



Teach children not to hate



Lindsay Tanner

WHEN I was about 10 years old, I somehow acquired a pen friend.

His name was Schindler and he was an East German.

He wasn't the renowned Oskar Schindler, who saved more than 1500 Jews from the gas chambers. He was a geography teacher in a small East German town called Wahrenbruck and his name was Erich.

For many years, Erich and I exchanged stamps and postcards. For some reason, Australian stamps were keenly sought after by European collectors. And East German stamps were pretty exotic.

I don't think they're worth very much, but they're interesting.

Over the years, all the stuff I got from Erich gave me a fascinating insight into a communist country at the height of the Cold War.

Erich was a lot older than I was and he died in the early 1990s. When I finally man-

aged to visit Germany not long ago, I tracked down his daughter, Gerlinde.

My wife and I had lunch with Gerlinde and her son, not far from where the Berlin Wall used to be.

Gerlinde gave me a packet of papers. It included a letter I wrote to Erich in 1968, when I was 11. It also had some newspaper clippings.

One of them showed Erich standing in front of his school, which is now named after him.

I had never seen a photo of him. She told me Erich had served as a private in the German army in World War II.

He then spent three years as a prisoner of the Russians.

Incredibly, he survived and managed to return home. He married a young German woman whose family, along with many other ethnic Germans, lost their home at the end of the war.

After suffering under the Germans for seven years, the Czechs expelled them.

Gerlinde told me that in spite of these experiences, her parents had taught her not to hate people of other nationalities.

They made a conscious effort to break the awful cycle of hatred and violence that

gripped Europe for centuries.

I discovered that the man I exchanged letters with was a hero in his own small way.

The peace and prosperity of modern Europe is in large part due to the readiness of ordinary

Germans such as Erich Schindler to take responsibility for the actions of Nazi Germany.

By breaking the endless cycle of hatred, they have helped build a new Europe.

In a world where hatred, violence and retribution are always easy to find, we should cherish these efforts.

Ian Paisley and Gerry Adams sat together in Northern Ireland to forge a new government. We may see similar progress in Kashmir and maybe in Israel-Palestine.

One of the great things about Australia is that we are not locked into a cycle of hatred with any of our neighbours.

Whenever we are tempted by bigotry and violence, we should remember where they lead.

And we should remember people like Erich Schindler who taught his children not to hate.

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