



MESSAGE FROM GHETTO THERESIENSTADT THE STORY CONTINUES AFTER 70 YEARS

Matosh Býček, Czech Republic

Protectorate, war, Holocaust ... beginning in 1941 the town Theresienstadt in northern Bohemia is successively becoming a fortress where thousands of citizens, defined by the Nuremberg laws as Jews or part-Jews, are concentrated. Women with little children, men, boys, girls and also old people live in steadily worsening inhuman conditions, calmed by the lie that this is their town, defense, provisional sanctuary until the end of the war. But above day-to-day life hovers the shadow of hunger, diseases, restrictions, hopelessness, the threat of transports to alleged labor camps in the East. Aged 13, 14, 15, forty boys lived at the building L 417, a former school, in a room of home # 1. Under the guidance of their beloved educator Walter they had their own autonomy, they organized and often moderated their evening lectures and discussions, wrote newspaper reports from all corners of Theresienstadt, created in daily struggles a collective, which became a real home for the boys, where each had his place and where friendship and sincere interest in the well-being of the other were not empty concepts. And the main thing was the newspaper VEDEM led by the untiring talented editor in chief Petr Ginz. More than 800 pages, typewritten or written by a boy's hand. Hundreds of articles about life together at the home, the organization of the ghetto, problems, pleasures, praise and mutual reprove. But there were also stories, essays, and poems. A message from tens of boys, of which the majority perished in the Birkenau gas chambers a few months later. When we - with our children from the Prague high school Nature School - learned about VEDEM in 2009, we were enthusiastic. Much of the life of the boys in home #1, of what bothered them or pleased them and what they created, was very near to life of our school collective today though our situation today seems to be entirely different, all this was somehow very familiar. And as we delved deeper into the life, the searching, the joy and the pain, but also into the mostly tragic death of our friends, our feeling intensified that, what the boys then created, was not actually meant only for them, but after half a century it speaks louder and louder to new generations. It was more than a challenge and so we decided to accept the torch from Petr, Kuř, Zdeněk, Walter and tens of others and to continue their work. To send the message of the Theresienstadt boys to all who are ready to listen. That was the beginning of the website www.vedem-terezin.cz. At first we published successively essays from VEDEM, an interactive map of ghetto Theresienstadt was added whose locations pinpoint the places dealt with in articles of VEDEM and there are also recent photographs. Later, also thanks to cooperation with Památník Terezín, we succeeded to get original scans of the newspaper and these we too made accessible to the public at the start of 2011, for the first time online. Together with Baobab publishers we prepared for publication as a book also a collection of poems by the talented young poet Hanuš Hachenburg "Hned vedle bílá barva mráčků" (Just beside is the white color of clouds); he, too, was one of the contributors to VEDEM; he perished in Birkenau not yet 15

years old. His poems touched us mainly by their depth and maturity. We staged his marionette theater play "Hledáme strašidlo" (We Look for a Ghost) a number of times in Prague and Brno. (we are now working on English subtitles for the video recording of the play). We also began cooperating with Jiří Brady who at the time had taken part in the creation of the newspaper and with Chava Pressburger, sister of VEDEM's editor in chief Petr Ginz. During further visits to Terezín we became interested also in other children's newspapers, published here in the children's home L 417 and this way we succeeded to make accessible almost 10 preserved issues of the newspaper DOMOV. It was published from December 1943 to May 1944 by two friends, then aged 12, Martin Glas and Petr Seidemann; Martin mostly wrote and Petr drew. Different from VEDEM, you will find in the newspaper more exercises, competitions and quizzes. Thanks to cooperation with the Israeli organization Theresienstadt Martyrs Remembrance Association we later made accessible also 22 further preserved issues of the newspaper KAMARAT. It was published at Q 609, a children's home located in a one-story house where in 10 rooms there were both boys and girls of various ages and nationalities. Editor in chief of KAMARAT was Ivan Pollak and all in all there were 22 boys aged 11 - 15 who contributed. Starting October 1943 until September 1944 a total of 22 issues appeared, at first every Friday, later irregularly. We got much help by many contemporary witnesses not only from the Czech Republic. Their memories, which we eventually decided to document in the framework of some of our film projects, captivated us very much. They strengthened our conviction that what had happened 70 years ago, what the boys and girls in Terezín managed to do, has to be constantly brought to attention, especially to the youngest generation. That was the beginning of the idea of a competition for students of grade- and high schools "Převzmete terezínskou štafetu" (Receive the Theresienstadt relay race), which begins in September 2011. Its aim is not only to motivate young people to study the subject, but also to reflect their present life and to be aware and to value what for children in the Holocaust was also the strongest light - friendship, solidarity, search for truth and freedom. Through the competition we would like to seek for and to cause contact between young people of the whole Republic who would also want to deal with the topic and would help with the recording of reminiscences of surviving contemporary witnesses and to commemorate the message of all those affected. Our website project is growing constantly, in English too. Our goal is that the message from nearly 70 years ago will never be forgotten and live forever. It testifies not only to historical events but also that unbelievable courage and willpower even in the darkest of times can achieve unbelievable results and always find light. And that is needed today, too, more and more. ■





