

## ABSTRACT

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TRAUMATIZATION AND THE LOSS OF  
FAMILY LIFE EXPERIENCED AMONG THE  
CHILDREN OF THE KINDERTRANSPORTS.

Matthew Christian Stahl, Master of Arts, 2014

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Between December 1938 and September 1939, 10,000 Jewish children were evacuated from Nazi territory to the United Kingdom. Approximately ninety percent of these children were never reunited with their families. This thesis draws upon oral histories and memoirs of children from the *Kindertransports* in order to understand and analyze the traumas they experienced before fleeing from Nazi persecution and as a result of their separation from their parents as well as the factors that most influenced the long-term effects of this trauma.

SEPARATION AND LOSS: SEQUENTIAL TRAUMATIZATION AND THE  
LOSS OF FAMILY LIFE EXPERIENCED AMONG THE CHILDREN OF THE  
KINDERTRANSPORTS

By

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## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Kristina Dagley Stahl, and to my children, Bethany Eureka Stahl and Liam Franklin Stahl.

Kristy, thank you for being willing to move across the country with me from California to Maryland so that I could pursue my dream of attending graduate school and a career as an archivist. Thank you for putting up with the many long weekends and late nights that I spent writing and revising this work, and thank you for your love and support. You now have my undivided attention.

Bethany, the first two and a half years of your life have been spent with me in graduate school. I must say that every interruption, every game of roll-balls, every story read, every cartoon watched, and every moment spent watching you grow from a baby to a toddler has been worth the three extra semesters it took to finish.

Liam, you were only two months old on the day I defended this thesis. We haven't spent much time together the last two months as I have been rushing to finish. Even at two months, I can already see your joy for life, and I am eager to watch you grow.

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## Introduction

Between December 1938 and September 1939 an estimated 10,000 unaccompanied children fled from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia to the United Kingdom as part of the *Kindertransports*, a program through which the Jewish community in England, with the cooperation of the British government, sought to rescue Jewish youths from Nazi persecution. While these evacuees were spared the traumas of the Holocaust, they did experience emotional and psychological traumas of their own both before fleeing their home country and after their arrival in England. The children of the *Kindertransports* experienced what psychiatrist Hans Keilson called “sequential traumatization,” a term that refers to an ongoing series of several negative, traumatic events that have a lasting, negative impact on an individual’s life.<sup>1</sup>

Keilson first published his study on sequential traumatization in 1979. In this study, he focused on Jewish war orphans who had survived the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands from 1940-1945, either in hiding or in concentration camps.<sup>2</sup> Regarding orphans in general, Keilson wrote:

The trauma of becoming an orphan marks the beginning of a new developmental phase for all children. The psychological and possibly pathogenetic significance is dependent on a number of factors such as age and stage of development at the time of the trauma, social maturity, the quality of the pretraumatic situation with respect to the various aspects of mental hygiene and lastly the quality of the help offered the child after the trauma.<sup>3</sup>

He argued that the trauma of these war orphans, however, extended beyond just the loss of their parents and differed from that of children who had been orphaned through illness or traffic accidents. In addition to having experienced the traumatic loss of their parents, these war

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<sup>1</sup> Rebekka Göpfert, “Kindertransport: History and Memory,” *Shofar* 23 (2004): 25.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Keilson, *Sequential Traumatization in Children: A Clinical and Statistical Follow-up Study on the Fate of the Jewish War Orphans in the Netherlands*, trans. Yvonne Bearne, Hilary Coleman, Deirdre Winter (Jerusalem, the Magnes Press, 1992), 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

orphans were survivors of an ongoing “persecution process” and the loss of their mothers and fathers was “the final culmination of the acts of terror” that they endured.<sup>4</sup> Like all orphans, though, the lasting impact of this trauma depended on the factors detailed above.

The vast majority of *Kinder* not only experienced the trauma of becoming an orphan, but also ongoing persecution and instability that served to heighten their trauma. The patterns of harassment they endured in their home countries before departure, the sustained attacks on their families’ economic security, the initial separation from their families, the constant relocation and changing of living situations in England, and, for most of them, the realization at the end of the war that their parents had perished, were all contributing factors to this trauma. For the children of the *Kindertransports*, the quality of care they received after their arrival in England affected their ability to deal with their loss more than any other factor. Children who were treated well by their foster families adjusted to their new lives and dealt with their trauma more easily than those who were treated poorly or were not placed in stable living situations.

As the political, economic, and social climate in Germany became increasingly hostile to Jews throughout the 1930s, parents’ ability to support their families financially began to falter. Many Jewish families hoped that this situation was only temporary. In the mid-1930s, plans for emigration from Germany often involved keeping families intact and did not include the sense of urgency that many felt in the weeks following *Kristallnacht*. On that night, November 9-10, 1938, mobs of Germans throughout the Reich attacked Jewish homes, businesses, synagogues, orphanages, and other institutions, in retaliation for the assassination of a German diplomat in Paris by a Polish-Jewish man born in Germany. In the days and weeks following these attacks, the arrests of Jewish men and older teenage boys, along with a series of decrees designed to cripple the Jewish community financially, led many Jews to realize they no longer had a future in

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Germany and tipped the balance toward emigration. Indeed, *Kristallnacht* was the catalyst behind the creation of the *Kindertransport* program, and the moment when many Jewish parents decided that evacuating their children from Nazi-controlled territory was more important than keeping their families together.<sup>5</sup>

