like Gypsies but we owe them justice.

The myth of pure and impure blood, together with the myth of 'blood libel' against Jews, is deeply ingrained in Western society. Although we now know that genes control family traits, we still talk of 'blood lines' and 'in the blood' – implying that there are different sorts of blood. The idea of 'pure blood' still carries a connotation of something desirable, more desirable than the impure version. Yet animal breeders know very well that so called 'purebred' or

'thoroughbred' animals are often weaker and more vulnerable than hybrids, mixed-breeds and mongrels.

Likewise, human people became stronger, more versatile and adaptable through migration and intermarrying with ethnic cultural groups different to the group from which they originated. Yet many such ethno-cultural groups look down on mixed marriages or 'marrying out'. The myth of 'purity' being possible feeds the desire to keep your own group pure by keeping 'pollutants' out. Many local communities believe their community is polluted by the existence and presence of Gypsies in just the way that Nazi propaganda presented Jews as poison polluting the purity of the 'master-race'. Such people do not realise that Gypsies are part of the same community as themselves and therefore do not accord them the same Human Rights as they expect for themselves.

Both Jews and Gypsies have at times been accused of stealing children from the wider community to use for evil purposes. This turns unthinking people against Jews and/or Gypsies so that whatever goes wrong in the community is immediately blamed on them. In the face of monumental ignorance of the origins, history and culture of Gypsies, myths spread quickly about the evil doings of Gypsies. As these are believed instead of verified or challenged, they grow rapidly and are used to justify ethnic cleansing of Gypsies from whole areas – deportations in France, evictions from 'illegal sites' in Britain, torching camp sites in Italy and Spain. The reality that Gypsies actually live is very different to the fantasy many people have of what it is like to be a Gypsy.

A contradictory image is projected by society onto Gypsies: they are denigrated and despised as a negative influence and perceived as aloof and unwilling to integrate; at the same time as being relegated to 'the bottom of the heap' they are accused of unfair advantages and being favoured by the law. Similarly there is a dual image of Gypsies in the collective mind: we disparage them as dirty lying thieves and simultaneously envy what we imagine is their freedom to come and go as they please, to sing and dance and sleep under the stars with none of our restrictions and frustrations. Because we envy their imagined 'freedom' and carefree life, we want to destroy it and force them to adopt our way of life in 'bricks and mortar' houses.

There is a strong tendency to 'blame the victim' rather than looking at the issue from all sides. Some normally thoughtful well educated people consider the Gypsies have 'brought it all on themselves'; they should co-operate and live like everyone else in ordinary houses; they are illiterate because they don't send their children to school; they are dirty because they leave rubbish everywhere they go.

Gypsies are not a problem. We have a problem with Gypsies. We have difficulty accepting Gypsies as human beings and equal to us, accepting their different culture, confronting our own prejudice and giving up our myths and negative projections. Only breaking the barrier of ignorance about Gypsies can show how these myths are illusions and expose the racism that drives them. Racism can be contained once opened to awareness. The far more difficult problem is the appalling extent and intensity of indifference. Gypsies are marginalized, isolated and excluded; we don't want to see them so we make them invisible and discount them as not part of the community; and when we can't help seeing them we can't tolerate them and denigrate them as unhygienic and a nuisance that we want to be rid of.

There is absolutely no Gypsy problem in Britain except of our own making. It started between the late 18<sup>th</sup> and late 19<sup>th</sup> centuries when a series of acts created laws about the enclosure, ownership and use of what was previously 'common land' available to Gypsies to camp on and locals for hay and firewood and to graze animals. Gradually, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, hostility towards Gypsies who did not want to fit in with an urban way of life and negative myths about them escalated. What little common land was left became heaths, commons

and parks and Gypsies were shut out with far too few places where they could pitch legally. At the same time, the trades they were used to, such as basket weaving, textiles, seasonal agricultural work, were mostly mechanised and industrialised. Few employers would knowingly hire Gypsies. Even now most Gypsy men will not agree to be filmed or interviewed, as they fear, with good reason, to be known as Gypsies. Gypsy women are more forthcoming as they are proud, with good reason, to show their immaculate and comfortable modern chalet caravans and the children they care for devotedly.

