

## BETWEEN THE NOTES OF LIVE

Experiences and trauma of a Sinti descendant of the second and third generation

### PAGE 2

My name is Manolito Steinbach

I am a musician and represent the second and third generation of Auschwitz victims. I was born in 1971 in Berlin-Wedding.

That is where I grew up and went to school. I experienced racism and antiziganism very early on. I was teased and bullied by my classmates because I am a member of the Sinti.

My classmates always shouted at me: "Gypsy, the thief. Zig zag, I'll get you Gypsy!" I had to constantly defend myself and I didn't feel like going to school anymore. When my grandmother asked me why I didn't want to go to school anymore, I told her and she went with me to the headmaster.

Later I went to another school. I didn't have such problems there because there were a lot of foreign classmates and I got on well with them. They also accepted my origins.

I also had two friends, they were German and had a completely different attitude towards me. They didn't call me a "gypsy" or insult me with other swear words.

I lived in Berlin for 30 years, then in 2001 I moved to Oldenburg for my wife's sake. There I experienced a new environment, but was still confronted with the shadows of my past.

### PAGE 3

The history of my family and their Holocaust experience

I grew up with my grandmother and learned from her at an early age what happened to us Sinti during the Second World War under National Socialism.

My childhood and youth were shaped by my grandmother's survival mentality. At the age of 28, the Nazis took her to the Ravensbrück women's camp, and in 1942 she was sent to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. Her husband, my grandfather, was in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Berlin-Oranienburg. Unfortunately, I never got to know him because he died in 1968.

While I was growing up with my grandmother, I saw her cry again and again. At first I didn't know why. I have heard from many who knew her well that she was a fun-loving person before the years in the concentration camp turned her into a serious person.

PAGE 4

She spent four years in the Auschwitz concentration camp. Four long years. She suffered trauma there.

At some point - I was still young - I asked her why she had the "Z" and number tattooed on her left arm. She then told me what she and her family experienced in the concentration camp. She didn't tell it all in one go; sometimes months went by before she continued.

She always told me about terrible episodes.

One day she told me that she sometimes couldn't sleep at night in the concentration camp because she could hear the children and adults crying. She and all the other inmates had nothing to eat or drink. Sometimes there was soup or turnips - or potato peelings, which they sometimes shared with the rats. Many of the other prisoners were sick, had typhus, lice or scabies.

The emaciated prisoners had to run and carry bricks or pull road rollers like a team of horses. Anyone who tried to rest was immediately killed.

My grandma told me that she and her sister and her two small children, a girl and a boy, stood together in a line in front of the gas chamber. My grandma was very lucky to survive. She and others were called back, but she had to watch as her sister was sent alive to the gas chamber with her two small children and came out dead and was then burned in the oven like the other dead.

My grandma witnessed how my grandpa's daughter from his first marriage, my aunt, was also killed. She was 24 years old and had two small children who were taken to Dr. Mengele for testing purposes, the doctor in the Auschwitz concentration camp who killed people with his medical experiments.

My great-grandfather was in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp and in the forced labor camp in France. There he had to dig mass graves for the dead and also trenches for the soldiers. When he returned from the prison camp, his wife, daughter and grandchildren were gone.

He later learned that his daughter and grandchildren had been murdered in the Auschwitz concentration camp. As my grandmother told me, he later suffered from trauma, depression and delusions and began to drink because of the terrible things he had experienced.

PAGE 6

My grandmother told me all of this - and it all happened like that. And a lot more happened during this time that doesn't fit in this little brochure, you need several books for that. They were madmen! What an ideology! A perverse system! Auschwitz was a killing factory.

I didn't understand at the time why we Sinti were locked up, mistreated, gassed and burned. Why medical experiments were carried out on us. I simply didn't understand it. There was only a WHY. My grandma couldn't give me an answer either, she didn't understand it herself. She just said to me that Hitler and the Nazis didn't like us because we were different.

My grandma and a younger sister were then liberated from the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp on January 27, 1945.

Whenever my grandma told me about the time in the concentration camp, she cried and said, dear God, why did you let it happen. Then she said that she was so homesick for her sister, her cousins and her relatives, who were all killed in Auschwitz. What I heard from my grandma sparked a rage in me that I couldn't describe. I hated the perpetrators.

PAGE 9

Living in the shadow of the past After being liberated from the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, many Sinti tried to return to their hometowns. My family lived in West Berlin after 1945. After the war, until 1964, my grandparents lived in various places in Berlin-Wedding with other relatives who had survived the Holocaust. They all lived in skylight trailers (similar to a construction trailer). Among other places, they lived at the former East-West border crossing at Bornholmer Brücke.

In 1964, my grandparents were offered a three-room apartment in West Berlin. My grandfather only had four years to experience what it felt like to live in an apartment with running water and a tiled stove. In 1968, he died of lung cancer.

