

## *Part two: the horror*

*The death machine needs guinea-pigs,  
young guinea-pigs, guinea-pig children...  
With a deception Mengele, the angel of death  
of Auschwitz-Birkenau, procured 20 children  
to be sent to the camp in Neuengamme.  
There waiting for them  
was Doctor Kurt Heissmeyer  
and his experiments on tuberculosis.  
But when the British were very near,  
the children had to be “disappeared”...*

*Bullenhuser Damm*



#### Europe 1944.

*From this map you can follow the stages of the tragic journey of the 20 children. Torn from their countries of origin, they were taken to Poland, to Auschwitz-Birkenau; from there to the concentration camp in Neuengamme in Germany; to die in Hamburg, in the school of Bullenhuser Damm. Finally, their bodies were burnt in the crematorium in Neuengamme and their ashes scattered over the surrounding fields.*

### *The journey from Neuengamme Birkenau*

**O**ur children were in Birkenau, in hut 11. They had arrived from various places in Europe invaded by the Nazis; they were torn from their homes, from their possessions; they were crowded with their loved ones onto cattle wagons. They had a long, hellish journey, without eating or sleeping; hunger, thirst, tiredness and desperation accompanied them... Then on the unloading ramp they knew the bitter taste of selection... *And why all this? Because they were Jewish!*

*The 20 children of*

In a declaration issued in Israel 12 years after the end of the war, Dr Paulina Trocki stated that: “From late September, early October 1944, the children who arrived at Auschwitz with the transports were no longer sent to the gas chambers (or rather, not all were). At the end of the year, there were around 300 children per hut”. In late 1944, therefore, the children were no longer immediately all sent to the gas chambers; they were left alive, waiting... Undoubtedly the SS had them some grisly plan in store for them... In the hut at Auschwitz-Birkenau the days of these children passed by miserably: few hugs, little bread... a few morsels arrived as presents from the nearby huts... Andra and Tatiana, the cousins of Sergio de Simone, returned from that hell. “Andra was always cold; at night she couldn’t stop peeing herself. There was one dramatic night she spent in the camp infirmary ... Alone, a child, unseen, perhaps forgotten, she witnessed a terrible scene, which only with time was she able to give the correct name to: a birth!” The acrid smell of the smoke from the crematorium infected the air; it was no life for children. The prisoners that went to work filed by in lines of five before their eyes; they were dressed in stripes, they sank in the mud, they were nameless shadows; the semblances of their mothers were no longer recognizable; those women were skeletons, almost frightening. There was the blockova (block senior) who showed a little pity... or that slice of white bread, those biscuits, that chocolate received from an SS man... From the darkness, shreds of memories emerge... Malnourished children

become sick with awful illnesses: some had typhus, diarrhoea, deep cavities in their cheeks, on their faces due to an illness called “noma”, which even frightened the commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolph Höss, as he himself acknowledged on the pages of his book of memoirs Commandant of Auschwitz. Then there was the problem of language; how could the children communicate? The Italians must have spoken to each other, the Polish will have made a group together, the Dutch must have made friends, the French automatically had an accent in common... but there the orders arrived in German and you had to obey, otherwise you were beaten. Thus the children soon became bilingual and then, being together, picked up a bit of Czech, Polish... Time went by slowly; there were no more special days, no more birthdays or religious celebrations; there were no songs, everything disappeared as though by an evil spell. Everything was ugly, so ugly as to seem the bottom of the black hole of our history. Yet...

... the death machine needed guinea-pigs, young guinea-pigs, guinea-pig children!

The Viennese doctor Ella Lingens reports to us that one day a special block was prepared at Birkenau for children; there were 20 children there, 10 males and 10 females. “I remember it well”, said the doctor. “The children were in bed; they had to stay in bed... it was a hut with a clay floor, an old stable for horses and on the door there was still a poster with the words: ‘40 horses’. The children had bunk beds... the children were not sick. They received good food... They

*Bullenhuser Damm*

were well nourished and fattened up for Heissmeyer's experiments. One day the physician responsible for the children's block, Dr Irena Bialowna, came by and said they had to have the walls of the hut painted. A young Polish artist was given the job, by camp physician König, of painting images from fairy-tales on the walls: Red Riding Hood, the wolf, Snow White, Cinderella. The children had red cups with white marbles...".

Information on Hut 11 also reaches us from Polish nurse Elzbieta Piekut-Warszawska, who worked at Birkenau in the "Mengele-Kinder-Baracke" (Mengele's Children's Hut), that was near Hut 11. The children in Mengele's hut were also Jewish, from different countries of Europe; they were twins. Mengele subjected them to experiments to develop research to give him the title of professor.

"Mengele's children's hut was made of wood with a brick stove. The beds were camp beds where the children slept in twos or fours depending on their age; there were no mattresses, but straw sacks without sheets. On each bed there were two blankets. The food consisted of black bread, margarine, jam and white bread on Sundays... milk soup... potatoes with boiled turnips and cheese. Every day the children were washed in small basins with very little water. The older children helped".

The Polish nurse also tells us:

"Both the children in Mengele's hut and the children in Hut 11 had to go to the clinic for examinations. This was very

gruelling for the children. Frightened, tired, hungry and trembling with cold, they got up at six o'clock and had to walk the kilometre and a half from the hut to the clinic... It was already cold in late September early October and the clinic wasn't heated. The children had to wait naked for five to fifteen minutes until the X-ray was done, commented on and discussed... On returning to the hut the children often had coughs, colds, fever and even pneumonia".

It was 14 May 1944 when some children were examined and had blood samples taken... it was on that occasion that "child 179614" had a saliva sample taken for checks on diphtheria. That child was Sergio de Simone. That child who was so beautiful... "Nobody would dare hurt such a beautiful boy"... these were the words that came from the heart of his mother Gisella.

The words that the executioner of Auschwitz, Dr Mengele, was to invent were a wound to the heart. Some children are needed, but how can we ensure that panic does not spread, so the intervention can be as sterile, as surgical as possible? The man in black was to dress himself in infamous wickedness. One cold morning in November 1944, Dr Mengele, the angel of death, appeared in hut 11 and said:

***"If you want to see your mother  
step forward..."***

The story could end here... but if we left readers the task of

*The 20 children of*

finding an ending, even if we told you to imagine the most tragic fate, no one would even get close to the truth!

... and some children did step forward. They dreamed of the love denied; they hoped to find again the warmth of their mothers' embraces; they confided in the sweet promise of those words; they trusted the dream. They already tasted the kisses; they were consumed by desire; they had a foretaste of the joy of that flight, that dive into those arms so dreamed of. For an instant they found the stolen joys again; they trusted and... fell into the blackest hell. What awaited them was not the arms of their mothers to rock them, not the kisses to comfort them, not the lullaby to warm them and the hugs... but months of torments, of fever, of abandonment, of surgery on the lymph nodes. ***10 males and 10 females were taken from hut 11*** with the promise of their "mothers' arms". **The 20 children** daged between 5 and 12 were loaded onto a truck that took them from Birkenau to Auschwitz railway station.

***This was our group.***

***They were the 20 children that I have introduced to you.***

***They were the children of Bullenhuser Damm.***

The camp commandant had sent for Dr Paulina Trocki, ordering her to accompany the children, together with three nurses, including a laboratory expert. The transport was guarded by an SS officer; the train was a normal train, or so

it appeared from the outside. To prevent people from approaching, the rumour had been spread that the load was transporting people sick with typhus. When little Georges-André Kohn recognized the city of Berlin through the window, he said: "If only I knew someone; if I had an address, I would escape...".

Our 20 children were on the train. They were taken care of; they received chocolate, milk. After two days, on 29 November 1944, the train arrived at Neuengamme camp. The camp was around 30 kilometres from Hamburg. It was surrounded by birch trees and by a canal that was built by the first prisoners in 1940.

In the museum that now stands in the area where the camp stood there are huge panels bearing the names of all those who died in the camp; there are also the names of our 20 children. You can still see some huts and the chutes where the prisoners worked until they were exhausted. There were 106,000 prisoners in Neuengamme; of these 50,000 died. Their bodies were eliminated in the crematorium. The camp is famous for the factory made of red brick, the famous "Klinker". In a later phase weapons were manufactured in the camp. The children arrived at night. Neuengamme was a camp for political prisoners; there were no Jews. Dr Trocki would tell that the prisoners cried when they saw the children; she herself was afraid they wanted to use the children for experiments. A medical student from Belgium, who worked in the camp pharmacy, confirmed that

*Bullenhuser Damm*



*Neuengamme camp stood around 30 kilometres from Hamburg. It was surrounded by a birch wood and a canal built by the first prisoners in 1940. Today you can still see some of the huts and the chutes where the prisoners worked until they were exhausted.*

Neuengamme was a “men’s camp, no children... There was also a French physician there, Dr Florence, who tried to save the children...”.