THE 3RD ANNUAL TOURNAMENT - LIGA TEREZIN 2011

Nir Knorpel

The 3rd annual memorial soccer tournament for players and fans of the Liga Terezin took place and left a strong impression of great success. The "Soccer Nation" in cooperation with the Emek Hefer Regional Council and Beit Theresienstadt (directed by Oded Breda), with the participation of 6 youth teams aged 13 - 15 from the Education and Social Activities groups of Hapoel Tel Aviv and teams from Emek Hefer did something never done before, they actually reconstructed part of the LIGA TEREZIN, held far away in the dark days in ghetto Theresienstadt. Both there and here the games were studied and summarized; dealing with the subject was an opportunity for ghetto inmates - some of which



played, others were fans - to escape the difficult reality surrounding them and gave hope to their lives. Before entering the lawn, the youngsters who came to our tournament got historical explanations about what

had happened in the past; no doubt - the experience enriched them, this was the unanimous conclusion. The soccer tournament is in fact a side event of this productive day that gave the children another perspective on life and we hope that this initiative will continue and become a tradition. (A report on the subject will be published on the website).

There was also soccer - we did not forget that - children aged 13-15 whose behavior was exemplary, nice and well-educated children for sure, good sports, fair play - that was doubtlessly the name of the game. The tournament was won after an impressive display by the team "Hagibor Terezin", represented by children from Emek Hefer under the guidance of **Vicky Galam**, the same team overcame in the final game the team "Hakoah" consisting of the Education Activities group of Hapoel Tel Aviv in Bat Yam. In the semi-finals played the team "Dror" - that arrived from the Jordan valley and the team "Youth Care" represented by youngsters from Kiriath Malahi. Places 5/6 were contested by the "Nesharim" team represented by children from **Afula** and "Maccabi Prague" - by Emek Hefer children. I would

like to summarize the tournament as a milestone in the development of the children's personality, surely an experience each of us should have and especially young people. **A few reactions by**



councilors and trainers: **Elrom Koby**, soccer trainer of the Education Activities of Hapoel Tel Aviv in Upper Afula: "An interesting day, which instilled much knowledge". **Arnon**, trainer from Emek Hayarden: "In my opinion the children showed much interest, were active in conversation, it was enriching and exciting". Arnon also said that he was touched by the fact that the children of his group showed so much interest and the guide at Beit Theresienstadt requested the participation of more groups. **Elad**, the councilor from "Hashachar Club" of Kiriath Malachi: "I learned much and the guys learned to see the full half of the cup, all in all a very enriching experience". The manager of Maccabi Emek Hefer, **Vicky Glam** added: "I want to congratulate this initiative to organize a tournament the educational aim of which combines so excellently with the sportive aim, I believe and I am sure that it is very important that the youngsters get to know the Jewish heritage from the Holocaust and that they know that even in the most difficult days Jews did not forego soccer and culture; I hope that this welcome initiative of the teaching tournament will continue".

Gil Laish, field director of the Educational and Social activities of Hapoel Tel Aviv said: "The initiative and the project are welcome; it's not a routine you encounter daily, that way to reach young people through soccer, is a creative way, correct and effective. The Educational and Social activities of Hapoel Tel Aviv deal all year round with educational contents and cooperation with Beit Theresienstadt is right on target, dealing with subjects we want to bequeath to youth; we hope for fruitful cooperation in the future, too." The tournament and the preceding instructional part were an eminent success. ■

See you next year,

Nir Knorpel Director, Northern District, Football State

LIGA TEREZIN IN COPENHAGEN

The Football Supporters Europe network (FSE) - the European Football Fans organization invited Oded Breda from Beit Theresienstadt to present LIGA TEREZIN at its annual conference in Copenhagen, held in July 2011. The lecture's topic: "TEREZIN LEAGUE - there was football in the Holocaust - can we take Holocaust out of football" At the lecture the participants of the meeting, who had arrived from all parts of Europe, were told the story of "Terezin League" and they were the first to view a part of the new documentary film dealing with European "Jewish" teams like Ajax and Tottenham. Many of the participants of the meeting checked out the possibility of presenting the film or the subject as such in their countries. The meeting also dealt with fans' activities against racism, homophobia and violence at football stadiums in Europe. ■