Of the approximately 300,000 Gypsies in our community, about 200,000 no longer lead a travelling life and have integrated into the community. For the 100,000 or so that still want to live 'on wheels', there is a shortage of 3-4000 legal pitches. Less than one square mile could provide for these. The last government assessed each borough for how many new pitches they need to provide. Some boroughs, like Newham, Durham and Wellingborough, took responsibility to provide accommodation and education for their Gypsies; others used every possible ploy to avoid taking this responsibility. When the present government took office, they set about devolving power central to local government with their 'Localism Bill'. The Secretary of State for Communities, Eric Pickles, immediately voided the past government's assessment of needed new pitches in each borough. This is tantamount to giving the go-ahead to boroughs like Basildon who are determined to get rid of rather than provide for their Gypsies.

A group of Travellers, encouraged by the government at the time to take responsibility for themselves, bought a field called Dale Farm in the borough of Basildon, Essex about 25 years ago. Basildon Council made no objections as the field was a junk yard of discarded vehicles, which the Travellers cleared at their own expense. The first few families obtained planning permission for semi-permanent chalet-caravans and houses with yards for caravans. Some of the local 'settled' residents then started complaining and harassing the Travellers, creating a hostile conflict. Although the average success of planning application in Basildon, I am told, is 95% - the success rate has been 25% for Travellers. Yet a myth survives that Gypsies get preferential treatment!..]

Gypsies have a fascinating history. Since 2008, June has been allocated Roma/Gypsy/Traveller History Month. This is an opportunity for schools to study Gypsy history and challenge anti-Gypsy racism and local governments to organise civic events with exhibitions about Gypsies. Learning about Gypsies should figure in Holocaust education programmes and Gypsies should be remembered in Holocaust memorial events around January 27<sup>th</sup> and also around August 2<sup>nd</sup> which is the date chosen by Gypsies themselves to remember the largest slaughter of Gypsies in the Holocaust.

Most people acquire stereotypes of Gypsy families from hearsay and/or through the media. Few realise how important the family is in Gypsy culture, how house-proud and concentrated on their children's welfare the women are. Most Gypsies are Roman Catholic and devout church-goers with a high standard of morals. They want education for their children but many refuse to send their children to school, with good reason, out of fear for their safety. Some boroughs avoided using government money allocated for children with special needs for Traveller children and used it all elsewhere. Even those boroughs that set up good networks of support teachers for Traveller children, have recently had to cut such services in the financial crisis.

The media have often exacerbated hostility towards Gypsies. Whether this is deliberate to sell papers and pander to viewers' predilection for shadenfreude, is debateable. The BBC screened a documentary in September 2009 titled "This world: Gypsy Child Thieves". This was an excellent and informative programme for anyone able and prepared to think critically. I know of several viewers who regarded it as entertainment, confirmation of their prejudiced image of Gypsies and a boost to their anti-Gypsy hostility!..]

In 2010/11, Channel 4 screened a series of programmes under the title “My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding”. This was supposedly a documentary series but the title, taken from the comedy film “My Big Fat Greek Wedding” gave a contradictory message that it was to be a laugh at the Gypsies expense.[..]

Many people, particularly in the media industry and the police, have not yet realised that Roma/Gypsy/Travellers comprise a cultural ethnic group in law. It is as much a Hate Crime to insult verbally or physically a Gypsy as it is to do so against a Muslim or Jew. Anyone willing to challenge such Hate Crime but unwilling to approach the police, can contact the charity StopHateUK on the internet or ring 0800 138 1625.

Another insult to Gypsies is to write the word Gypsy or Traveller without a capital letter. I challenge the editor, whenever I read something with these capitals missing, that she/he would not print Muslim or Jew without capitals; and it is ambiguous, as I am a traveller when I go on a journey but I am not a Traveller. Also I am a Jew and would be offended if called a jew. This needs challenging by a lot more people. You can almost assess the depth of anti-Gypsyism of a newspaper or journal from whether it capitalises Gypsies and Travellers. The editor of the Times tells me they have their guideline reviews periodically and will consider my complaint at their next review. The Guardian already uses capitals for Travellers. The local Echo group sees no reason to change. The general public are reluctant to give up the last bastion of culturally acceptable racism against Gypsies, and the media are well aware of this and appear to exploit it at every opportunity to ‘sell a story’.

