

TERESA LAZZARO

*Twenty butterflies  
and a new spring*

A voice for the Bullenhuser Damm children

**EXPERIENCES**



## **Experiences**

Teresa Lazzaro

# Twenty butterflies and a new spring

A voice for the Bullenhuser Damm children

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## CONTENTS

Giuseppe Marchetti Tricamo <b>Nothing has been the same</b>	11
Sergio Todesco <b>Twenty poems for twenty stones</b>	15
Teresa Lazzaro <b>Bullenhuser Damm</b>	
The Butterfly Project and Teaching Teenagers about Bullenhuser Damm: a unique experi- ence in a Comprehensive School in Italy	23
Selected Bibliography	44
July 7th 2013	46
July 8th 2013: The place and memory	48
Teresa Lazzaro <b>Poems</b>	
20 April, 1945	55
Surcis Goldinger	56
Mania Altmann	57
Blumele Mekler	58
Lelka Birnbaum	59

H. Wasserman	60
Ruchla Zylberberg	62
Riwka Herszberg	63
Lea Klygerman	64
Jacqueline Morgenstern	65
Eleonora Witonski	66
Roman Witonski	68
Marek James	69
Eduard Hornemann	71
Alexander Hornemann	73
Roman Zeller	74
Georges-Andrè Kohn	76
Marek Steinbaum	78
Sergio De Simone	79
Eduard Reichenbaum	81
W. Junglieb	82
Twenty butterflies	83
Colloquio	84
April 20, 2013	85
Never forget	86
Advent 2014	87

Giuseppe Marchetti Tricamo

## **Nothing has been the same**

These pages are full of heartbreaking anguish. Resonant with memory, these verses tell the world the story of the twenty butterflies at the moment when, ready to fly and live their Spring, they fell instead in the tightly woven net of the Nazi ogre.

Twenty innocent children were betrayed, were taken from their families, from their homes in France, Holland, Poland, Yugoslavia, Italy. These young defenseless creatures were violently robbed of their trust and, after that dark night when the world lost the power of reasoning, dawn would come back with the colors of hope. Teresa Lazzaro remembers them one by one, verse after verse. To each child she dedicates a poem, a monument made of strong and sincere feelings, a witness of love across time. The poems are more effective than the stele erected in the garden of the school that housed them for a few hours. For those tender children (Teresa is right) a place well protected in our hearts is more appropriate than marble.

The children are white roses who, from the garden of Bullenhuser Damm, invite us to meditate and to remember (just as the author does in her work) that their dreams have been torn by the terrifying whistle of the train that brought them to Auschwitz and then from Birkenau to Neuengamme near Hamburg. No more fairy tales, dolls, bicycle rides, no more “*sweets with nuts and*

Sergio Todesco

## **Twenty poems for twenty stones**

A clear writing, not rhetoric at all, that finds a way out to escape emotions thanks to objectivity. I would say I can notice a brave decency, something like a compromise between Thomas S. Eliot and Edgar Lee Masters, between *The Waste Land* and the *Spoon River Anthology*.

Introducing these poems is not so easy for me. It is not just a literary production, indeed, but a passionate reflection about what has been the biggest drama in the history of mankind: radical evil. And it is not pleasant to explore this darkness.

Meanwhile it is true that we always have to oppose word and bravery to the temptation of silence and fear. We come from the Light and we go back to the Light, but sometimes we account for the darkness we meet throughout our path.

It happened in old Europe, all along the XX century (when the legacies of Enlightenment and of the breath of light for the freedom of the national states coming from the Risorgimento would have brought peace and wellness), that a whole community, victim of a collective possession provoked by a crazy shaman – possessed in turn – considered normal to accept some unreasonable ideas about the race, about Jews, destinies and the fates of the entire planet.

Teresa Lazzaro

**The Butterfly Project and Teaching Teenagers about Bullenhuser Damm: a unique experience in a Comprehensive School in Italy.**

Memory Revisited. The Holocaust in European Art and Popular Culture in the New Millennium.

The Hugo Valentin Centre, Uppsala University, Sweden:  
21-23 March 2013.