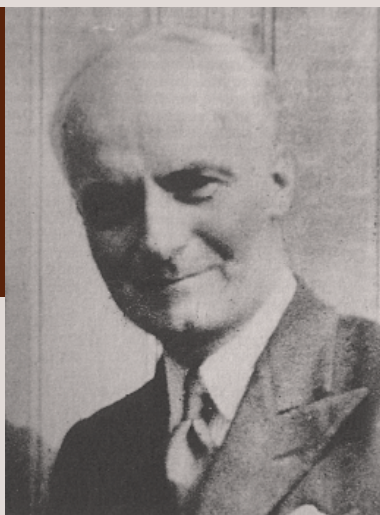
On 29 November Sergio de Simone had a birthday. What a tragic birthday fate had reserved for him, “who was so beautiful...”.

Dr Trocki did not see the children again.

And the three young Polish nurses who accompanied our 20 children on the journey from Neuengamme Birkenau? Where did those young nurses end up? I would like to tell you they were saved, that they saw the road home again, that they found the courage to keep on living. Instead, Neuengamme was their station of destination: they were killed there, hanged in the Bunker.

Christmas 1944. The children received some gifts from the prisoners. An Austrian prisoner, Jupp Händler, was dressed as Santa Claus. This was of course forbidden; those who approached the children’s hut risked the death penalty, but it was Christmas, surely they would not shoot... Even the cook, Longin Bladowski, who was an SS man, showed he had a little heart. A Dutch prisoner, Jan van Bork, begged him to give him some sugar. The cook was moved and also gave him some flour; the prisoners prepared cakes, biscuits and toys for the children. They got a pair of glasses for Marek James. His own pair had been broken by the SS at

*Professor Gabriel Florence, a member of the Resistance, was taken prisoner on 4 March 1944. Forced to assist Heissmeyer in his experiments on children, he was to meet the same end as the children in Bullenhuser.*



*Professor René Quenouille, sentenced by the Nazis on 3 March 1943 for having given shelter to a British parachutist, was interned in the Neuengamme camp. Forced to assist Heissmeyer, to save the children from infection he secretly attempted to render the tuberculosis bacilli harmless by boiling them: in vain ... He was murdered together with the 20 children in Bullenhuser.*



Auschwitz. The new pair was not right, but it was still a joy for Marek. The children were in a bad way. Hut 4a was ready for the experiments on TBC; all around there was barbed wire, the glass on the windows was whitewashed to prevent anyone seeing inside...

On 9 January 1945, Dr Kurt Heissmeyer arrived in Neuengamme. In the previous weeks he had conducted experiments on Russian and Serbian prisoners. Most had died; some were killed in order to perform autopsies and “study” them. His diabolical research now needed children. Two French physicians who were prisoners in the camp, Professor Gabriel Florence and Professor René Quenouille, were forced to help him. Both would end their days in Bullenhuser Damm, together with the 20 children.

### *Hut 4a: Dr Heissmeyer's experiments*

January 1945: the experiments began.

Heissmeyer had the skin cut on the children's chests, under the right armpit, with an X shape, three to four centimetres long, then with a spatula he introduced the tuberculosis bacilli and finally he covered the incisions with a sticking plaster. The children thus became infected with live tuberculous bacilli, capable of unleashing the illness in a very virulent



from Heissmeyer received the cultures from a certain Dr Meinecke, a bacteriologist from Berlin, who attempted to persuade Heissmeyer not to use the live bacilli on human beings, but he did not listen. Heissmeyer was blinded by ambition; he wanted to make his mark, to become a professor; he wanted to go down in history, he wanted to become famous. He had no scruples; he treated the children as though they were mice... like guinea-pigs to study their immune defences, to collect antibodies, to prepare a vaccine...

On 19 February 1945 Heissmeyer had the skin under the left armpits of the children cut and introduced more live bacilli. The children were lethargic, suffering; they had fever. Heissmeyer ordered Prof. Quenouille to take X-rays of the children. Another prisoner also entered the hut; he was Polish physician Zygmunt Szafranski. He came from Radom, as did the children of his colleague Sewern Witonski, the pediatrician, Eleonora and Roman Witonski, two of our 20 children...

To carry out the operations the presence in the camp would be exploited of a prisoner who as a free man was a surgeon, the Czech Bogumil Doclik. Heissmeyer was not capable of operating; he needed a surgeon to implement his criminal project.

It was 3 March 1945 when the children were operated on. Another prisoner helped the surgeon Bogumil Doclik, he was the Pole Franczyszek Czekalla. At around 7pm everything



*These are the 20 children immortalised by the slaughtering physician, Heissmeyer, at the end of his experiments. These raw images provided the most precious and unequivocal indictment.*

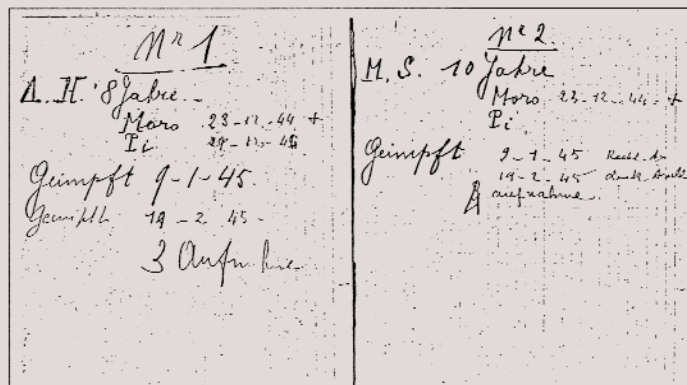
*The 20 children of*





*"Photo of the ring". Here we see little Eleonora Witonska (Heissmeyer had each child photographed after removing their lymph nodes) and the hand of an adult who is raising the girl's arm. In April 1985 the prisoner Jan van Bork of Amsterdam, who had survived Neuengamme camp, recognised the "ring" in this photo and told Günther Schwarberg that at Neuengamme he had made two rings, one for himself and one for his friend Anton Hölzel. So we know whose hand this is, and that with the 20 children there was an angel who stayed with them till the end, till Bullenhuser Damm...*

*Jan van Bork is dead. His ring is conserved forever in the museum at Bullenhuser Damm.*



*This table was found together with the photographs. It was kept in a zinc box.*

*It is likely that it was not written personally by Heissmeyer, but by one of his assistants. Let us read it together, with the help of Günther Schwarberg:*

*No. 1 and No. 2 indicate the number Heissmeyer gave the children in his experiments.*

*A.H. 8 Jahre stands for "Alexander Hornemann, aged 8"; M.S. 10 Jahre for "Marek Steinbaum, aged 10".*

*Moro means "tuberculous test according to Ernst Moro".*

*Pi probably stands for "tuberculous test according to Klemens Johannes Pirquet" (both tests served to verify the presence of tuberculosis).*

*Geimpft 9-1-45 [...] probably means "vaccinated\* 9-1-45 right armpit".*

*Geimpft 19-2-45 [...] probably means "vaccinated\* 19-2-45 left armpit".*

*\* Heissmeyer had "vaccinated" written; let us not forget that in fact he had "infected" the 20 children with live tuberculosis bacilli.*

Bullenhuser Damm

was ready. The children were made to enter, undress and lie down on the operating table. After disinfecting the skin under the arm, the anaesthetic was applied. The surgeon felt the lymph nodes beneath the armpit, then he proceeded with an incision of around five centimetres and removed the nodes, finally suturing the cut. Each operation lasted around a quarter of an hour. That evening nine children were operated on. The French physicians put the nodes in jars with formalin, labelling them with the names and numbers tattooed on the children's arms. All 20 underwent the same operation. After which they were taken to hut 4a... Heissmeyer took the labelled jars containing the nodes to the laboratory of the sanatorium of the SS in Hohenlychen, where the pathologist Hans Klein was expecting him. He was aware of the experiments, having visited Neuengamme camp on 19 April 1944 with Heissmeyer and with the SS head of health, Dr Enno Lolling. Together, the three physicians had seen hut 4a where the experiments on TBC would take place; they had seen the windows whitewashed to prevent what was going on inside from being seen, the barbed wire. They had given their consent to the diabolic, criminal project. The children are seriously ill, the infection struck them all in a devastating form, the nodes removed and studied by pathologist Klein did not show any traces of antibodies... l'esperimento è completamente fallito. It was 20 April 1945: the British were drawing near; the children had to be "disappeared"...

### *From Neuengamme to Hamburg to Bullenhuser Damm*

The order arrived from Berlin to the commandant of Neuengamme camp, Max Pauly. He called SS corporal Anton Thumann and told him to pass it on to the head physician of Neuengamme, Alfred Trzebinski, Heissmeyer's deputy, the supervisor of the experiments.

In the papers of the trial in Curiohaus we read:

*Halte dich fest, ich soll dir etwas nicht gerade Schönes sagen. Es liegt ein Exekutionsbefehl aus Berlin vor. Du sollst die Kinder durch Gas oder Gift umbringen* ("Prepare yourself, I have some rather unpleasant news. There is an execution order from Berlin: you must eliminate the children with gas or poison").

Prozess Neuengamme, Band III, S. 346.

It was the evening of 20 April 1945. The children were lying in their beds; sleep, fever, illness. They had fallen asleep. They woke them...