As in the title of Colin Clark and Margaret Greenfields’ book ‘they are here to stay’. The sooner we realise this and support instead of persecuting Gypsies, the more unnecessary suffering could be avoided and problems resolved. In some areas Police and Local Councils are joining forces to develop social inclusion that includes Gypsies. Unfortunately in other boroughs, like Basildon, they are joining forces to evict Gypsies. Imposing our terms is likely to fail. Forcing destitute Gypsies into social housing has little chance of working. The only real answer, in my opinion, for long-term success, is through education for both the public and Gypsies. Those who have already grasped the seriousness of our problem with Gypsies need to challenge the signs and acts of discrimination and insult and expose the latent racism so that it can be seen for what it is and addressed. Above all we need more research into the experience of Gypsy children and their needs, both those that have ‘made good’ and those who are trapped by discrimination and hostility.

Ruth Barnett, September 2011  
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Greg Stanton Genocide Watch: <http://www.genocidewatch.org/>

Subscribe to the Roma Virtual Network: [romale@zahav.net.il](mailto:romale@zahav.net.il)

## PEEP VARJU'S STORY

When professor Mai Maddissoon introduced Peer Varju to us she told us he would read his text in Russian. She suggested we should think that we were watching a movie in a foreign language without sub-titles. Although she translated his paper and the English text appeared on the screen, she asked us to look at Peep and to listen to him and to learn more about him than just the text would learn us.

I had met Peep the evening before in the small kitchen in one of the student homes in which the participants of the conference at the University of Reading were lodged. He was accompanied by Perrti from Finland and Kai, a Fin living in Sweden, two men I had met at other conferences. Perrti could exchange some words with Peep who lives in the region of Tallinn. My husband and I visited that city once and I asked Perrti to tell Peep that we liked that beautiful town a lot. That brought a smile on his face, he looked at me for a while and then lowered his eyes again. For the rest of the evening he kept silent and I guess he will have felt alone, just in the way I had felt at the conference in 2002 in Oulu where almost everybody spoke Finnish and I could not understand nor speak a word.

Peep started the presentation of his paper in this way:

I treasure my fate because:

- I am the only one of my family of 7 deportees who survived the starvation
- My aunt and other survivors of her cohort had the insight and skills to find me and bring me back home to Estonia away from the orphanage
- When my cohort of survivors formed the Union of Memento the opportunity arose to share the narrative of our journey and through that narrative the crimes which had been committed against us.

Peep was born in 1936 in a small Estonian village. His father had a high rank in the police force and had to face a death sentence when the Soviets invaded Estonia in the autumn of 1939 as a consequence of the Molotov-Von Ribbentrop treaty. On June 14, 1941 the family was summoned to prepare some luggage and to go to the Palmse Community Hall including the four children. Russian soldiers accompanied them and the other families which had been given the same order. From there they travelled by truck to the Rakvere station where they got on board a train. Nine trains totalling 490 carriages were assigned for the transport of Estonians to Siberia. The men were separated from their families and had to travel in compartments designated for men only.

The train set off for Siberia, some more carriages were added and even some from Leningrad. On June 17, 1941 the train crossed the border in the area of Narva and arrived in Novosibirsk on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July. The journey in the train was hard, especially for the children of whom many died from starvation or exhaustion. One woman tried to commit suicide surrounded by women and children. She survived but her little child died. She was removed from the train and got a 15 years sentence. On July 2, 1941 the people who managed to survive the problems during the voyage embarked on a ship on the river Ob. We know how many of the people embarked because the administration was found completely intact: 787 Estonians and about 1100 people from Lithuania.

In Siberia living conditions were very bad, the standard of hygiene a deadly threat for everyone, but especially for the small children. Many of them died from diseases like measles. In Spring 1942 126 of the 291 Estonians who had arrived in the camp had died.

Medoezi Tsvori was the place where Peep's family settled, but one of his brothers did not reach this destination, he succumbed on his way. There was a constant lack of food, many people died from starvation. The locals were people who in the 1930s had been the more prosperous farmers in their villages and for that reason had been deported to Siberia. This was one of the measures taken by the Soviets to force collectivisation on the soviet

farmers. They were not interested in human beings, they took corn and seedlings without remorse in order to achieve their political aims.

One of the women who survived the transport and the stay in Siberia told Peep that his mother had knitted a lot during her stay in the settlement. His aunt who survived as well, told Peep many details he did not remember, since he was only 4 years old when they left their village.

