

Statement in Cologne Germany, at the Italian Cultural Institute, January 27, 2011, at the presentation of the book edited by Giorgio Sacerdoti,

“In Falls wir uns nicht widersehen”. (Prospero Verlag) “

(“ In case we shall not meet each other any more”)

I am Emilio Sacerdoti, one of the four sons of Ilse and Piero Sacerdoti. I have been for many year an economist and mission chief at the International Monetary Fund, and am now a consultant to the World Bank and the European Commission, working on African countries.

As a grandson of Helene and Siegmund Klein, the reading of the book and the letter exchange is a task that entails heavy feelings, in particular the chapters about 1942 and 1943, the restrictions and persecutions in the Netherlands where they had taken refuge after the Crystall Nacht destructions of Jewish businesses and synagogues by the Nazis in Germany in November 1938, the arrest and deportation of my uncle Walter, Ilse’s brother, when he tried to cross to Southern France in June 1942, escaping from occupied Netherlands, the letter he sent from the French transit camps before being deported to Auschwitz in August of that year, the death of Helene in a hospital in the Netherlands January 1943, Siegmund alone in his hiding place in Amsterdam, and then his discovery by the police and forced move to the transit lager of Westerbork near Amsterdam, from where his last letter to Ilse was sent on November 2, 1943, just before he was sent to Auschwitz to die.

On the contrary, the letters about the marriage of Piero and Ilse in Marseille, France in August 1940, and about the birth of Giorgio in Nice, in March 1943 are exquisite and poetic, a light of joy darting through dark times, full of love and confidence.

They were terrible times and yet still to the end they had hope and confidence, even if these hopes became gradually weaker, the Klein parents always hoped that Walter would be freed from his French jail and reach safety with my parents in Marseille, which however did not occur. The letters also indicate the efforts that my father, who lived and worked in Marseilles with my mother since mid 1940, made to get Walter out of the French prison before he be handed to the Germans, but to no avail. He even tried to bribe Nazi officials, giving out a large sum of money, of course useless....

My parents Piero and Ilse were strong and courageous people. In those time they were young, enjoyed as Italian citizens of a certain degree of protection against persecution, and had an optimistic outlook. This comes out clearly from the letter exchanges. After the war they looked to the future, to raise a

young family, and build a better world, and little they spoke to us of their war experience, they were too involved in building a future to look back at the horrors of the past.

In his refuge in Switzerland, in Geneva, where my father taught at the university civil law in a course for Italian young soldiers who had taken refuge across the Swiss border, when Northern Italy was occupied by the Nazis after the armistice with the Allied on September 8, 1943, he met great leaders of liberalism thought, such as Professors Einaudi (later first president of the Italian Republic), Del Vecchio and Ropke, and there he strengthened his convictions that liberalism, and free markets with a social orientation were the only foundations to build free societies. He also became convinced of the overriding need to strive to build a united Europe, as the sole rampart against the intolerance of the past that had led to so many destructions and annihilations.

Also Ilse's relatives, who survived the Nazi onslaught by finding refuge in the US and in England, her cousins Erwin and Erbert Klein, her aunts Alice and Elisabeth, her cousins Edith Barr and Olga Sandler and Margott Cortell, whom all I met, were strong personalities, full of optimism and confidence. To them the fate was favorable and benign, but to so many others it was not.

I think that every person draws from those terrible war times some lessons. I think that we who are the survivors from the destructions and the annihilations have a special responsibility, more than other people, to strive for a better world, and to fight injustice, egoism and oppression wherever they take place, and defend human rights and the dignity of men. That is the only way to honor the millions who were murdered in the Holocaust.

We are all grateful to Giorgio for having collected and published the letters, for us and the future generations to reflect and meditate, and to honor the dead.

We are also grateful to the coworkers of the Center of Jewish Documentation in Milan who so much have strived to present the historical background, and the details of the persecutions and deportations as a background of the personal histories, so as to understand the immensity of the killings, and to remember and meditate.