The two Dutch nurses Hölzel and Deutelom were ordered to wake them up, to dress them. The two physicians Florence and Quenouille were instructed to prepare the children for a move to Theresienstadt ... "Perhaps mummy will be there...". What pain, what lumps in the throat those two poor French doctors must have had. How did they succeed

*The 20 children of*



*Hamburg, the school at Bullenhuser Damm.*

in consoling the children, in lying compassionately again, in preparing a gentle deceit to prevent the children from weeping desperately... They were physicians, they knew that TBC was rampant in the small defenceless bodies; they were men and knew the Nazi beasts, they knew their rules, their customs, the absence of even the slightest moral and professional ethics. They knew the SS were murderers. So they knew that this journey would be the last. Professor Quenouille turned to nurse Paul Weissmann and said to him: "I believe we won't meet again".

At 10pm a large postal truck arrived. On board the truck that left Neuengamme camp there were six Russian prisoners, the two Dutch nurses, the two French physicians and the 20 children.

With them there were also SS officers Wilhelm Dreimann, Adolf Speck and Heinrich Wiehagen: these men were the Exekutionsskommando of Neuengamme; they were experienced executioners; they took some ropes. Sitting in front were driver Hans Friedrich Petersen and SS physician Alfred Tizebinski.

The commandant of Neuengamme camp, Max Pauly, had already had thousands of people killed, but he showed some hesitation, as these were children. This murder had to remain secret.

The truck headed towards Hamburg, towards Rothenburgsort, towards the Bullenhuser Damm school.

Hamburg had been heavily bombed, even Bullenhuser

Damm school had been struck by bombs in July 1943; part of the roof was burnt. The school had been occupied by the SS and transformed into a jail for Scandinavian prisoners. Around 600 of them had been crowded in. “It was a tough imprisonment, but less hellish than Neuengamme camp”, according to Danish prisoner Dr Gregers Jensen.

In April 1945 the prisoners were all taken away.

Bullenhuser Damm school was empty, defended by just two SS personnel: Johann Frahm and Ewald Jauch. From this moment SS officer Arnold Strippel took command of the operation.

An hour before midnight the Bullenhuser Damm massacre began.

Here are the facts, gleaned from the deposition given on 9 March 1946 at Neumünster camp before British judge Captain H.P. Kinsleigh by Adolf Speck, one of the killers:

“First the six Soviet prisoners were made to get down from the truck; Dreimann and Trzebinski pushed them into the school. I, Petersen and Wiehagen remained in the truck. Johann Frahm and Ewald Jauch were there when we arrived. Both entered the school together with Dreimann and Trzebinski and the six prisoners. Then Trzebinski, Frahm and Jauch took the twenty children and four adults...”.

No sensitivity, no human feelings emerge from this blunt

account; rereading it almost 60 years later still gives me the shivers. No hug for the 20 children...

Now let us read the precise description of the massacre given by Johann Frahm on 2 May 1946:

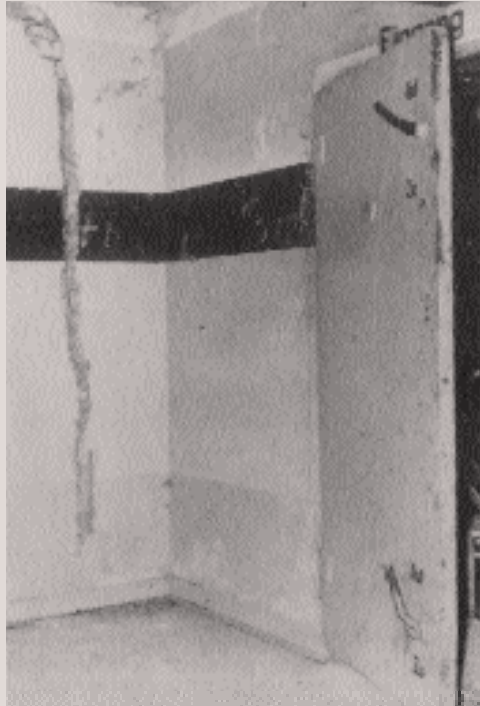
“The camp commandant of Bullenhuser Damm was Jauch, the executer of the orders was Strippel... I went down to the cellar, where the new arrivals had been assembled. There were around 20 children. Some seemed to be ill. With the children in the cellar were Dr Trzebinski, Dreimann and Jauch. Strippel was coming and going. The children had to undress in a room in the cellar. Then they were taken into another room, where Dr Trzebinski gave them an injection to put them to sleep. Those that still showed some signs of life after the injection were taken into another room.

A rope was put around their necks and they were hung from a *hoo wie Bilder an die Wand... (like pictures on the wall)*. This was executed by Jauch, by me, by Trzebinski and Dreimann. Strippel was only partly present... Around midnight another load of prisoners arrived from Neuengamme...”.

*Bilder an die Wand... (like pictures on the wall)*: this is how Frahm responded when Captain Walter Freud asked him: “How did you hang them?”  
*“Wie Bilder an die Wand.”*

**... Like pictures on the wall... Dear reader, I leave any**

*The 20 children of*



*The cellar in Bullenhuser Damm where the hangings took place.*

**comment to your sensitivity, to your heart ... learn to love these poor, desperate, sick children, who had already spent days or months in hut 11 of Birkenau. I suggest you visit it. Then follow with your finger on the map, if you are unable to do so physically, the route to Neuengamme, near Hamburg, where the mothers were supposed to be, in Mengele's false promise. There instead was Heissmeyer with his homicidal experiments and finally again the promise of the mothers, and instead the postal truck and Bullenhuser Damm school in Hamburg and there, in the cellar, were the jailers, there was an executioner who had the courage to hang them ... like pictures on the wall!... Never forget them!**

Eleven months later, before the British court SS physician Alfred Trzebinski was to describe the facts of Bullenhuser Damm as follows:

“The children did not suspect a thing. I wanted at least to assuage their final hours. I had some morphine with me... I called the children one by one ... I gave them an injection on the buttock, where it is less painful. So they would believe it was really a vaccination, I changed the needle after each injection. The dose was supposed to be enough to make them sleep. I must say that the children were in quite good condition, apart from a twelve year-old boy, who was very poorly. This child went to sleep immediately. There were six or eight still awake, the others slept... Frahm took the twelve-year-old in his arms and told the others: ‘He will be

*Bullenhuser Damm*

put to bed'. He took him to another room, around six or eight metres from the one where the children were found and there I saw that there was already a rope on a hook. From this rope Frahm hanged the child that was sleeping, then he held on with the full weight of his body onto the child's body so that the rope tightened and hanged him ...

I saw a lot of suffering in the camp... But hanging children, this I had never seen".

In the morning at around 4am all the children were dead. The bodies were piled up in the cellar. The SS also took the bodies of the other prisoners there: the six Russians, the two Dutch nurses Dirk Deutekom and Anton Hölzel, and the two French physicians, René Quenouille and Gabriel Florence, who were hanged from pipes in the boiler room.

In the meantime, the postal truck had brought 24 more Soviet prisoners from Strippel's camp in Spaldingstrasse. They were all to be hanged, but six of them managed to run away. They hanged 18 of them.

In the cellar, at dawn, there lay 48 bodies.

The SS went up to the first floor, drank coffee and smoked cigarettes.

20 children had just been hanged and the SS drank and toasted the Führer's health: was 20 April 1945, the day of Hitler's birthday! As their reward for completing the massacre of Bullenhuser Damm, the SS received twenty cigarettes and half a litre of grappa.

In the meantime it had become daybreak. Trzebinski returned to the school. As a doctor he had some formalities to respect: he

had to verify the death of the prisoners.

It was Trzebinski himself who related this at the trial:

"I went back into the building to see the children. In the room where they had been, there was no longer anybody, just the luggage. I went to the room where the hanging had happened. I found it locked. I took Frahm with me, who opened the door for me. There lay the children, and all of them had the signs of hanging on their necks. I examined each child to confirm that they were dead. Then I went to the room where the men had been hanged and confirmed that they were dead. **Damit war dieses traurige Kapitel abgeschlossen** ('Thus this tragic chapter was closed')".

### *From Bullenhuser Damm to Neuengamme*

In the night between 21 and 22 April, the postal truck returned to Bullenhuser Damm.

It was Ewald Jauch who provided the details during the trial: "The bodies were taken from Bullenhuser Damm to Neuengamme in the truck. Strippel travelled in the truck; I accompanied him and the others, who had gone to the cellar where the bodies lay. With a couple of guards, Strippel collected the 48 bodies from the cellar of Bullenhuser Damm; He had them loaded onto the postal truck and taken to Neuengamme. Here the SS commandant Brake, responsi-

*The 20 children of*





*The crematorium in Neuengamme.*

ble for the crematorium of Neuengamme camp, had the bodies of the 20 children and 28 adults burned in the oven. The ashes were spread over the surrounding fields”.

Those ashes were supposed to become dust and nobody was to have known of the tragic events of Bullenhuser Damm. But on 31 March 1945 Dr Henry Meyer, a Danish prisoner at Neuengamme from December 1944, had secretly noted down the surnames of the children on whom Heissmeyer was conducting the experiments. He also noted their age, sex, countries of origin and the first letter of their first names. This list was entrusted to the Danish Red Cross. This is how the names of the 20 children of Bullenhuser Damm were saved.