Soon after the death of his first brother his other brother died. His mother, who had been pregnant when they were summoned to leave their village, gave birth to a boy who managed to stay alive, when his mother died, 6 weeks after the delivery. But his life was too fragile, his strength too weak, he succumbed 5 months later. Peep learned from other stories that orphaned children were looked after by other women until they were sent to orphanages. So he presumed one of the settlement women took care of him and his sister. When Peep's sister died he was the sole survivor of his whole family – after the war he learned that his father had died too in Siberia.

It is difficult to check dates of a person's death because the Soviets had their own way of writing Estonian names, so one can never be sure that the data one finds are the correct ones.

Peep was taken to an orphanage in Aipolova, where he fell seriously ill. He managed to recover from the dysentery that had ravaged his body. There were more Estonian children in the orphanage and they could speak with each other in their mothertongue. In that way they could support each other. But very soon the children were forbidden to speak Estonian, only Russian was allowed and the children were raised in the Sovietideology: they should become model Soviet citizens.

After the war, in 1946 courageous Estonian women travelled to Siberia in search of Estonian children in order to repatriate them to their homeland. They found Peep and a girl, Astrid Heige, in the orphanage and they took the two children back to Estonia. By then Peep had forgotten his mother tongue and had to relearn it.

'Whoever robs children of their identity is guilty of genocide, whoever robs a people of their children is guilty of genocide', said Peep.

Some heartwrenching numbers to end with: two thirds of the babies who started their journey to Siberia in 1941 died, half of the children below the age of 2 died, more than one third of the children below the age of 5 years died. Mothers tried to save their children, but often in vain. Many of them stole food knowing that they would be imprisoned or sent to forced labour camps, hoping that this could have the positive effect that their children would be sent to orphanages where they had far more chance to survive. To honour those mothers who witnessed the starvation and the death of their children a monument has been erected on one of the banks of Rouge Large Lake.

Timothy Snyder stated in his book *Bloodlands* that the Soviets deported 17 500 people from Lithuania, 17 000 from Latvia and 6000 from Estonia. Peep Varju was one of them, he survived, marked by his terrible experiences, fragile and nevertheless so strong.

GSB

### **TIMOTHY SNYDER: BLOODLANDS; Europe between Hitler and Stalin**

Ed. Perseus Books, 2010

Some reviews:

'How Stalin and Hitler enabled each other's crimes and killed 14 millions of people between the Baltic and the Black Sea. A lifetime's work by a Yale University historian who deserves to be read and reread.'

(*The Economist*, Books of the year)

'To us in the West, the horrors of World War II are associated with the names of Auschwitz, Iwo Jima and Hiroshima. Without denying the significance of these places, Snyder, an immensely talented historian of Yale University, radically alters our understanding of the mass murder that went on during these years by showing in convincing fashion where and how most victims met their end. *Bloodlands* overflows with startling facts and revelations....In a conclusion that should be required reading for all, Snyder addresses the moral questions raised by this murderous history with insight and recognition of the shades of culpability that make it difficult at times to neatly separate victims from perpetrators. He also shines much needed light on the dangers of 'competitive martyrology' of the recent past, as the nations of the bloodlands have tried to claim greatest victim status'.  
(*Seattle Times*)

'A brave and original history of mass killing in the twentieth century...Snyder's original contribution is to treat all of these episodes – the Ukrainian famine, the Holocaust, Stalin's mass executions, the planned starvation of Soviet POWs, postwar ethnic cleansing – as different facets of the same phenomenon. Instead of studying Nazi atrocities or Soviet atrocities separately, as many others have done, he looks at them together. Yet Snyder does not exactly compare the two systems either. His intention, rather, is to show that the two systems committed the same kinds of crimes at the same times and in the same places, that they aided and abetted one another, and above all that their interaction with one another led to more mass killing than either might have carried out alone.'  
(Anne Appelbaum, *New York Review of Books*)

'For over a decade in the middle of twentieth century, the lands between Russia and Germany were the killing fields of Europe. Tens of millions of civilians from Poland to Ukraine, Lithuania to Belarus were starved, beaten, shot and gassed to death by the authorities and armies of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. We think we know this story and we assign shorthand labels: Auschwitz, the Gulag. In his path-breaking and often courageous study of Europe's 'bloodlands', Timothy Snyder shows how very much more complicated the story was. His account of the methods and motives of murderous regimes, both at home and in foreign war, will radically revise our appreciation of the implications of mass extermination in the recent past. *Bloodlands* – impeccably researched and appropriately sensitive to its volatile material – is the most important book to appear on this subject for decades and will surely become the reference in its field.'  
(Tony Judt, author of *Postwar* and *Ill Fares the Land*)

