

Dear benefactors and friends,

March 1999

As a reader of Katha Pollitt's column in THE NATION you already supported the peace project "Vacation from War".

This summer we plan, like last year, a camp for refugee- and orphan-children from Bosnia to recover on the sea-side. Therefore we ask for donations ("as adopted parents for the holiday") of around \$ 150 each, more or less.

At the end of January three members of our group visited some children in Tuzla and were shaken by the horrible living conditions. An example is: A mother with three children living in one room without heating, the little girl without shoes and socks, an the father still "missing" and not knowing anything about his fate. The most cherished thing in their possessions was an empty bottle of sun-tan-lotion, a souvenir from the summer camp two years ago, hanging on the wall like a picture.

Worse than the living conditions however, are the problems of traumatization. Many of these children have seen their father being shot, their mother raped and people blown to pieces by grenades.

We are convinced that the experience of love and peace will be grounded deep in their minds in the future.

As much as possible we try to have in each group Muslem, Croatian and Serbian children and to make sure that they have a wonderful time together. If this is not possible for political reasons the children, parents and teachers all know, that also within this program children of the so-called enemy take part in another camp.

For the past five years, about 9000 children from all parts of former Yugoslavia have participated in the program "Vacation from War", organized by the "Comitee of Basic Rights and Democracy".

In the last three weeks a new "Peace Corps", named NATO, have been bombing Kosovo, turning a conflict into a war with hundred thousands of refugees, burning cities and more and more cruelties by the Serbian army.

Nevertheless we will try to organize a vacation-project for displaced children of Kosovo, now living in refugee camps in Bosnia. (Meanwhile there are already 30000 Kosovo-Albanians in Bosnia, where every single place is already overcrowded with Bosnian refugees from the Serbian part).

This last summer we worked on a reconciliation-project of high symbolic importance: Putting a group of Muslamic refugee children from Srebrenica, now living in Tuzla, together with displaced Serbian children from Sarajewo now living in Srebrenica. In January we went to Tuzla and Srebrenica. Most mothers agreed to their children taking part in this reconciliation-project.

We all hope that war stops immediately.
Please help us to help the children

Warm regards
Helga Dieter

Copy this letter and forward it to friends.

Please make out checks to the Bosnian Initiative Frankfurt and mail them to Katha Pollitt c/o The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003-2332

Dear friends, dear Katha,

late January it was snowing all week. The children you could hardly find or reach by car many living outside Tuzla in abandoned houses, that's why I could not visit them all. Schools were closed because of lacking heating material.

I gave your letters (and the money) to our partner-organization "Amica" in Tuzla and meanwhile the children got your greetings. I hope they will write you a thank-you-letter. I spent a few visits to the children and was shocked by terrible things: a mother with three children living in one cold room, the little girl without shoes and socks. The father is still "missing" and they don't know anything about his fate. The most precious thing - like a picture on the wall - was an empty sun-milk bottle, a souvenir from the summer-camp at the sea-side.

Some of you know Edina's story, who lost her parents and brother and was wounded by a grenade. She still has many splinters in her body.

Last year her young uncle (a teacher in the camps 96 and 97) emigrated to the US. In Edina's neighborhood I saw him on a video-tape dancing on a Bosnian party in Newark. By the way he is a good photographer and we financed a small exhibition of 40 pictures of him showing Tuzla during and after the war. It was quite successful when shown in public buildings and schools in Frankfurt. Perhaps you know a school or institution to show it in the US.

He can also help you and translate the children's letters if necessary.

Two teachers fell in love with each other during the summer camp 97 and finally married. On the wedding party there were at least 100 people; the room was just heated by their singing and dancing.

As you can see my journey was not only a sad experience not taking into account a cold I caught in my shoulder. That's why I had to leave Bosnia some days earlier. But the people I left behind have to get along with the bad living conditions and cannot escape with the next plane.

Thank you for your love and support
Helga Dieter