In the empty school of Bullenhuser Damm, on the night of 20 April, while the hanging of 48 people was being carried out, while 20 children were hanged “like pictures on the wall...”, on the ground floor of the red brick school of Bullenhuser Damm there was one person. It was Wilhelm Wede, the custodian, he only civilian who had access to the camp. When questioned, months later, on what had happened, what he heard that tragic night, he answered that he heard absolutely nothing, that he was asleep. Yet, the following morning, he wondered where the wooden toy and a pair of old dolls that he found on the floor of the cellar had come from... and that he quickly got rid of in the oven...

### *Part three: the justice*

*On 3 May 1945,  
the first of the killers  
of the 20 children died,  
killed by an escaping Russian prisoner:  
he was Heinrich Wiehagen,  
teacher by profession...*

*The 20 children of*



*The SS at Neuengamme. The arrows indicate Max Pauly and Arnold Strippel.*



*Wilhelm  
Dreimann.*



*Hans  
Friedrich  
Petersen.*



*Adolf  
Speck.*



*Johann  
Frahm.*



*Dr Alfred  
Trzebinski.*

### *The trial of the executioners*

**C** With the British army moving ever closer, the murderers attempted to destroy all traces of their massacres.

The commandant of Neuengamme camp, Max Pauly, destroyed 400 kilos of documents that attested to the misdeeds of the SS and had a sign hung up outside the crematorium with the words "Disinfection Room". The huts were cleaned so that the British would find everything in order. Indeed, the first soldiers who entered Neuengamme camp found the huts empty and clean.

Pauly abandoned Neuengamme, but only after having loaded the 2000 packages from the Swedish Red Cross that were stored there onto a truck by the warehouse manager, Jacobsen. From that haul Pauly and Jacobsen split 400,000 cigarettes, 20,000 bars of chocolate, 20,000 packets of coffee and tea. On 3 May commandant Max Pauly went to Flensburg with a camp car and there he hid in the house of his sister-in-law, Anita Knuth. He threw away his uniform and put on civilian clothes. On 15 May 1945, at 11pm, two British detectives responsible for hunting war criminals rang Mrs Knuth's doorbell. Max Pauly was captured and interned in Neumünster camp. Johan Frahm, Wilhelm Dreimann, Adolf Speck and Ewald Jauch were subsequently also taken there. Four of the killers of Bullenhuser Damm still remained at large: Arnold Strippel, Kurt Heissmeyer, Hans Klein and Alfred Trzebinski. Trzebinski had fled to Hesendorf, thinking he had managed to get away with it. But the British had set up a special commis-

sion of investigators to track down the war criminals and the name of physician Alfred Trzebinski was on their lists. It was British Major Walter Freud, nephew of Sigmund Freud, who went to Hesendorf to draw him out on 1 February 1946. On 18 March 1946, in Hamburg, the trial began of the 14 SS criminals responsible for Neuengamme concentration camp. For the trial the British used one of the few rooms in the Curiohaus that had not been bombed. The proceedings against the exterminators of Bullenhuser Damm were called *Curiohaus-Prozesse*. Pauly was no. 1, Thumann no. 3, Dreimann no. 5, Speck no. 9, Trzebinski no. 14. A few months later, Jauch and Frahm were called to the dock to answer for the children's massacre. Strip-pel's name also appeared among those incriminated, but the charges against him were suspended. British Major Stephen Malcolm Stewart opened the trial with these words: "Listen to the story, told by two witnesses, of the young French boy Georges and little Jacqueline and many other nameless children, who were taken to the camp for experiments. They were beautiful, normal, healthy... and they were killed!"

Here are some passages from Johann Frahm's deposition:

"What happened after the children were given the injection? You said that they slept. Is that true?"

*Frahm: "Yes, it is true".*

"What happened afterwards?"

*"They were loaded into a room. They were asleep and never woke again".*

"How can you say they were dead?" "Did you see this room?"

*"It could be seen".*

Who put the rope around the children's necks?"

*"Me".*

"Did the children cry?"

*"No".*

Camp commandant Max Pauly said he had just been carrying out orders. All the accused tried to deny blame; nobody declared themselves guilty; none of them was ashamed. All said they had acted "for Germany" or "as soldiers"; all were just "parts of a system". But not all executed all the orders... The case of political prisoner Fritz Bringmann was cited. He was a nurse who in February 1942 refused to kill the Soviet prisoners who were no longer able to work with a phenol injection. He did not save the lives of the Russian prisoners with his refusal to carry out an order - they were killed by SS commandant Willi Bahr in person - but he saved his own humanity. Fritz Bringmann survived the camp, but did he did not receive any recognition for his exemplary behaviour. The trial against the criminals of Bullenhuser Damm was concluded on 3 May 1946. At 11.45 judge C.L. Stirling pronounced the sentence: "Max Pauly, the court sentences you to death by hanging". All the eleven responsible for the Bullenhuser Damm massacre were sentenced to death by hanging. Awaiting execution, the prisoners were transferred from Altona prison to Fuhlsbüttel. The wait lasted five months. From his death cell, **Max Pauly** wrote to his son: "My dear, good boy, always be proud to be German [...] get me a plum cake, some chocolate pudding; I want to eat my fill once more... *Kopf hoch!* ('Head high!'), your faithful father".

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Alfred Trzebinski vented his feelings in his diary Ich, in which he passed himself off as a good man.

Wilhelm Dreimann ad pinned his hopes on the petition for leniency made by his wife. The petition was rejected by the British Army judge, Lord Russell of Liverpool.

On 26 August 1946 the British judge signed the eleven death sentences.

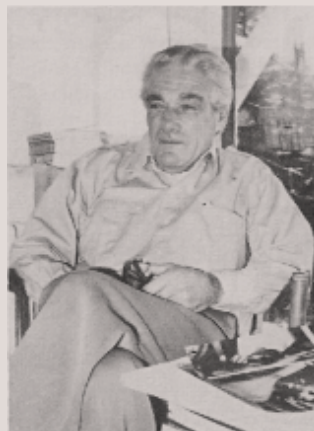
Alfred Trzebinski wrote a letter of farewell to his wife: "Without the slightest guilt I am accused of things to which I am completely extraneous".

Trzebinski could not bear the sight of the blood of animals; he cried if a rabbit was killed by the electrified fence that surrounded the camp. His worry was that something might happen to his adored cat Muschi. Trzebinski was a physician who had witnessed the hanging of 20 children and yet took care of a cat with obsessive love! Before the British arrived, in April 1945, Dr Trzebinski killed Muschi with a gunshot, convinced that nobody would love her more than him; then he drowned her four kittens.

On the morning of 8 October 1946 the death sentences were executed. At 10.59am the first one died; at 2.47pm the last of the eleven condemned men was hanged.

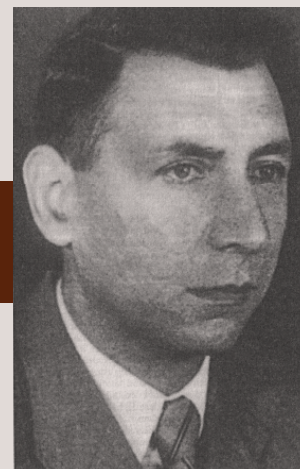
Willi Dreimann ended his life saying: "God, have pity on me". Alfred Trzebinski said: "Lord, forgive them for they know not what they do".

Yet the powerful chapter of the executioners of Bullenhuser Damm was not closed. There were 14 killers, 11 of them executed. Those not present: Heissmeyer, Klein and Strippel.



*Dr Hans Klein, pathologist. Klein was never prosecuted. He gained a position as forensic physician at Heidelberg University. He died in 1984.*

*Dr Kurt Heissmeyer. He was found in Magdeburg on 13 December 1964. He had a clinic specialising in pulmonary illnesses...*



*Arnold Strippel. Strippel's case would be opened and archived a number of times...*

*Part four:  
love and memory*

*“The good angel” of the 20 children  
of Bullenhuser Damm  
is Günther Schwarberg*

*The 20 children of*



***Günther Schwarberg:***  
***“The angel” of the children of Bullenhuser Damm***

Günther Schwarberg went to school when Hitler rose to power. When Hitler's war ended, Günther was a youngster full of hatred for the uniform and the swastika. All his life has been influenced by his aversion to Nazi Fascism. All his activities have had a precise objective: to seek out the murderers of the Third Reich. He became a journalist and a reporter on the magazine “Stern”, where he worked in the editorial office for 24 years. His most important work was the reconstruction of the massacre of Bullenhuser Damm. Starting from the end, from 20 April 1945, Schwarberg picked up the “shreds” of memory, putting them back together to return to history the faces, names and roots of the “20 children”. He loves them so much that they have become “his 20 children”. He looked for their relatives in Europe and worldwide and formed the “Association of the Children of Bullenhuser Damm”. Günther Schwarberg still devotes all his energies to ensuring justice is done. With lawyer Barbara Hüsing he has carried forward the search for the killers who escaped the Curiohaus trial. In October 1946, when the death sentence was passed on the 11 murderers of the massacre of Bullenhuser Damm, Schwarberg was a young journalist. Few were interested in the Curiohaus trial, in Germany at the time there was talk above all of the Nuremberg Trials. Then silence descended over the tragedy of Bullenhuser Damm; the journalists kept silent, forgetfulness was swallowing Memory...

