

VEREINIGUNG KINDER VOM BULLENHUSER DAMM e.V.

Ruben Herzberg

Address at the commemoration on April 20, 2018 at Bullenhuser Damm

Today, 73 years ago, on April 20, 1945, it happened here in this place. In the basement of this schoolhouse at Bullenhuser Damm in Hamburg-Rothenburgsort. We got together today to commemorate the 20 children who were brutally murdered here, less than two weeks before the liberation of Hamburg. Their murder was intended to remove the traces of the gruesome experiments to which they were previously exposed. There were also four other inmates murdered that night who had supported the children and at least 24 Soviet prisoners of war. Today we want to mourn also for them. It helps a lot if our gaze focuses on the fate of an individual. And that is the very special merit of your wonderful movie, Merle and Stela, the movie that we just saw, and for which you also got the Bertini Award. You have given voice to 12-year-old Walter Jungleib, who was murdered here with the other 19 children 73 years ago. You let him speak directly to us. When I saw your film for the first time, late last year, when I was still active as headmaster of Klosterschule - this is Merle's school - I spontaneously remembered the sentences with which Günther Schwarberg started his 1996 book "Meine 20 Kinder" („My 20 Children“), the book about his entanglement in this story. The headline of the first section reads: "Sergio always stays 7 years old." He begins with the words: "Today: I have 20 children, and when I got them, they were already dead. And now they are with me every day, they are not getting older. Sergio is still 7, funny as Pinocchio. Jacqueline is twelve and pretty. Eleonora is five, never went to school in her life and only speaks Polish, except a few German words, 'Achtung', 'Loeffel (spoon)', 'Aufstehen (Getting up)'. When they died I was 18. In my youth, I knew nothing about them. At that time they could have been my younger siblings and now they have become my children for many years."

Those very words (that have been in my mind since I first read the book long ago) came to my mind when I saw your movie. You bring something back to life that actually does not exist anymore, and that's wonderful.

Günther Schwarberg, when he wrote his book "Meine 20 Kinder" ("My 20 Children"), had worked for almost 20 years on the family histories of almost all 20 murdered children in minute work in a journalistic way. He had long since founded the Association of Children of Bullenhuser Damm with Barbara Hüsing, and they were the first Germans to be awarded the Anne Frank Prize. Again and again I was able to personally experience how Günther Schwarberg succeeded here in this cellar, in this place of an unspeakable, a speechless happening, Hamburg student groups of my schools, first the

Jahn-Schule(now Ida-Ehre-Schule), then the Klosterschule, to engage in joint reflection and work together on the topic. And that is not at all self-evident with this topic, because it latches one's throat.

Without Günther Schwarberg, Barbara Hüsing and all the other active members of the association, many survivors would never have learned of the fate of their loved ones murdered here. Today there are again some descendants of the murdered children among us, including Grete Hamburg and her son Rami, who came from Israel, the sister and nephew of Walter Junglieb.

Without this place of remembrance, many thousands of people - many of them Hamburg pupils - would not have been confronted with this gruesome Nazi crime, which was committed right here in the heart of the Hanseatic city of Hamburg, at least not so directly at the scene.

And the work continues. The touring exhibition created last year also motivated Merle, when she saw it in Klosterschule, to get closer to the children from Bullenhusen Damm. Merle inspired Stela from Gymnasium Süderelbe, and then they made their joint film as part of the digital memory project "Hamburg Memory". But already 30 years ago, the work of the association encouraged, for example, a teacher of Klosterschule, Barbara Brix (she is today among us), to build – together with her former students - a memorial for the 20 children in the small schoolyard of Klosterschule and there also to create a small rose garden. Since then, this monument and this rose garden are maintained there. This morning there was also a small memorial ceremony there, as I have just learned from my successor, Mrs. Brandt-Dammann, who is also here among us.

I am entangled in the story of Bullenhusen Damm much more - very personally, and that has to do with the fact that I am a Jew, that I was born in Israel, because my parents as young people left Germany early enough, in time, but „of course“, could not take the whole family. My uncle, my mother's younger brother, Heinz-Egon Günther Laser, could easily have been one of those 20 children. He was 17 years old, a bit too old, perhaps, when he was deported to Auschwitz in a cattle car on March 2, 1943, together with his parents, my grandparents, from Hagen, Westphalia, and was murdered immediately upon arrival. As a historian, I did the research as well as I could. When I heard about what happened here at Bullenhusen Damm, I occasionally got caught up in the almost cynical thought of being thankful to any fate that he was spared this. This is a thought that is so abysmal that I can hardly pronounce it.

What has happened here, as terrible as it is unbelievable, singular as it may seem, has not been singular, and that makes the whole thing even more distressing. Dr. Kurt Heißmeyer, the doctor in KZ Neuengamme who ordered 20 children from KZ Auschwitz

for his experiments, was no exception. He had a large number of scientifically highly interested, absolutely unscrupulous colleagues. The number is estimated at over 350. They all were German physicians who had sworn the Hippocrates' oath and committed crimes of untold kind, It was not just these 20 children, on which so-called "medical" experiments were made. There were thousands of people, in many different places, not only in Neuengamme with Dr. med. Heißmeyer. I will just mention two more examples.

At Dr. Sigmund Rascher in Dachau, his human experiments were documented on film. These film clips are so horrible that even at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. they can only be seen with warning. The screen is positioned inside a kind of a deep fountain that one has to approach and in which one has to deliberately bend down to see the film clips of Dr. Rascher. These so-called "medical" experiments show how people freeze to death in cold water and suffocate in airless chambers. That was Dr. Rascher's terrible research that should promote his career. Then among the many others I would mention Prof. August Hirt in Strasbourg, who made more detailed investigations with brains, and ordered these brains, also in Auschwitz, exactly according to age, height, sex. Healthy people who met his standards were selected and put to death for the purpose of these investigations. Their brains then came to Prof. Hirt in Strasbourg. Prof. Hirt also carried out torturous experiments on living people with fatal results, such as the chemical weapon mustard gas (yperite), which destroys the human bronchi.

Known cases. Everyone who deals with the topic, comes across it. But in the general consciousness, the Nazi experiments are far too unsettled.

"Medicine without Humanity," Alexander Mitscherlich had called his investigation about it, the social psychologist and psychoanalyst, who then led the Sigmund Freud Institute in Frankfurt / Main in the 60s and 70s. He made these investigations immediately after the liberation for the Nuremberg Tribunal on war criminals. His results were initially only published in a limited edition, which until 1960 was only available to doctors. It took a long time for a certain amount of publicity to be made about the horrible Nazi experiments with human beings. Günther Schwarberg's series of articles in the magazine STERN in 1979 "The SS Doctor and the Children" was the "opener", as one would say today.

That's why I - and many other people - are so grateful that there is this place as a memorial site, that there is the „Association of he Children of Bullenhuser Damm“ that continues the legacy of Günther Schwarberg. And that's why it's so important to look at the individual destiny of knowing that it's not just a deplorable individual destiny; and it is equally important to know, considering the unspeakable size of the crime - we were talking only about experiments with human beings, and not about the Holocaust as a

whole - that not only 20 children died, but that alone 1.5 million Jewish children were murdered by the Nazis. The numbers are getting bigger, the more one deals with the topic. The fact that the Nazi-fueled war cost nearly 60 million lives is a well-known figure.

But if you focus on a single child, like you, Merle and Stela, have done it in your film, then the whole monstrosity of the crime may be really understandable, sensitive, even and especially for people who are not dealing with this issue every day.

The daily occupation with it remains the fate of those whose loved ones were murdered.