

**Opening of the Exhibition “The Girls of Room 28, L 410 Theresienstadt”  
In der Gedenkstätte/ Pamatnik Terezin, 21 October 2021**

**Greetings Words by Hannelore Brenner**

*vermittelt von Katarina Hurychová, Direktorin der Svobodná základní škola, o.p.s. in Třebušín.  
Mit Katarina haben wir 2017 eine Kooperation begründet – siehe Waldorfschule.*

I am deeply sorry that I cannot be here with you today. I would, if I could, this is for sure. I am glad that Katarina Hurychová is ready to say some words in my name.

Let me first say thank you, Katarina, for all you did in the course of our cooperation since 2017. And thank you to Mr. Roubinek and Mr. Blodig and all those who, in the name of Pamatnik Terezin, play a role in showing this exhibition.

As some of you know, to tell the story of the “Girls of Room 28”, to share their experiences, their ideals and hopes especially with the younger generations, this has become my life’s work and a matter of the heart.

And this is so, because something very special happened when I first met with Anna Hanusová née Flachová and Helga Kinsky, née Pollak, in September 1996 in Prague, and when, soon after, I visited them in Brno and Vienna. It was during our first encounters that I heard about their wish to do something to remember the girls who once lived with them in the Girls’ Home L 410 in Room 28 in the Theresienstadt ghetto; and also about their wish to pay homage to those of the adults in Theresienstadt who became so important for them - their care-takers Ella Pollak, Eva Weiss and Eva Eckstein, their teachers, above all Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and Mrs. Brumliková, Zionists leaders like Fredy Hirsch or adults like Margit Mühlstein or Rudolf Freudenfeld. “They took so much care of us”, Anna Hanusová, whom her friends called Flaška often said. “Later I understood: They saved our souls.”

I often wondered: How come? What happened there, in this Room 28, in the middle of a Jewish ghetto, in the middle of suffering and sorrow, of hunger and hardship, and constant fear of being transported to the unknown East? How must it have felt to live there as a child aged between 11 and 14 years?

Through many conversations and encounters, I have gotten a feel for it. And I am grateful for all I learned from the survivors of Room 28, not only from them, also from other Holocaust survivors. But of course – there was a special spirit, a special bond that connected us.

It is this bond and my promise to help them fulfill their wish, that inspired me to do what I did in the years following our encounters in 1996: writing the book and a theatre-play, creating this exhibition, founding the NPO Room 28, realizing many projects and organizing many events with them, launching *Edition Room 28* in order to finally publish the original Terezin diary of Helga Pollak; after all, it is this document that enabled me to tell the story of these girls.

And it is the diary of Helga Pollak and the poetry-album of her friend Flaška, that form the very heart of this project of remembrance.

May this heart continue to beat for a long time and be felt by others.

Only three of the girls are still alive, Vera Kreiner and Handa Drori in Israel, Evelina Merová in Prague. I wished so much Evelina would be with you! And in thoughts I am with those who have left us and were so dear to me.

What I have to say I have written down and there is nothing more to add. I always felt more like a medium. I wanted to give a voice to the voiceless, to those who were murdered in the Holocaust – to their fears, their hopes, their visions; and fight against oblivion of their gruesome end that is beyond any imagination. I wanted to create a resonating space for their words, their music, their works of art. And of course, I wanted to share the story of “The Girls of Room 28” and let the world know what the surviving women had to say. Here are some messages:

*Our friends from Theresienstadt and all those we loved and lost in the Holocaust have no grave where we can leave a stone in remembrance. That’s why we wanted the book, and that’s why we wanted this exhibition – as our stones of remembrance.*

**Helga Kinsky., née Pollak**

*We wish that by remembering our friends of Room 28 and all the wonderful people who took care of us, the human values and achievements will live on which became so important to us: tolerance, empathy, education, culture, friendship and love.*

**Anna Hanusová, née Flachová**

*As one of the girls from “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 visitors of our exhibition and readers of our book that such evil times will never recur.*

**Handa Drori, née Pollak**

This may make you understand, why for me and our organization Room 28 e.V., the very word “Room 28” has become a symbol and a program.

20. October 2021

Hannelore Brenner