On 13 December 1948, at midday, the former political prisoner Clemens Bukowski, in Frankfurt, in Münchner Strasse, saw a man whose walk he recognized. “I had no doubt, it was Strippel, the murderer”. After the Curiohaus trial, Strippel had also been condemned for other massacres; he was wanted but his file was to be opened and closed due to lack of evidence.

The years passed, every effort was made to soothe the pain, to close with the past... On 21 May 1959, in “Stern” magazine, in the “Dear readers” column, an article was published by Jürgen von Kornatzky in which he wondered whether it was appropriate to tell children, during lessons, what had happened around fourteen years earlier in a school in Hamburg, where 10 Jewish boys and 10 Jewish girls, aged between four and twelve, were used as guinea-pigs by Dr Heissmeyer for his experiments on tuberculosis. From Hanover the news arrived that in Magdeburg there lived a certain Dr Heissmeyer. On 13 December 1963 the doctor who had used the children as guinea-pigs was arrested. Since the end of the war he had lived in liberty, maintaining his name, carrying out the profession of physician specialising in pulmonary diseases. For over 18 years! Heissmeyer had very large consulting rooms and was the owner of the only private clinic for the treatment of tuberculosis in the German Democratic Republic. He lived in a beautiful house, furnished with antique furniture, adorned with precious paintings and carpets. Had also purchased a house for his three children; he was considered a good physician, much esteemed and loved! Initially Heissmeyer denied all the accusations against him, but finally revealed the existence of the proof of his misdeeds: 19

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years after the end of the war, eine Kiste was exhumed: a zinc box measuring around 60 x 20 x 30 cm. In that box, together with silver cutlery and a porcelain dish – a gift from Oswald Pohl, a general in the Waffen-SS with a dedication and Happy New Year wishes for 1944 – were the X-rays, the charts with the checks on the fever, the annotations on the progress of the illness, the photographs of the 20 children after the operations. That zinc box contained evidence that Heissmeyer was guilty of crimes against humanity. “Did you take the fact that you were using people for your experiments into consideration?”, he was asked at the trial. “I considered the prisoners in camp Neuengamme, and also the children made available to me in the autumn of 1944, as objects. For me there was no difference between people and guinea-pigs – then he corrected himself – between Jews and guinea-pigs”, Heissmeyer responded. Forensic physician Professor Otto Prokop worked for four months on the records of Heissmeyer’s experiments; at the end he said: “In my career as a forensic physician I have never seen anything worse... my secretary cried, and this must make us think, considering she was used to making records during autopsies”.

O. Prokop, Kriminalistik und forensische Wissenschaft, Heft 3, Berlin (DDR) 1970.

A dozen patients of Heissmeyer – the prototype of the thousands of people who did not resist the Nazi criminal system – testified in his favour, saying that they owed their recovery, their lives, to him! Heissmeyer lacked the seed of human feeling; it is on people like him that dictatorships rely.

After a long debate, on 30 June 1966, the Court of Magdeburg

pronounced the sentence: “Dr Kurt Heissmeyer is sentenced to life imprisonment”. He was 60 years old.

One year later, on 29 August 1967, he died of a heart attack.

His two male children are doctors; together with their sister, they have carried out humanitarian actions. One of them declared: “I can’t understand how a man that loved children so much could have been capable of doing such a thing”.

### *A life for justice*

It was 1977 and by pure chance Günther Schwarberg read Geisel der Menschheit (The Scourge of the Swastika in English) by Lord Russell and Unter Türmen und Masten by Willi Bredel, books in which the massacre of Bullenhuser Damm is discussed. In the meantime Bullenhuser Damm school was reopened; it resumed its educational activities without mentioning to the pupils what had happened in the school cellar, what suffering had taken place in the room on the first floor. The survivors of the concentration camps had asked a number of times for Bullenhuser Damm school to become a monument to Memory, for a memorial stone to be placed there... On 30 January 1963 the request was granted, but the stone was placed inside, on the staircase that leads to the cellar, and not on the façade, as would have been proper. Furthermore, that memorial stone refers to “20 foreign children”, and it is not said that they were “Jewish”, and the 24 Soviet prisoners are not named a tall. It was to be the love, patience, devotion and courage of Günther Schwarberg that returned the whole truth to history. The limited knowledge of German students of the history of the Third Reich prompted the

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editor-in-chief of “Stern” to publish the first part of Günther Schwarberg’s work: *Der SS-Arzt und die Kinder*.

On 8 March 1979 the magazine began to publish Schwarberg’s work and part of the records of the Curiohaus trial with the sentence. For six weeks “Stern” told of the tragedy of the “20 children of Bullenhuser Damm”.

Strippel was still free. He was the last of the executioners of Bullenhuser Damm. In 1949 in Frankfurt he had already been sentenced to thirty years for killing 21 prisoners in Buchenwald camp. In 1969 he had obtained a rehearing and reduction of the sentence to the six years already served and reimbursement of 120,000 marks for the sentence and detention, declared unjust! Strippel bought a beautiful house in Kalbach; he lived comfortably, self-assured, even imposing his will on the Municipal Council of his town: he obtained a commitment that trees would not be planted in front of his beautiful house because they cast shadows on his balcony!

After the publication in “Stern” of the report on the executioners of Bullenhuser Damm in March 1979, Strippel sued Schwarberg and his newspaper; the complaint resulted in a 100,000 mark fine! The following months were very hard for Günther Schwarberg, who nevertheless continued his work collecting testimonies... It was above all the relatives of the 20 children who had formed the “Association of the children of Bullenhuser Damm” who were calling for justice. They joined the prosecution as plaintiffs and lawyer Barbara Hüsing was appointed to represent them. In the end the complaint was annulled and the fine cancelled. The hope that justice would be done was reborn!

In this period the witnesses and the relatives of the “20 children of Bullenhuser Damm” were heard. Henri Morgenstern, the cousin of little Jacqueline, who was in the audience chamber, reports: “He is a few metres from me; it is Strippel, I recognize his profile. I have cold, sweaty hands; an unbelievable agitation assails me”; then he stood up and pronounced the horrifying words shown on the first pages of this book... They stood opposite each other. Strippel was silent. Yet the sentence did not come, the trial did not begin. There were obstacles, delays, adjournments. Barbara Hüsing received letters and pleas from France, Holland, Israel, the USA... Strippel could not remain unpunished!

It was 13 December 1983 when, finally, the trial opened against Arnold Strippel. The sentence against him was already written in the judicial documents of the trial of the British court in 1946. But those documents were in English; a translation, revised and corrected, was needed... Meanwhile a further six months passed. Public opinion split: many did not want to keep looking back, others demanded justice. The wounds were gaping, bleeding... It was clear that time was expected to resolve the unsettled issues of justice, it was hoped that the relatives, friends and acquaintances of the drama of Bullenhuser Damm would capitulate due to tiredness or desperation. But the energy released by the love for those twenty poor innocents brought together the now few relatives, who all chipped in and appealed to an International Tribunal. The court was installed at Bullenhuser Damm. It was 18 April 1986, As Presiding Judge, Martin Hirsch began the proceedings thus: “This is the worst murder in the his-

*Bullenhuser Damm*

tory of humanity”. For two days the witnesses gave their depositions: their words were immensely powerful. In the gymnasium of Bullenhuser Damm school there were hundreds of people; they all stood, a deathly silence reigned. Tears flowed in streams. On 20 April, on the 41st anniversary of the massacre, there in that same school where the “20 children” were hanged, Strippel’s guilt was confirmed. The warning with which the presiding judge closed the session was a frightening one: “A state that leaves the murderers of the Nazi regime unpunished is subject to a new fascism”.

Yet the official justice did not move forward; new quibbles were sought. Three experts were appointed to verify whether the accused was well enough to undergo a trial. Months of investigations and finally on 20 January 1987 the trial closed due to the physical impossibility of the accused to endure it!

**Arnold Strippel died at his home in Frankfurt in May 1994... unpunished!**

### *20 April, day of “Memory”*

On 20 April 1979 “The Association of the Children of Bullenhuser Damm” was created “The investigations by the relatives of the 20 Jewish children slaughtered at Bullenhuser Damm has lasted decades” – tells Günther Schwarberg, founder of the association – “In this period of time we have formed a new family... A series of incredible circumstances has played a decisive role in the investigations...”. Together with the publication in “Stern” magazine of the series of articles on the murders of Bul-

lenhuser Damm, in 1979 Günther Schwarberg had printed in a number of languages a poster with the photos of the 20 children and sent copies to their countries of origin and to Israel...

