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A Short Version of our Brochure “Vacation from War in Summer, 2005”

Dear friends,

We would like to thank our American friends for all their donations, especially for the campaign “Vacation from War”. Here is our brochure from the summer camps in 2005. We are sorry that we can’t translate all of it into English, but we will try to give you a short version. Some of the reports are written in English, and you can find them on the Internet.

We start the brochure with our thanks to all the donors in Germany and in the US. We describe many splendid ideas they had to collect money for this project: benefit concerts or theater, auctions and flea markets, different kinds of private or neighbourhood parties. Also schools were inventive; one organized a weekly project with art lessons and sold the results to parents and friends. Some schools organized peace races in which the children collected money from parents and relatives every time they ran around the schoolyard. These efforts raised a surprising amount of money.



Last year the readers of the newspaper “Taz” elected Helga Dieter and the project Vacation from War for the Panter award for “heroes of everyday life.” Helga Dieter decorated herself ironically with a “garland of honour” and insisted on the quotation of Bertolt Brecht: “Unfortunate the country that needs heroes.” Nevertheless the award brought publicity and new donors for the project.

Last year some Jewish emigrants heard about Vacation from War and supported the project. Ilse M. escaped the Nazi terror and now lives in London. She sent us a letter written on an old-fashioned typewriter in German, “I’m nearly hundred years old and have difficulty to walk. But I can call friends to support this exceptional and wonderful project.” Ilse is a member of the Freethinkers Society in London. She published a notice in their newsletter.

Derek W. read Ilse’s remarks and wrote to us, “Congratulations and thanks for creating Vacation from War. It was wonderful of you to invite Israeli Jews and Palestinians to

share a holiday in Germany. How wonderful that there are Palestinians who think of objectives other than violence. Since boyhood I have been an active Zionist and believe passionately that this movement needs not involve any injustice or cruelty to Arabs or to anyone. The purpose in my writing to you is to ask you to put me in touch with a Palestinian militant who prefers a polite and friendly correspondence to violence and war.” Since then he has stayed in contact with a young Palestinian woman from Bethlehem.

In spring 2004 Hava Beller called me. A German friend of hers had told her about Vacation from War. She introduced herself as a documentary filmmaker who won several awards. She was very much interested in making a film about the Israeli-Palestinian encounters. I had to refuse because these young people are very shy and afraid of the media. Coming back home many Israelis could be regarded as traitors with harsh consequences in their lives. For many Palestinians the situation could become really dangerous because of fanatic neighbors.

Nevertheless Hava became involved in the project. In autumn 2005 she visited Israel and Palestine and met many participants and facilitators on both sides. You can read her report on the Internet.

Joseph lives in a Commune in England. He came at his own expense to Germany in order to tell the young people from Israel und Palestine about his fate: How he escaped the Nazi terror as a refugee through many countries and finally his service in the Israeli army. In 1948 he had to humiliate the Palestinians which moved him to live in England.

Each year we try to find a new and interesting focus for this brochure in order to avoid repetition because a lot of our donors have supported the project for many years and already know about the conditions or fates of many participants as well as about the difficulties and advances in the group process. This year, without our assistance, the young participants and facilitators set the focus in the reports they sent to us and in which they told us how the project “changed their whole life.”

In the former Yugoslavia some of the participants, who had first come as children and later as assistants, have started to work for peace in their hometowns. You can find on our homepage the stories from Vanja (Vucovar/Croatia) and from Zlata (Banja Luka/Serbian Republic in Bosnia) who both founded new peace groups.



Sonja and Dzenan happened to become friends in the camp. Dzenan, a Muslim from Bosnia, wanted to visit Sonja, who comes from a nationalistic Serbian family. Her father

told her no Muslim would ever be welcomed in his house. But nevertheless Sonja resisted and invited Dzenan. Afterwards the father told Sonja, that he was the nicest guy she ever brought home.



Husnija and Jovica - both have grown up in an orphanage, one in the Muslim part of Bosnia (Tuzla) and the other in the Serbian part (Banja Luka). As an exception to our rules, orphans were allowed to come to the camps every summer. Therefore Husnija and Jovica met each summer and became close friends. They now are over 18 and facing a difficult start in their lives because at this age both had to leave their orphanages. Neither one found work or a place to live. But next summer they can meet again as “assistants” in the camp.