In the year 2000 the governments of 44 countries at the Stockholm Conference made a declaration which included the following commitment by all attendees “*We pledge to strengthen our efforts to promote education, remembrance and research about the Holocaust, both in those of our country representatives that have already done much and those that choose to join this effort.*” All the countries decided that the memory of the Holocaust should be kept alive as a lesson for future generations and as a way to prevent the repetition of a similar crime. The Declaration is regarded a milestone in the international struggle against racism and anti-Semitism.

Since then, I have felt it a must for me to speak up and teach about the Holocaust. The Past cannot be forgotten and the Holocaust provides a context for exploring the dangers of remaining silent and indifferent in the face of the oppression of others. I believe it is important to help teenagers acquire knowledge and understanding of such

a complex event, and even encourage awareness of what may be required so that similar events will never happen again. It is my duty to inspire critical thought and personal growth. Learning about the Holocaust can work to prevent racism, bullying and prejudice. It also helps teenagers understand important values such as appreciation for individual rights and enhances the effort to learn universal values such as nurturing, sharing, caring and forgiving. Furthermore, the Terezin Declaration included the need to enshrine for the benefit of future generations and to remember forever the unique history and the legacy of the Holocaust (Shoah), which exterminated three fourths of European Jewry. The word unique in the title is due to the fact that I am an English teacher in a Comprehensive Italian school where I must face obstacles and challenges since the teaching of the Holocaust is an optional activity.

My father was born in 1921 and during World War II had to fight in the Air Force. On September 8 1943 an Armistice was signed by the Anglo American forces and the Italian government. The announcement was widely perceived as the end of the Italian war, and many soldiers returned home in civilian clothes. The aftermath was terrible because there were too many German troops in Italy. My father was caught by Partisans on his way home in Modena and later by the Nazis. As a consequence he spent some time in Dachau as a political prisoner. May be just a few days before he had the lucky chance to escape from a truck. He barely spoke about his experience and whenever there was a TV program about WWII he would not watch it. I found two diaries he left but with many torn pages. He was like many others who could not or chose not to deal with what happened.

## **20 April, 1945**

The last black cloud pregnant with smoke  
quenches colors in the sky  
wandering alone up high following a silent cry.

A lump of pain has been a proof for weeks already:  
it is a list for the Red Cross.  
Dispersed are the ashes  
which go away with names,  
ages, nationalities and harrowing  
photos fixing horror.

The morning then collects letters to reassemble  
in the bubble of life with rags and toys  
cut off from the smile of those  
who dared to step forward.

Bitterness and sadness fill the air all around  
strangely recording a name after  
another on white stones.

There is no perfect crime.  
This anomalous slaughter  
lacerates still year after year and  
seeks in the line of wind  
the thread of memory and  
thinks back in time to the past  
far from joy and the alphabet of love  
traces Remembrance  
among butterflies and white roses.

## **Surcis Goldinger**

In spring days somewhere  
near the site of the oven flowers are deep yellow  
and all around many lost butterflies follow  
the outlines of the shadow my ashes  
set into the ground.  
It is the shadow of notebooks never written  
never thrown in the air to play.

Can you read the agony of my soul  
looking at my face in the photo?  
I lost my voice when stripped of joy  
I asked for help and never got an answer .  
“Maybe there will be your mum” they said, waking me up.  
There was of a rope waiting for me instead  
and I was hung on the wall like a picture.

Imagine if you can  
the life I wanted to live  
keep for me a place in your heart  
write my name on a stone  
and remember that when you touch it  
you hug me and cherish my tattooed number.

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Messina, April 2015

*For many years, teacher and poet Teresa Lazzaro quietly held the story of the Bullenhuser Damm children in her heart. Recently she began teaching and leading school youths groups in commemorating these children creatively whilst also writing poetry about the deceased. The Bullenhauser Damm children were subjects of Nazi medical experiments at Neuengamme and were later brutally murdered. Teresa Lazzaro wants us to remember them and to connect with each of them individually. She wants us to know each of them as a butterfly ready to fly rather than for their lives to remain doomed never to soar. Teresa has embraced these children as her own; and, in the process, has found that teaching and preparing school commemorations has also helped teenagers learn about love and tolerance in a multicultural world. It is a remembrance brought to life and stimulated by a committed, imaginative teacher.*

*Ken Waltzer*

*Professor of History and former head of Jewish Studies  
Michigan State University*



In the front cover the photo by Sebastiano Occhino interpreting a detail of the kirigami made by Nino Scaramozzino for Memory Revisited.

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