In Tel Aviv Ella Kozłowski recognized the photograph of her cousin **Riwka** Herszberg. Riwka’s father was killed by the Nazis, while her mother, who survived, moved to the United States and unfortunately was not in time to recognize her child’s photo because she died following serious injuries in an accident. Ella went to Hamburg many times and became one of the closest friends of Günther and his wife Barbara. From the Netherlands, also Ans van Staveren, the aunt of **Edo** and **Lexje** Hornemann, showed affection and thankfulness to Günther, but never went to Hamburg. She never felt she could set foot in the country where the last murderers of the 20 children had gone unpunished. Günther and Barbara often made visit to “aunt Ans”, and they telephoned each other every week. Nison Zylberberg, **Ruchla**, ’s father, from Sandomierz in Poland, who survived because he succeeded in escaping to the Soviet Union with his brother and sister-in-law, came to know that his little Ruchla was one of the 20 children of Bullenhuser Damm after 1979, following the publication of Günther’s articles in “Stern” magazine. Until his death in autumn 2002, Nison Zylberberg went to Hamburg many times from the USA to commemorate 20 April. How many letters were written by Rucza Witonska, who survived Auschwitz, mother of **Roman** and **Eleonora**, two of the 20 children. How many tears must she have shed over those letters sent to the International Red Cross, to which nobody ever replied! After 33 years, only Günther Schwarberg

*The 20 children of*

was able to answer her. Because of this, a profound, extraordinary bond was forged between them, which still survives today. It took a long time, but in the end **Sergio** de Simone's mother was found. Gisella purposely did not respond to Günther's appeal; Sergio's mother, would not, could not accept that they could have done so much evil to her little boy Sergio, to her baby "who was so beautiful..." Gisella went to Hamburg on 20 April 1984, but she kept on hoping until her death that "it was not true". For the Day of Memory in Hamburg, Sergio's brother, Mario, and his cousins Tati and Andra Bucci were present. Also present were Henri Morgenstern, cousin of **Jacque-line**, arriving from Paris, and Lola Steinbaum, the sister of **Marek**, born in Radom in Poland, from Monterey, near San Francisco. From Brooklyn came Chaim Altman, **Mania's** uncle from Radom, with his wife Hilda; Jitzhak Reichenbaum, brother of **Eduard** of Kattowitz, returns regularly to Hamburg from Haifa; from Tel Aviv comes Shifra Mekler, **Blumele's** sister and the sole survivor of her family. **Georges-André**, 's brother, Philippe Kohn, returns to Hamburg every year. Philippe Kohn is president of the Association. Philippe is the brother of Georges-André Kohn, one of the **20 children of Bullenhuser Damm**. Georges was the oldest of the "20 children", the most ill, the weakest; the one who was hanged first. Philippe was with Georges and all his family on train no. 1697, which at 4pm on 17 August 1944 departed from Drancy-Le Bourget station. In the cattle wagon there were 51 people, 51 Jews, hot, thirsty, hungry, afraid... Disobeying his father for the first time, Philippe and sister Rose-

Marie, together with some other brave people, had managed to escape... and to survive the extermination of his family, **the extermination of 6 million Jews**. What the relatives of the 20 children feel, the torment in their heart, is expressed well by the words of Rucza Witonska: "My two children were forgotten for years. Now many people are thinking of them; this relieves my pain... I thank them all".

Since 20 April 1980 Bullenhuser Damm school has been called Janusz Korczak Schule in memory of the great Polish pedagogue, director of the orphanage in the Warsaw ghetto, who on 5 August 1942, together with all "his" children, was loaded onto a cattle wagon and deported to Treblinka to die in the gas chamber. Every year, on 20 April, Günther Schwarberg organizes a very moving commemorative ceremony in the school. The children are called out aloud by name; white roses bloom for them in the school garden. And new plants are continually being brought by the schoolchildren. There is not one young person in Hamburg who does not know the terrible story of the "Kinder vom Bullenhuser Damm".

20 April 1988, in recognition of all of their great commitment, Günther Schwarberg and Barbara Hüsing were awarded the "Ann Frank Prize".

On 20 April 1995, on the 50th anniversary of the massacre, in the Burgwedel district of Hamburg, twenty streets were named after the **20 children of Bullenhuser Damm**.

*Bullenhuser Damm*

***Jitzhak Reichenbaum  
and Shifra Mekler tell their story...***

“I was born in Katowice, Poland, on June 8, 1932. My father, Ernst Reichenbaum, was born in 1900 in Ustron, Poland, and later moved with his parents to Cieszyn.

Before the war he worked as chartered account at a German publishing house named Adamski in Katowice. My mother worked as his assistant. My brother Eduard was born in Katowice on November 15, 1934.

A few days before the beginning of the war (1.9.1939) our family moved to Piotrkow Trybunalsk, my mother's hometown, where she was born as Sabina Jakobowicz on February 26, 1909.

Until the great deportation to Treblinka, in October 1942, we lived with our grandparents, Rickerska St. 8. My father worked as a clerk in the Jewish community and I studied in an underground class. As Jews we were forbidden to attend school, and had to study illegally. This was dangerous: if caught, we would have been executed, together with our teachers. After the deportation of the Jews of Piotrkow, only 3000 working people remained there. They were concentrated in a small area, which was called the small ghetto, or the ‘Block’, and we stayed there until July 1943.

At the end of July we were sent to the ‘Arbeitslager’ Blizyn.

The Germans did not want to send any children to an ‘Arbeitslager’, and therefore they brought lorries to the railway station where the trains to Blizyn were to leave. They put all the children on the lorries in order to bring them to a graveyard, and to shoot them there. My brother and I were on such a lorry already, when my father succeeded in bribing one of the Germans, who then allowed him to remove us from the lorry just in time, before it drove off to the graveyard. And so it happened that we left for Blizyn together, my parents, my little brother and myself. In Blizyn I became a useful working prisoner. My job consisted in producing socks for the ‘Wehrmacht’ thus supporting the German war apparatus. About a year later, at the end of July 1944, we were deported to Auschwitz. It was the first time I was separated from my family. When our transport arrived at Auschwitz, we immediately passed a ‘selection’ on the ‘Rampa’. My brother stayed with my mother and both were taken to the ‘Frauenlager’ B in Birkenau. I was sent to the ‘Mannerlager’ A, ‘Block’ 10 and got the prisoner-number B 2514, which was tattooed on my left arm. My father arrived at Auschwitz a few days later, and unfortunately I never had the chance to see him again.

‘Block’ 10 was only for youngsters; on one side were the Jewish boys, on the other Christian boys, deported from Warszawa to Auschwitz after the revolt in 1944.

Several boys in our ‘Block’ fell ill with rubella, a highly





*The underground class in Piotrkow. Our books are hidden behind the coats. The second one from above that's me.*

*Deportation document where, on the ninth line from the bottom we read of the transport from Bliżyn to Auschwitz on 1 August 1944, the number of deportees, the number that would be tattooed on them.*

*Document attesting to the transport of women from Birkenau to Lippstadt.*

*Sabina Reichenbaum was born on 26.02.09. Why did the Nazi SS man who drew up the list write 26.03.14? Undoubtedly the mother of Yitzhak and our little Eduard wanted to be believed to be younger, to die as late as possible... Sabina Reichenbaum certainly could not have imagined that more than 60 years later we would notice this heart-rending deception of hers!*

infectious disease. We were therefore put in quarantine, and the Germans didn't dare enter our 'Block' for about two months. During this time we were not allowed to leave our 'Block'. When the quarantine ended in September 1944, the Lagerarzt Thilo appeared. All the Jewish boys were ordered to line up in front of him in three rows, and he marched through the rows, selecting us to life or to death. When he reached me, he asked: 'How old are you?', Without hesitating I answered that I was 14 years old (I was 12 at the time). He looked at me, and, although I suppose he did not believe me, he let me live (my mother had always told me, that if a Nazi asks me about my age, I should add two years to my real age).

On 2 Oktober 1944, the day of the Jewish Succot feast, was another selection. Doctor Mengele came holding a measure at the height of 1meter 50. Any boy who did not reach this height, was doomed to die. Knowing that I had no chance of passing this test, I quickly decided to jump to the 'Good side', the place of the boys who had already passed the 'test'. Fortunately nobody noticed, and once again I had saved my life.

A few weeks later we were transferred to 'Lager' D, in which we started working. Our job consisted in dismantling storehouses and the crematorium in Birkenau. We were harnessed, like horses, to carriage (about 10 boys), the so-called 'Rollwagen', and had to transport material

and clothes to the railway station. All this material was to be sent to Germany, as the front approached, and the camp was due to be liquidated. I worked like this from October 1944 till January 1945.

When I was still in ‘Lager’ A, I talked to my mother and to my brother, who were in “Lager” B, through the electrified fence. She even threw pieces of bread across the wires to me. I still remember, and I can never forget, the smell, the smoke, and the fire, coming out of the chimneys, especially at night. Also, i cannot forget the people who were going on their way. I saw them going and going...”.

“In November 1944 my mother, with 300 other women, was evacuated from Birkenau and sent to Lippstadt to work in a munitions factory called Eisen und Metallwerke. My brother remained in the children’s hut at Birkenau and from there he ended up at Bullenhuser Damm. My mother’s tattooed number was A 15723. On the women’s list for Lippstadt she had the number 81. Number 80 on the list of women was Mania Herszberg, mother of Riwka Herszberg, one of the 20 children of Bullenhuser Damm”.

As the document on page 100 testifies.

“In the last days of March 1945, 800 women were marched, escorted by the SS, from Lippstadt to Bergen Belsen to be exterminated in the final days of the war. My mother was one of them. On 1 April 1945 they were saved

by the American soldiers. The women met their liberators in Kaunitz, a village in Westphalia.

