



Stones of Remembrance

December 2018

Dear friends,

I would like to combine my best wishes for a good New Year to you with some words about the project with and about *The Girls of Room 28* and share with you some thoughts.

People have often asked me in the last years: Who of the survivors of Room 28 is still alive? Whom could we invite – to openings of the exhibition, performances of *Brundibár*, readings and other events initiated to remember the victims of the Holocaust, to highlight the importance of art, culture and education and to underline the moral imperative of standing up against the increase of anti-Semitism.

I am sorry to say that my answer is: There are only few of them still alive. This year we lost Ela Weissberger and Hanka Weingarten, already in 2014 Anna Hanusová (Flaška), the soul of the project. - I am happy that Helga Pollak-Kinsky (Vienna), Handa Drori, Judith Rosenzweig, Vera Kreiner (Israel) und Evelina Merová (Prague) are still with us. But most of them are not able to go on long trips any more.

Sometimes, when listening to the feedback to my words, it is like I see a curtain falling on a theatre-stage. And words like these resound: *What a pity. Now there is almost no chance any more for young people to encounter survivors of the Holocaust, the witnesses of an era that drew Europe and our world into the abyss of human potential, people who could help us make young people aware of the dangers in our world and to save them from another human collapse.*

However, there are other voices mingling with these words – words like those from Anna Hanusová (Flaška) und Helga Pollak-Kinsky, the two friends who have inspired to our project of remembrance. *We wish that by remembering our friends of Room 28 and all the wonderful people who took care of us in the Theresienstadt Ghetto, the human values and achievements will live on which became so important for us: tolerance, empathy, education, culture, friendship and love.* Or the words of Handa Drori: *As one of the girls of "Twenty-eight" – this is how we called our Room, I hope that our project will achieve its objective. This is important for us for two reasons. Firstly, because we want to save from oblivion the girls who lived with us in our Room and did not come back from the concentration camps. Secondly, as a warning for the next generation; and also as an example of how easily a new Holocaust could happen if well-meaning people are too unconcerned and allow fanatics to come to power. I wish for the sake of all readers that such evil times will never recur.*

A lot has happened since 1996, when we started with our project. And a lot has happened since 2004, when the book and the exhibition have first reached the public. The project turned into a living Jewish-German project of remembrance and, almost on its own, into a cultural and an educational project.

When looking back on our 22 years of alliance I am always surprised to see what developed from this one desire to create a lasting memory. I am surprised about the international reach, impact and appeal of the project and amazed about what happened in Brazil since 2014, when the exhibition *As meninas do Quarto 28* came into being and developed such an amazing life and was shown in the best venues throughout the country - to São Paulo, Brasilia, Porto Alegre, Rio de Janeiro and Recife.

I am well aware that all this would not have been possible without the active participation of the survivors. And believe me, dear friends, I am well aware that all this would not have happened without you and innumerable people who have taken interest in

our project over the years, who supported us and helped us share the story of these girls in many various ways. Often they kept alive the flame of hope in times when it was close to expire. And as for Brazil, what happened there would not have happened without the passionate commitment of my friends in São Paulo, Karen Zolko and Dodi Chansky, and the genuine support of their families and friends.

I do owe a lot to all of you who have helped pave the way from the beginning of the project in 1996 up to the point now, end of December 2018. And it is therefore that I want to express my gratefulness to you who have become true friends and were essential for the development of the project. I am thinking of many good friends! I cannot name you all, but do hope you feel it is you that I address when reading these lines!

And I am thinking of many touching feedbacks we got. It had made the survivors and me very happy. Because we felt that our expectations were met and sometimes even exceeded, the expectations to reach young people's heart and share with them the experiences, the ideas and hopes of the survivors of Room 28. It was in Überlingen, a German town on the Lake of Constance, when, in retrospect of a special Brundibár-project, in which the Girls of Room 28 were involved for a week, a teacher said: *Here a seed has been sown that will live on in the children and one day bear fruit and come up again at the right moment. They will grow up and come into situations where they will remember this experience. I am convinced that a very valuable seed has been planted that will blossom into confident and positive social behavior.*

We all knew, and we all know: We are transient. And this exactly is the reason why we joined forces - Flaška, Helga and their friends of Room 28 and me. We wanted to create something that will continue to exist beyond our death. I am well aware that my own creative powers and life is limited too. Therefore, it is important for me to evoke today the beginning, the motives and the aims of the project.

We always thought of the "Thereafter". This is why the book, the exhibition, a theatre-play, the *Edition Room 28* and the *Educational Project* came to life. All together they form "Stones of Remembrance" – different media that document the story of these girls. One of our guiding principle was, to do this with the highest possible level of authenticity. And one of our deepest wish was that the story of these girls will be told and retold to future generations, so that these "Stones of remembrance" will be a bridge from the past to the future.

In 2007 the NPO Room 28 was founded. This organization has now a concrete project: to establish, together with our Czech partners, a permanent exhibition in Terezin and to combine with it the *Room 28 Educational Project*. I am happy that thanks to our Foreign Ministry we will create Czech teaching material and a Czech new version of the Compendium to the Room 28 Educational Project till November 2019. The greatest part of the budget is kindly provided by the Foreign Ministry. Room 28 e.V. has to find and raise a missing amount of 2.500€. Of course, as we depend on financial support too, we would be happy about any donation.

As for *Room 28 Projects* - which refers to the entirety of all works connected with the story of the Girls of Room 28 and is not identical with the NPO Room 28 - more projects are on the way or under discussion. I am happy to tell you that the Theresienstadt Diary of Helga Pollak-Kinsky will soon be available in a Czech edition, and that the English exhibition is invited to Wales/Great Britain in June 2019.

I hope that in 2019 I will be able to update you on a more regular basis. I am sorry that this was not possible in the last two years due to poor health. But now things are getting better and so I am confident that together we can realize a lot of the work that remains to be done.

My best wishes to you, stay healthy, be happy, and be good fortune and peace and love on your side throughout the year 2019.

Hannelore

Hannelore Brenner, Room 28 Projects