'Nearly seventy years after VE-Day, World War Two continues to be perceived through a narrow Western perspective, and many basic problems about the war of 1939-1945 remain unresolved. In *Bloodlands* – which refers to the huge belt of territory between Germany and Russia – Timothy Snyder examines the little known tract of the European continent that was scourged by Stalin as well as Hitler, and reaches some disturbing conclusions. Combining formidable linguistic and detective skills with a sense of impartiality, he tackles vital questions which have deterred less courageous historians: Where and when were the largest casualties inflicted? Who were the perpetrators, and which ethnic and national groups were victimized? How can one calculate and verify the numbers? This is a book which will force its readers to rethink history.'  
(Professor Norman Davies)

'An important new history....One of Snyder's major achievements in *Bloodlands* is to preserve this sense of the singularity of Jewish experience, even while showing its complex relationship to the terrible experiences of the peoples among whom Jews lived. The relationship between Jews and communists is probably the most explosive of all the subjects Snyder addresses, and here he benefits most of the strengths he shows throughout the book – deep learning, wide compassion, and clear, careful moral judgement...Anyone who wants

to fully comprehend the Holocaust – at least, as far as it can be comprehended – should read *Bloodlands*, which shows how much evil had to be done in order to make the ultimate evil possible’.  
(Adam Kirsch in *Tablet*)

*Sinikka Ortmark Stymne, Swedish writer, 2008*

### **Finally, the “War Child” Spoke**

Parents want their children to be spared from the horrors of the war raging in their country. Therefore they send their children to a solitary diaspora in a country where peace reigns. For instance, last year about 1000 solitary refugee children came to Sweden, mostly from Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia. Estimates put the number of displaced refugee children in Europe to 100 000.

I was one of about 80 000 “War Children” who were evacuated from Finland to Sweden during WWII. In 1944 and 1945 I lived in three foster families. I was physically safe and I did not have to listen to the thunder of bomb-planes. But spiritually I was lost by being separated from my mother and father and from my language and my cultural roots in Finland.

We lonely war children were expected to be nice, obedient and grateful. Some of us found a loving family, others didn’t. Many returned to Finland but some 15 000 remained in Sweden. Most of us are plagued by guilt from feeling rejected by our parents as well as from having deserted both them and our Swedish foster parents.

Almost half a century later I told my story in the book “Thou Who Hast the Children Dear”\*. My story broke the silence and war children could openly start talking about their grief. Both countries have since then officially acknowledged their mistaken contribution to the plight of the people concerned.

Here follows a scene from my story dating back to August 1944:

*Two girls aged nine and ten, are walking across the grazing fields. The first, Sinikka, light brown eyed, her dark hair sun-bleached. The second, Inga, blue eyed and golden haired. Both with bows as butterflies in their hair. Nature surrounds them with green meadows, high trees and silence. The corn is waiting to be harvested...*

*The girls climb the old cherry tree, sitting on stable tree branches, their legs kicking. Sinikka looks at Inga. She is silent and thinking about something. She isn’t as usual. Is she angry? That would be dangerous. Am I going to be sent to a children’s home? Haven’t I been nice enough? Don’t they want me here any more, like the two families before them? Have I been nagging or something? Inga was almost always talking about something, but not now. Awkwardly it came:*

*- Please Inga. I know you have heard something. I’m not going to tell anybody if you tell me. Please! I promise. I give you my word of honor...*

*Sinikka knew nagging was dangerous. Her mother wrote long time ago in a letter that she shouldn’t.*

*- Please ... Her eyes were begging. - I’m not going to tell anybody.*

*Silence was thick for a moment. Then Inga said:*

*-Your father is dead and he’s been so for a long time.*

*Sinikka’s legs stop kicking. Time stops ... Inga wasn’t talking about her father! It couldn’t be. A long time? Her mother would have told her if it were true ... Sinikka climbs down, without a word. Inga looks guilty but Sinikka doesn’t notice. She remains in the shadow of the cherry tree. From this moment she was frozen stiff and numb. From this moment on she had no hope left, no hope to return home, no home left in Helsinki...*