Rebekka Edelmann, who worked as a translator and assistant in the project for many years, wrote her dissertation about a small village in Bosnia where the Muslim refugees returned voluntarily or by official order. They live under extreme pressure after returning to the scene of their torture and facing the perpetrators in the next village.

In each group are Shiatsu therapists who care for the physical relaxation and basic health treatment.

Dorit Riethmueller’s report shows that after the NATO war against Serbia the conditions in Kosovo are far from peace. The Serbian minority now lives in UN protected enclaves. But this brings no safety. In spring 2005 the rest of the Albanian UCK attacked the Serbian minority. Many Serbian children are invited for holidays in Greece by the Greek Orthodox Church. Therefore it is difficult to find Serbian children at all and especially those who want to spend their holidays together with the Albanians. But there they were! Two joint camps took place.



Also many reports of the summer camps with young people from Israel and Palestine focus on the follow-up (sustainability) of our efforts.

Yossi from Israel had his 18th birthday during the seminar in summer 2004. By chance we saw on the Internet that he now coordinates the non-violent protests against the wall on the territory of the Palestinian village Bi'lin.

The initiative Breaking Barriers was founded after the first meeting of Vacation from War for young people from Israel and Palestine in summer 2002. Despite many difficulties, they found ways to work together and break barriers. Another German peace organisation invited four members for a trip through many German schools in order to clarify the background of the conflict to German students. Like other peace groups in Israel (Rabbis for Human Rights, Gush Shalom, New Profile) the members of Breaking Barriers help the Palestinian farmers to sell their olive oil. On both sides they conducted photographic workshops and show the pictures now in a joint exhibition in Israel as well as in Palestine.

Danna Bader writes that nearly half of the group that she facilitated last summer stay in contact and are now working as peace activists on both sides.

Rüdiger Pusch tried a small evaluation in one of the groups. The result was that the meeting had an enormous impact for nearly all of the participants. The young Israelis mostly emphasized the emotional changes' the young Palestinians pointed out the aspect of learning new facts and views. Astonishing, and a contradiction to these results, are the answers to the question, "What concrete situation, remark, picture changed your point of view?" The members from Palestine could identify specific quotations or pictures, most of the group members from Israel answered with general responses like "Everything was impressive."

The story from Hava Beller about her experiences with the participants from the project you can find on our homepage.

For the children in Bethlehem, the West Bank and Gaza who could not leave their country to come for vacation, a clown and a musician organized workshops for social workers and a show in which the children enjoyed and forgot about their daily dread for a short time

Helga Dieter writes about the problems getting visas for the Palestinian participants and about the absurd fears and questions of the German secret service. (Why are most of the female group members not yet married? As though it is a custom in their culture!)

As in years past, a group of youngsters from Nablus/Palestine was invited. This town often is under curfew and bombing by the Israeli army. The children are suffering. It is like living in a big prison for years. Last spring they also had to face threats from militant Palestinians because of their plan to meet the “enemy.” We gave them the advice to stay at home: “We don’t want victims for peace,” we wrote to them. But they had the courage to come. It was a very difficult meeting with dramatic scenes after having seen the film “Jenin, Jenin,” which their facilitator brought with them.



All these difficult experiences were easier to face with the help of the Shiatsu therapists who took part in every camp. Beate Merkel wrote a report about their work.

All the different stories in this brochure show that it is possible for the children and young people who are former or present “enemies” to come together and start to understand each other and find friends from “the other side” and that this experience has a deep influence on their lives.



With the help of all the friends and donors of the project we hope to be able to continue in the summer of 2006 and give more young people the possibility to change their point of view and perhaps their whole lives.

Thank you for your support

**Helga Dieter
Coordinator**

A vacation scholarship is \$ 150 but we appreciate any amount.

Please make out a check to “Vacation from War” and either send it to

- **Helga Dieter, Flussgasse 8, D- 60489 Frankfurt / Germany or to**
- **Katha Pollitt, c/o The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003**