

FRIENDS OF THE LITTLE SISTERS OF JOY

Newsletter no 17

Summer 2012

My dear Friends

The Jewish people prays for rain at this time of year (as of old in Palestine) and it seems that their prayers have been answered! Rain can be both a sign of blessing and a time of grace and since celebrating my 60th birthday last December I seem to have taken on a new lease of life.

The Concert for Peace and Reconciliation I gave in Wolfson College last February was the first evening recital I had done for a while. The hall, bounded on one side by an English garden and on the other by a Chinese one, is a beautiful place in which to sing. The audience numbered about thirty and were from various backgrounds.

I was a little nervous at the start, but soon the audience was joining in with me in the songs of the 60's and 70's. When I stopped playing and let them sing unaccompanied, their voices rose up like a force for healing in a broken and troubled world.

The Hebrew music was well received-I sang a selection of pieces from the Eve to the Close of the Sabbath with melodies that I learned in my childhood.

The simplest songs also struck home, like Plaisir d'Amour and John Riley; my own favourite was All my Trials, a traditional American folk song made famous by Joan Boaz. I quote:

'If living were a thing that money could buy,

Then the rich would live and the poor would die,

All my trials, Lord, soon be over.'

April saw my return to Amsterdam after a long absence. Chava and Liesbeth are two of my closest friends. They were in their 20's when I met them on a summer programme at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1989. Now they are married with several children, some of whom I was meeting for the first time. I stayed in a little hostel right in the centre and enjoyed walking along the canals, looking at the buildings, tall and thin, which are such a hallmark of this beautiful city.

Amsterdam was where Ety Hillesum lived. Ety was a vibrant young Jewish woman, older than Anne Frank. She was a great teacher, reader and linguist and, above all, a writer of diaries. She perished in the Holocaust also, but in her diaries talks about the time leading to her last days as a time of enormous time of internal and spiritual growth. She stresses the need not to hate, but,

rather as a mystic abandoning herself to the Divine Will, finds an inner meaning to those terrible dark days.

Was the Holocaust simply a tragic waste of human life, or should we see it as a universal act of salvation for the whole of humankind?

In Peace and Friendship

Have a wonderful summer

Your sister Gila