*She went to the farm and waited till the moment when the house was empty. Then she takes her mother’s letters from a box and reads them once more ... Mother wrote nothing about Father’s death. Months ago she wrote that he was ill, when Sinikka was still*

*living with the first foster family. She had been worried and cried. Her foster family had consoled her by persuading her that her father was almost well. They had pointed out words and she looked in her dictionary...*

*She takes another letter, it is from Easter... Mother wrote that Father has stiff arms and cannot write with them, but Mother will continue to write. And Sinikka was content with that. Then later, Mother didn't write, she couldn't understand what Sinikka wrote anymore.*

*Finnish and Swedish were mixed into an incomprehensible lingo. She didn't have any language left...*

*Sinikka kept her promise to Inga. She didn't talk about her father's death. Neither to her foster family, nor to her mother in Finland. Her father was inaccessible. He was living deep in her heart.*

*Tears of grief flow almost sixty years later.*

*\*Sinikka Ortmark Almgren: Du som haver barnen kär, 4th Edition, SinOA 2003. [www.sinoa.se](http://www.sinoa.se)*



*In 2005 the plight of Finland's War Children was publicly recognized. The king of Sweden and the president of Finland presided jointly over the installation of a statue named "Separation" on the Finnish-Swedish border, where the majority of Finnish children crossed during the war.*

## **NOVEMBER 20 'A DAY FOR THE CHILDREN OF WAR'**

A group of Finnish War Children in Sweden wants to make November 20 'a Day for the Children of War'.

On November 20, 1989 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. On the same date, November 20, will we honour ALL children of war. Together with our organisation we want to focus on the terrible situation for children in countries affected by war today.

During World War II (1939-1945) the most extensive transfer of children in modern history took place. All over Europe millions of children were evacuated from their homes, away from the horrors of war, either to safer areas in the countryside of their own countries or to other countries that were not as deeply affected by the war. In many countries in Europe former war children, now retired, have organized themselves in associations in order to deal with their often severely traumatic memories as well as their fate.

Finnish war children in Sweden have formed one of the largest such organisations. Nearly 80,000 children were sent from Finland to Sweden to stay there until the war was over and peace could be established. The youngest of those children were only a couple of months old, the oldest had reached the age of 14. They were war victims, as were of course the children that had to remain in Finland. Today there are associations in Finland for children of evacuated and civil veterans, for children of German soldiers serving in Finland, for children of civil prisoners of war and for children who lost one or both parents in the war. The Swedish National Association of Finnish War Children currently has close to 900 members, war children who for various reasons remained in Sweden. The sister association in Finland – for children that were evacuated to Sweden but returned after the war – has about 2,000 members.

We came by boat or train, alone or together with brothers and sisters. We were pulled from our homes and placed in strange environments with people who spoke a language we did not understand. For those of us who were ill upon arrival, our stay in Sweden became vital to our recovery and survival. Many of us remember this time as a happy time; we did not only get a safe haven but also a new language, new families and new friends. But other war children never stopped longing for mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters, and this longing and homesickness for Finland overshadowed the safety that many foster parents offered. The traumatic separation from our families in Finland and subsequently from our new families in Sweden has left slow-healing mental wounds in nearly all Finnish war children. Many of us have always had difficulties knowing where we belong, in Finland or in Sweden. At best we have been able to benefit from two cultures and two languages - and thereby have had a better life.

Regrettably wars and conflicts are still going on in the world, putting children in stress situations and traumas similar to the ones that we experienced seventy years ago. Children fleeing war zones today often experience yet worse conditions than war children during and after World War II. What these refugee children need are sympathetic close human beings who care and give continuity to their shattered lives. In the year 2010 alone, nearly 3,000 refugee children have come to Sweden without their parents. How many refugee children are there in Europe, arriving alone, without parents or relatives? In the whole world?

As Finnish War Children we do not only want to help and support each other. With our knowledge and experience of what it takes to be a war child we also want to help the war children of today. Please show your support! United activities on 'A Day for the Children of War' would strengthen all war children and could help to ease their plight.