My final march, called ‘the march of death’, began on 18 January 1945, and was from Auschwitz to Gleiwitz. Those who could no longer walk were killed on the spot. I was lucky, because I had a warm coat and good boots that I had taken from the store while I was working with the Rollwagen. I thought about escaping during the march, but after brief reflection I reached the conclusion that I would not have had the least chance of surviving if had tried it! We marched day and night, until we reached Gleiwitz. It was very, very cold; the snow was deep. In Gleiwitz the Germans pushed the prisoners, who were of different nationalities, like beasts onto open wagons, from 80 to 100 people on each wagon. When we reached Sachsenhausen, on the end of January 1945, there were only 30 of us alive in my wagon; we were on top of the frozen bodies. My friend Marys died in my arms. I myself looked like a skeleton. My feet were injured and frozen. You can still see the marks left on my feet by that awful experience today. I was lucky, because I was admitted to hospital in camp Sachsenhausen and I could recover a bit, regain the strength to continue to fight to survive. Two weeks later I was evacuated from Sachsenhausen to Mauthausen. I was still suffering terribly with frozen feet. In this camp I found out about my father’s fate: he had been shot during the march of death from Auschwitz to Germany; with swollen and frozen feet, without eating for days... he



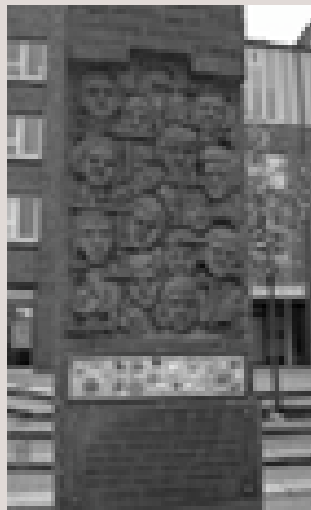
ing the border illegally. In Italy we stayed for six months in a college founded by the soldiers at Santa Maria al Bagno; we studied there... For me it was a paradise!”

“With the help of the Jewish Brigade I contacted an uncle of mine who had gone to Israel before the outbreak of the war and was working as a teacher in Jerusalem. I met him on 8 November 1945 when I immigrated to Israel. I set sail from Taranto on board the Canadian ship Princess Kathleen bound for Haifa. My mother, who had survived, sent me letters and photos from Germany, until June 1947, when she too arrived in Israel. When my uncle and I went to collect her on her arrival in Haifa, she did not recognize me; she thought I was one of his pupils! I was 15 years old, my language had become Hebrew. The last time I had seen my mother we were at Birkenau, separated by the barbed wire. I was a delicate, pale and frightened twelve-year-old boy... My mother never recovered from the pain of the loss of my brother Eduard and my father, and she remained a sad and depressed woman until her death in 1985. It is impossible to believe, to imagine how much strength, how much will, how much endurance has been necessary to overcome the wounds of the camp”. I visited Birkenau and the Auschwitz museum in October 1988: it was a special experience for me”.  
*(Free translation of the testimony given by Jitzhak Reichenbaum for the Auschwitz Museum).*

The jigsaw of the young lives of the 20 children has a bil-



*Group photo at Santa Maria al Bagno. I am standing above on left close to a girl.*



*Burgwedel: monument with the faces of the 20 children of Bullenhuser Damm.*

*I 20 bambini di ...*

lion pieces...

Shifra Mekler, who lives near Tel Aviv in a kibbutz, has a dramatic story behind her: she is the sister of Blumele: one of our 20 children. Her experience was made public at Bullenhuser Damm for the first time this year, during the commemoration for the 60th anniversary.

Günther Schwarberg tells Shifra's story starting with her mother's words: "Shifra renn, renn...!" ("Shifra run, run...!") It was October 1944 in Sandomierz. The whole family was deported: mother, father and 5 children, Shifra's brothers and sisters. Shifra was 6 years old. A Polish woman kept her hidden in a stable and in a ditch. At the age of 7 she weighed 8 kilos... then she emigrated to Palestine, to the Mischmar Ha'emek kibbutz.

Her story was not in the first Italian edition of this book, because it only emerged this year from the ocean of pain of the Shoah. I was with Shifra for hours in Hamburg in April, but I did not find the courage to ask her questions; she speaks Yiddish, Hebrew, English, German, French and other languages; she is a lady with the courage of a lioness. In the hall of the hotel she started reading the dedication of this book aloud: *To the children a hug* in Hebrew and then in English and in the other languages. I was very moved, then she asked me if I could leave her the copy of the dedication, something I did with immense pleasure.

*The story of the small monument in Burgwedel*

In the district of Hamburg that is called Burgwedel, a monument has been erected in memory of the 20 children of Bullenhuser Damm. In this district a nursery school has been named after **Bluma Mekler**. Her sister, Shifra Mekler, came from Tel Aviv for the inaugural celebration. On that occasion she was shown a photo of her little sister Bluma, the photo that an SS man had taken for Heissmeyer during the experiments by the murderous physician. Shifra had no photos of Bluma; she had nothing left, either of Bluma or of her family... only that cry of her mother... "*Renn, Shifra renn...!*" "*Renn, Shifra renn...!*"

Nothing, only the fear she had inherited. With that photo, from that darkness, Bluma's face re-emerged, and Shifra grasped a tangible memory, and from that day, forever, this memory will live in Roman-Zeller-Platz in Hamburg.

And if it is true that the children of Burgwedel can learn today and forever that a child that for years had been dead could come back to life, at least in the memory, and that a woman, the sole survivor of her whole numerous family, could find her little sister's face and a little piece of happiness, is this not a great thing? Should the children of Burgwedel, their parents and their friends, not be proud of being able to show their humanity, in this way, here, in this small district of the enormous city of Hamburg?

These children who today learn at school about the tragic story of the 20 children of Bullenhuser Damm, will be the true witnesses of tomorrow and one day they will find themselves saying: "Do you want me to tell you the story

*Bullenhuser Damm*

of our monument in Roman-Zeller-Platz in Burgwedel?”

***The commemorations for the 60th anniversary***

The publishing of the book *I 20 bambini di Bullenhuser Damm* on the occasion of the 60th anniversary has been a way of remembering them. I believe it is hard to imagine the work there has been behind even a small book like this: a tangled web of e-mails, phone calls, faxes, trips, hours of work, particularly at night, a river of tears, lumps in the throat, a sense of impotence. Out of so much suffering, luckily, deep friendships have been born, bonds that time cannot erase.

I am bound by a sincere affection to Andra and Tati Bucci, the cousins of Sergio de Simone; I exchange emails with Jitzhak Reichenbaum, Eduard's brother; I have been to Paris to meet and embrace Philippe Kohn, Georges' brother.

Intense meetings, profound, true, beautiful, lined with tears.

My sole aim is always:

**To the children, a hug.**



*The schoolchildren of the Burgwedel district enliven the commemoration in Roman-Zeller-Platz.*



*I 20 bambini di ...*



*At six in the afternoon, the official commemoration took place in the gymnasium of Bullenhuser Damm school.*



*Günther Schwarberg remembered the tragedy of the massacre, he reminded everyone of the horror of the “non justice” and the hope that we never forget.*



*The presence of two groups of young students who enlivened the celebration was particularly moving:  
A class from a school in Hamburg and a class from a school in Marzana (Verona).*



*The presence of young people, the witnesses of tomorrow, was like a real hug for our children.*

*Bullenhuser Damm*



*"Stand here in silence, but when you go away do not keep silent", we read on the memorial stone in the white rose garden planted in memory of the tragedy of the 20 children of Bullenhuser Damm.*

### *Sergio on the cover!*

The decision to use Sergio de Simone's photo for the cover of the new edition of this book is intended to ensure in particular that Italian readers remember the sad story of this child, forgotten for too many years. Take a good look at this photograph. It will remain with you, as happened to me, when I saw it for the first time in a German newspaper. I reflected for months before proposing it to the publisher for the cover of this second edition. I almost felt uneasy, disarmed before such innocence, such desire to live. I hope this beautiful little face speaks to your hearts, that the joy of his eyes whispers words of hope.

### **There were 20 children of Bullenhuser Damm:**

2 were French,

2 were Dutch,

1 was Yugoslav,

14 were Polish,

1 was Italian... *his name was Sergio... who can forget him?*

The official commemorations for the 60th anniversary took place above all in Hamburg on 20 April 2005. At midday, in Roman-Zeller-Platz the young pupils of the Burgwedel district revived the "memory" by reading their compositions written in class, with songs and the lighting of 20 candles, one flame for each of the 20 children of Bullenhuser Damm!

*I 20 bambini di ...*

## *Afterword*

This “little book” [in Italian] has been possible thanks to the precious and patient help of Günther Schwarberg. Every doubt of mine, every uncertainty, was swept away by him; my every question was answered by his precious emails from Hamburg. To meet Günther Schwarberg personally, in Hamburg, at Bullenhuser Damm, was a moving and unforgettable experience!

“The good angel” is a tall, very gentle man. I felt I had known him for years, which is confirmation that “goodness”, true goodness, forms a bond and makes you feel like relatives!

He responded to my proposal to write a “little book” in Italian by giving me materials, addresses, authorizations to use photographs, information, memoirs... he placed at my disposal everything that has been the result of lifelong work.

I give it to you, dear reader, so you can carry forward the promise of remembering over time...