We lived in the shadow of the past. My grandmother always wanted us to be as inconspicuous as possible. She was afraid that someone would notice that we were Sinti.

For example, I had to strictly observe the midday rest period and was not allowed to play the guitar, no matter how quietly it was played. When I went down the stairs (we lived on the second floor), I had to walk slowly and was not allowed to jump. She was simply afraid that the residents would get upset about the music or the noise. She was afraid that the tenants would then collect signatures and send them to the housing association and that we would be given a warning or given notice straight away.

PAGE 10

She was very afraid of that, as she had experienced something like that herself. My grandmother also did not want me to go to my friends' apartment under any circumstances. She said she always had a strange feeling and thought that people would accuse me of doing something or taking something or something else.

Like many Sinti, my grandmother had to fight for a long time for reparations and a compensation pension. The authorities were made up of the same people who had worked there during the Nazi era and who did not recognize that the Sinti were racially persecuted

under National Socialism. They kept more files on us long after the end of the war, and the old files were not destroyed.

I think it is a scandal that these files were described as legitimate planning documents for the genocide. That these files were not given to archives, but that they were continued to be used by the perpetrators at the time. It was not until 1982 that the Nazi persecution of Sinti was recognized under international law by the German federal government.

Now, in retrospect, when you are a little older, you can understand it all better. And you can also take it all in and realize it in a completely different way.

It is important to me, out of love for my family and my fellow Sinti people, that I report on this. Many other Sinti who were not in the concentration camp or are still young and did not experience it themselves, and people from the majority society cannot imagine what these people suffered first hand. What pain, grief and despair they carried within themselves and still carry today.

PAGE 11

My painful visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp

WORK SET YOU FREE is written at the entrance to the former Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, which is now a museum. I was there in 2019. Exactly where my grandma, my aunts and my other relatives were.

At the exact site of the event, I also went into a gas chamber and looked at it. On the walls I could still see scratch marks from the desperate people who were facing their death.

I stood in a room in front of a pane of glass, behind which lay mountains of people's hair, as well as prostheses, children's clothing, baby clothing.

I couldn't breathe anymore, I couldn't breathe and tears came. It hurt me so much and then memories of what my grandma had told me about it shot through my head.

PAGE 12

The Sinti culture and the meaning of music for me

It is not their origin that says something about a person, but always the human being himself. Nor is it a religion, because God created every human being equal. Respect belongs to all people. No matter what skin color or origin.

Music is part of our culture, which is why I also came into contact with music at an early age. Since many of my relatives are musicians, I learned to play the guitar at an early age, but autodidactically. My family also includes a music legend: the world-famous German Sinti guitarist Häs'che Weiss, who unfortunately died young. One of my role models (and many Sinti musicians) is Django Reinhardt, the forefather of Sinti swing and European jazz.

I play in various bands, also with musicians who are not Sinti, who respect me as a Sinto, where there is no antiziganism and no discrimination. There I am respected as a human being, just as I respect them as a human being - even though they are descendants of the perpetrators.

PAGE 14

Forgive, don't forget

It is very important to me to tell others about what happened in the Third Reich. Because what happened then could happen again. Racism and antigypsyism are still in many people's minds. It is important that people speak openly about these issues in order to raise awareness and combat discrimination. By promoting respect, understanding and equality, we are actively contributing to ensuring that the past is not forgotten and that negative patterns are not repeated.

In retrospect, you can see that a lot has not changed about how things were back then. Because the hatred, prejudice, discrimination, stigmatization and antigypsyism that I had to experience over the course of my life - whether it was when looking for work, looking for housing or in many other things - are still there. I experienced it myself and still do today - there are no words for it. All that is missing is for the concentration camps to be rebuilt. It's quite a shame that people haven't learned from history and still behave in the same way towards us Sinti and have prejudices.

Because we no longer live in forests and are no longer outlaws, as they told us back then. Anyone who saw us could shoot us. Today we live in permanent apartments. We used to travel around because nobody wanted us. When we came to the villages, people just shouted "Take the laundry off the line and bring the children in, they're stealing our laundry and our children." When my ancestors used to take laundry off the line, they didn't do it to enrich themselves - no, because they had no other way to buy clothes. Without work or trade, they had no money, and if they did have money, they weren't allowed to go to shops to buy clothes because they were Sinti. And the thing about stealing children was simply pinned on us, because the Nazis took our children away from us, forcibly sterilized them and forcibly expropriated them.

We Sinti all have German citizenship and go about our work. Many of us are self-employed in many industries or work as employees. And many are musicians. Our children go to school. And - of course, when the holidays come, many Sinti still go on holiday with their caravans or mobile homes. But many are not allowed to go to public campsites because the owners still have prejudices. At some campsites it was or still is written that "gypsies" or "travellers" are not welcome. Nevertheless, it is important to forgive - but not to forget.