Sinikka Ortmark Stymne, Hilka Mälarstedt, Sven-Olof Larsson  
Finnish War Children in Sweden

## **CHILDREN IN WAR MEMORIAL PROJECT**

On behalf of Prof. Martin Parsons, may I draw your attention to the Children in War Memorial Project that was set up one year ago. The objects are set out below. The committee, chaired by prof. Parsons, would welcome any suggestions or help to further this cause. Throughout the year we have made various contacts but more are needed. Right now we want to set up a web-site and wonder if anyone attending the conference has this particular expertise and would be able to assist?

Mission Statement  
The Children in War Memorial

- \* The Children in War Memorial Project is a charity, the object of which is to recognise and portray the plight of children embroiled in war.
- \* The scheme has been inaugurated with the intention of erecting an international monument dedicated to children to convey the courage shown by them in the face of adversity – boys and girls affected by war and conflict throughout the ages.
- \* The memorial will be designed and created by Maurice Blik, an internationally renowned artist who, as a child was incarcerated during the Second World War.
- \* It is envisaged that the memorial will be on a scale worthy of such a grave and important subject, a work of art which is significant and timeless. The charity hopes it will be located at the heart of a busy metropolitan area, such as within the City of London, maximising public awareness and reaching the widest possible audience.
- \* Finance will be raised by appeals from charitable trusts, educational bodies and lottery funding, as well as private, corporate and public donations.
- \* Primary endorsement has been granted by the Research Centre for War Child Studies at the University of Reading.

With all good wishes – and please feel free to add a post on the BLOG  
Irene Glausiusz – Honorary Secretary, tel. 020 8904 5773  
Mobile: 07881 720 534 email: irenagl@gmail.com

Chairman : Professor Martin Parsons BA CertEd PhD DYL FCollIP FRHistS, Director  
Research Centre for Evacuee and War Child Studies University of Reading, Visiting  
Professor of War Child Studies University of Lodz  
Vice-chairman: Mr Peter Gibbs  
Patrons: Sir Brian Fall, former Ambassador to Washington and Moscow  
Professor Andy Goodwyn Head of the Institute of Education at the University of Reading

BLOG: <http://childreninwarmemorial.wordpress.com>

### **CONFERENCE READING SEPTEMBER 2011**

The leading theme of this conference was 'The Lost Childhoods of Wartime'. A couple of papers focused on war children's experiences having affected their psychological and social lives after the war. We could have become desperate because of all those problems, grief and pain we were confronted with, but the impression I took home with was not that of despair but that of hope!

First of all the contributions of a couple of students, presenting the issues they conduct a research study on, evoked in me feelings of warm appreciation and admiration. These young people commit themselves to difficult topics instead of choosing less complicated subjects and they do this with heart and soul. The same enthusiasm and ardent zeal I witnessed in the presentations of three former students of Martin Parsons, now graduated, who spoke at this conference about the outcomes of their studies. I felt privileged to listen to them and speak with some of them at lunch or during coffee breaks.

We listened breathless to the presentation of Peep Varju, bowled over by his terrible fate. But the strength he showed us in his being present at the conference and in his relating inexpressable events impressed all of us deeply.

In moving words Ruth Barnett drew our attention to the fate of the Gypsies and their ongoing discrimination. As a child she met with traumatic events. Now she is on the barricades for people who need our support.

For decades the evacuations of British and Finnish children was seen as successful operations, until a number of these evacuees started to speak about the negative effects they had to face because of their stay in the countryside or abroad. Researchers like Martin Parsons, Barbara Mattson and Perri Kaven published the outcomes of their studies, confirming the evacuees' experiences and problems. As a result of these publications people tended to see evacuation as such as a traumatising event. It is good to learn about evacuations shaped in such a way that the children received enough support to overcome their problems so that traumatising was averted: the evacuation of the Basque children and the pupils of the Jewish Free School. These children were kept together, surrounded by teachers and other adults taking care of them and this situation allowed them to keep their traditions and/or to speak their own language.

These stories alongside other issues raised the question of representativeness of the groups of people on which research studies are conducted. Our discussion led to the hypothesis that people willing to be interviewed or ready to participate in self help organisations belong to a category between the deeply traumatised people and those who were not affected at all or had got support averting traumatising.

In Sweden professor Pennti Anderson found in his research study significant differences between people who were evacuated in their childhood and a control group of people who stayed in their families. Whereas many people of his targetgroup showed symptoms of PTSD, the vast majority of the control group showed none of them. His study confirms the supposition that evacuated people were affected by their experiences and that effects still influence their lives many decades later.