**To the children, a hug.**

## *Clarifications*

### **The Jewish children at Auschwitz**

When the Jewish children arrived with their families at Auschwitz, after days of harrowing travel inside sealed wagons, they underwent selection. If they were aged under 15, then they were destined for immediate extermination. The SS separated them from their families and pushed them into the group of those sent to the gas chambers of Birkenau. Some children (particularly twins) escaped immediate death, as they were destined for the medical experiments of Josef Mengele. We show here an extract from the testimony given in 1961 by Dr Janina Kosciuszkowa, a former prisoner in Auschwitz-Birkenau, admitted with no. 36319, which confirms what was stated by Dr Paulina Trocki, cited in the pages of this book. “The children in Auschwitz can be divided into four groups: 1) children immediately sent to the gas chamber on arrival; 2) children killed even before being born or else murdered at birth; 3) children born in the camp and left alive; 4) children admitted to the camp as prisoners. [...] August 1944... dozens of convoys started to arrive from Warsaw: elderly women, newborn babies, children, teenagers, adults. Again the children were removed from their mothers. Two new brick buildings were opened [...] Each contained three hundred children, crowded ten at a time in bunk beds, up close to each other. Dirty, hungry, poorly dressed, exhausted, [...] they started to grow sick: pneumonia, scarlet fever, diphtheria. [...] The SS looked for children with “Nordic” features and blue eyes and immediately sent them into quarantine. We tried everything to recover them [...] to prevent them being sent to Germany. But it was impossible to deceive Dr Mengele [...]”.

### **Auschwitz-Birkenau**

Located 30 kilometres from Kattowitz, 50 from Kracow, 286 from Warsaw, after the occupation of Poland (September 1939) the town of Oswiecim was incorporated into the Reich together with the whole region of Upper Silesia. Until then under Polish sovereignty, Auschwitz was renamed according to the plan for the Germanization of the entire zone. At the time of its creation, on 27 April 1940, Auschwitz had 21 red brick buildings. From 1940 to 1944 in the area of Auschwitz-Birkenau-Monowitz various projects were begun with various purposes. On the basis of these programmes, the complex was used as a concentration camp, an internment camp for prisoners of war, an extermination camp, but also as a reserve of forced labour for the major industries and of human guinea-pigs for the Nazis’ medical experiments. The Auschwitz “site” operated practically incessantly from 1940 to 1945, continually nourished by the convoys that brought their human loads from Europe. It did not even stop when, close to the end, those responsible for the extermination tried to cancel out all traces of what had happened there by dismantling, burning and deporting the prisoners to

*Bullenhuser Damm*

more secure concentration camps. On 27 January 1945, the gates of Auschwitz opened to the shocked eyes of the soldiers of the Red Army, welcomed by the few prisoners who had not been able to be evacuated.

### **Camp ("Lager" in German)**

Female block senior.

### **Blockova**

Capobaracca donna.

### **The transports, that is, the systematic deportations**

The Jews deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau came from twelve countries invaded by the German army: Slovakia, France, Poland, Holland, Belgium, Yugoslavia, Bohemia-Moravia, Germany, Austria, Norway, Greece, Italy and Hungary. Total Jews deported: around 1,100,000.

The unloading ramps at Auschwitz

At Auschwitz three sites were equipped for unloading the convoy of deported people who arrived at the camp daily. The first, where the political prisoners were unloaded, was outside the camp. The second, called the Judenrampe, was put in operation in the second half of 1942, to coincide with the beginning of the extermination of the Jews. It was located near the goods yard of Oswiecim station, in the open countryside. The third, called the Bahnrampe, which began operating in mid-May 1944, entered the camp directly along the central avenue that separated sectors BI and BII. From that moment onwards, the unloading of the prisoners and their personal effects took place on this ramp, which was more convenient and away from prying eyes.

### **Selection**

During the spring of 1942, the date of commencement of the deportations of the Jews to Auschwitz, the selection of those able to work was carried out directly in the countries of origin of the deported people. Subsequently, following Heinrich Himmler's instructions, the Jews were transported to the camp and exterminated. Starting from 4 July 1942, the lack of manpower inside the camp led to a process of selection of the deported on their arrival. Those judged unable to work - pregnant women or those with children in their arms, the weak, the invalid, the elderly, those aged under 15 - were immediately sent to death; the able-bodied ones were held as prisoners-slaves.

### **The tattoo of the identification number**

Auschwitz was the only concentration camp where the use was introduced - only starting from the spring of 1942 and initially only for the Jews - to mark the identification number directly on the prisoner's skin. It was done with needles that tattooed the individual digits onto the left forearm.

### **Camp for families**

Sectors BIe and BIIf of Auschwitz-Birkenau, where, during 1943, the families of two particular groups of prisoners were confined: the gypsies and the Jews of the Theresienstadt ghetto. In these "camps for families" the children could play freely and were filmed and photographed repeatedly to demonstrate the "good" living conditions at Birkenau. The Nazis were certainly driven by a propagandistic aim, but not only: the nursery of the gypsy camp, in fact, formed the reserve of human guinea-pigs for Josef Mengele's experiments.

### **Theresienstadt (or Terezin)**

In November 1941, in the fortress of Theresienstadt, located north-west of Prague, the Nazi authorities established a ghetto for Jews. Sold by Nazi propaganda as a "rest home" for intellectuals, musicians, artists, writers, in reality Theresienstadt was a transit and collection camp for Jews to be deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka and Majdanek.

### **The gas chambers**

Extermination plants. At Auschwitz-Birkenau they were located in eight buildings: block no. 11 and crematorium I (at Auschwitz); bunkers no. 1 and no. 2, crematorium II, III, IV and V (at Birkenau).

### **The gas**

The gas chosen for the mass murder at Auschwitz was prussic (or cyanhydric) acid, marketed under the name of Zyklon B. It was introduced into the camp as a disinfectant in July 1940 and tested on human beings on 3 September 1941. Prussic acid is a highly toxic gas for humans; it blocks oxygen exchange in the tissues, provoking a sense of dizziness, headaches, vomiting and convulsions. It was chosen for the mass murder of Jews for two reasons: its high toxicity and its rapid evaporation. In a closed and sealed location, the overall duration of each mass murder was about 20-30 minutes: 5-10 for the actual poisoning, 15-20 to ventilate the premises.

### **Medical experiment**

Many physicians participated in the criminal experiments conducted on the prisoners in the concentration camps. The responsibility for this activity must be attributed to the supreme commander of the SS, Heinrich Himmler, and to Ernst Grawitz, physician and Director of the Central Health Office of the SS.

The experiments were for the purpose of researching into the scientific bases of the theory of the superiority of the "Aryan" race, the realization of projects of demographic policy and to improve the health of the German soldiers. In addition to the experiments sponsored by the authorities, some physicians conducted experiments on the prisoners at the request of Ger-

man pharmaceutical companies and institutes of medicine, or also to further their own professional careers. In the complex of Auschwitz-Birkenau-Monowitz there were no limits, either on the type of interventions, or on the number of people who underwent experimentation: rather, Auschwitz was so well equipped with “human material” that it was able to export it, as happened to the children's group transferred to Neuengamme.

### **Joseph Mengele**

Born in 1911 in Günzburg in Germany, Mengele graduated in medicine in 1935 and in 1938 he achieved his doctorate. With the rank of captain, in 1943 he was sent to Auschwitz. Here he remained until the evacuation (17 January 1945), conducting medical experiments on human beings and often presiding over the selections of the deported Jews. Interested in the phenomenon of twins and those he defined as “monsters”, he used children, twins and dwarves as guinea-pigs, practising mutilation of the sexual organs and injections, into veins or directly into the heart, almost always with lethal results. Transferred to Gross-Rosen, he disappeared after the liberation (5 May 1945). In 1949 he reappeared in Argentina. Tried and incriminated at Nuremberg, once again he succeeded in escaping, first to Brazil and then to Paraguay, where all traces of him were lost. It is believed that Mengele died in 1978, even if no documents exist to confirm this.

### **Drancy**

From 20 August 1941, a U-shaped building, the towers and some land at the barracks at Drancy became an internment camp for Jews. Until 17 August 1944 Drancy operated as the main transit camp for the French Jews destined for the extermination camps. In its three years of activity, the camp was commanded successively by SS officers Dannecker, Röhke and Brünner.

### **Alois Brünner**

Commandant of Drancy camp from 2 July 1943 to 17 August 1944. Sentenced to death in absentia on 3 May 1954 by the Military Court in Paris, he fled to Damascus, in Syria.

### **Nuremberg Trials**

In London on 8 August 1945 representatives of the four victorious powers and 19 other countries - which on 29 August would give rise to the United Nations - signed the agreement on the prosecution of crimes and the punishment of the major war criminals of the European countries of the axis. According to the Declaration of Moscow of 30 October 1943, all the war criminals would be extradited and subsequently judged in the countries on whose territory the crimes concerned had been committed; only the main criminals (whose activities were not limited to a single territory) would be judged by the International Military Court. In Nuremberg, from 20 November 1945 to 30 September 1946, the twenty-two politicians, soldiers and industrialists most responsible for Nazi Germany were therefore judged by the International Military Court.