Another discussion came up after Nigel Stanley's presentation in which he related the flight of British nationals from the north of Malaya to the south when trying to escape the Japanese invaders. During the flight the soldiers escorting the group of women and children sometimes got the food rations of the children who were called 'useless mouths'. When asked why people used this term he explained that the term was first used in the French-German war of 1870 where in the starving city of Paris the food portions were first of all given to the soldiers defending the town, food withheld from the children. Ruth Barnett said how awful using this terminology is, as children per definition cannot be judged by their actual contribution to the community. People need to recognize the children's priceless importance as future family, community and nation makers. Without children no future.

Julie Summers interviewed a number of parents who sent their children to the country side in the context of the evacuation programme of the UK authorities. Many of them had felt very unhappy because their children were not at home and regretted to having given in to the propaganda of the government, the clergy or the women's magazines.

The bookproject of Alison Baverstock has been inspired by the knowledge we acquired from the stories of war children and the studies on their experiences. One of the big problems is the alienation of the family members leaving those staying at home and the other way around. Alison Baverstock's husband is a soldier serving abroad, e.g. Afghanistan. So she knows from her own experience how important it is to stay in contact with each other. But exchange of news about everyday life is not enough. Therefore books are distributed among

the soldiers and their families. All members read the same book on which they comment in a scrapbook. In this way there is also an exchange of thoughts and emotions.

During this conference I again became aware of the importance of our work. We share our knowledge, we exchange our experiences, we ask for help and get support. We know that although war is still a reality in a lot of places in the world, the war children of today can be helped better and in at an earlier stage thanks to what at present is known about the effects of war on children.

Sometimes I would like to 'retire from the war': thirty years ago we founded our self help organisation 'Herkenning', I began to work on my problems as early as 1974, so now I long for 'vacation' and I long to leave the war-related problems behind me.

In Reading I found a new motivation to carry on for another couple of years.

Gonda Scheffel-Baars

Der Artikel von Maria Marchetta wird separat gesand.

#### WEBSITES

Organisation of Children of Dutch Collaborators:

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

Organisation of Children of War of different Backgrounds:

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

Organisation of Danish Children of War, Danske Krigsboern Foerening:

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

Norwegian Children of War Association, Norges Krigsbarnforbund:

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

Organization of Norwegian NS Children:

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

Krigsbarnforbundet Lebensborn, Norway:

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

Organisation of NS-children Vennetreff:

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

Riskforbundet Finska Krigsbarn: (in swedish)

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

Organisation of Finnish Children of War, Seundun Sotalapset:

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

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

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

Organisation of children of victims and children of the perpetrators:

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

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

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

Dachau Institut Psychologie und Pädagogik:

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

Kriegskind Deutschland:

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

Website for the postwar-generation:

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

Evacuees Reunion Association

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

Researchproject 'War and Children Identity Project', Bergen, Norway  
**[www.warandchildren.org](http://www.warandchildren.org)**

Researchproject University München 'Kriegskindheit'  
**[www.warchildhood.net](http://www.warchildhood.net)**

Coeurs Sans Frontières – Herzen Ohne Grenzen  
**[www.coeurssansfrontières.biz](http://www.coeurssansfrontières.biz)**

Organisation d'enfants de guerre  
**[www.nésdelalibération.fr](http://www.nésdelalibération.fr)**

Organisation of Us-descendants in Belgium  
**[www.usad-ww2.be](http://www.usad-ww2.be)**

Childsurvivors of the Holocaust in Australië  
**[www.paulvalent.com](http://www.paulvalent.com)**

International organisation for educational and professional development focused on themes like racism, prejudices and antisemitism  
**[www.facinghistory.org](http://www.facinghistory.org)**

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

Organisation of German Lebensbornkinder  
**[www.lebensspuren-deutschland.eu](http://www.lebensspuren-deutschland.eu)**

International Network for Interdisciplinary Research on Children born of War (INIRC)  
**[www.childrenbornofwar.org](http://www.childrenbornofwar.org)**

Organisation Genocide Prevention Now  
**[www.genocidepreventionnow.org](http://www.genocidepreventionnow.org)**

Basque Children of '37 Association UK  
[www.basquechildren.org](http://www.basquechildren.org)