When the children arrived in the United Kingdom, the trauma of separating from their parents was either mitigated or worsened, depending upon the living arrangements and surrogate families evacuees encountered there. In this regard, the experiences of the *Kinder* varied greatly. Some children were placed immediately into stable foster families who cared for them throughout the war and after. Other children frequently moved from one foster family to another. Some of these foster families welcomed the *Kinder* as one of their own, while others treated them more as house servants or hired help. Some *Kinder* were never placed with a family and spent the duration of the war living in converted holiday camps, hostels, or boarding schools. For those who lived with stable foster families, the long-term effects of their trauma were lessened, while those who moved frequently or who lived with families who treated them poorly often faced a more difficult period of adjustment after the war.

Equally important to the surrogate family lives that the children experienced during their early years in the United Kingdom was the level of contact they maintained with members of their own families. In some instances, siblings lived together in foster homes, but they frequently lived apart. The level of contact between separated siblings varied, depending largely on proximity. *Kinder* maintained limited contact with parents and other loved ones still living under Nazi control and exchanged occasional letters prior to the outbreak of war. During the early years of the war, they were able to send and receive Red Cross postcards limited to twenty-

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<sup>5</sup> Marion Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 129.

five words or less. Both of these methods were frequently unreliable and did not allow *Kinder* and their families to communicate openly because German censors monitored their correspondence. Of course for most of the *Kinder*, by 1942 even these postcards ceased to arrive, as their parents had been killed.

In the years following the war, many *Kinder* struggled with questions of their national and religious identities, feelings of abandonment and isolation, and a loss of connection with their own familial roots. Even among those who did reestablish contact with their parents, it was often after having been separated for a large portion of their formative years. Thus, these restored relationships were often strained, as grown children and their parents no longer knew how to interact. Furthermore, many of the evacuees often found it difficult to maintain personal relationships with their own families that they established after the war.

Until recently, historians have not studied *Kindertransport* survivors, although they have analyzed the program in the larger context of British immigration policy and Jewish flight from Germany in the 1930s and 1940s. For historians studying the National Socialist era, the Holocaust itself became the most important subject, while the exile and rescue of Jews remained marginal areas of study. Scholars viewed individuals who had escaped from Germany as undamaged and their fate was less interesting than the experiences of those who had perished or those who had survived the camps.<sup>6</sup>

Many scholars ignored the *Kinder* because they had spent the duration of the war in relative safety in Great Britain and their experiences seemed trivial in comparison to other survivors.<sup>7</sup> The *Kinder* themselves only began to recognize the trauma that they had endured in the late 1980s, as a result of the *Kindertransport* reunions organized in London by Bertha

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<sup>6</sup> Wolfgang Benz, "Emigration as Rescue and Trauma: The Historical Context of the Kindertransport," *Shofar* 23 (2004): 4.

<sup>7</sup> Göpfert, 25.

Leverton, a *Kind* who had fled from Munich in January 1939. After these reunions, many *Kinder* were finally able to articulate that they also had endured traumatic experiences through the sudden and often permanent separation from their loved ones.<sup>8</sup>

For many *Kinder*, these reunions helped make them aware that they had been part of a rescue program that was much larger than they had previously realized. Eddy Behrendt, the founder of the Kindertransport Association, recalled his impressions of the *Kindertransport* reunions when he wrote:

Until that time, I had rarely thought or spoken about the early experiences of my childhood, and knew of no one else who had fled the Holocaust to England on a Kindertransport. At these meetings I had met many people with similar backgrounds and stories and even some that came to England on the same train as I. It was all very impressive, and one could not help but be moved. I wept for the first time in many years.<sup>9</sup>

The sudden realization among *Kinder* in the late 1980s that they had actually been part of a mass evacuation of 10,000 children was not uncommon. Bertha Leverton experienced a similar revelation. In her 1996 interview with the Shoah Foundation she described the planning of the *Kindertransport* reunions. She recalled, “I realized within a couple of weeks that the synagogue wouldn’t have been big enough...I never knew 10,000 children had been given permission to enter. I knew nothing...we wanted to forget that we were refugees!” Leverton added that, after the reunion, everyone was now proud to have been a *Kind* from the *Kindertransport*.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1990s, in the years following the first *Kindertransport* reunions, the *Kinder* produced a flood of memoirs, as well as oral histories. This study is based on a close examination of these memoirs and oral histories. These accounts can provide valuable insight

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Eddy Behrendt, “Founding the Kindertransport Association (KTA),” Kindertransport Association, accessed March 24, 2013, [http://www.kindertransport.org/history08\\_FoundingKTA.htm](http://www.kindertransport.org/history08_FoundingKTA.htm).

<sup>10</sup> Bertha Leverton, Interview 12053, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

into the experiences of the *Kinder*, but they should also be approached critically as historical sources. As Caroline Sharples has argued, the writing of memoirs is a necessarily selective process as the author carefully decides what to include and what to exclude. The way in which the author portrays these events is also significant, and memories of the past are often adulterated by hindsight, particularly when recalled from early childhood. Interestingly, many of the *Kinder* memoirs draw upon a stock set of incidents and they often incorporate similar language in recalling their experiences.<sup>11</sup>

Similar issues arise in the use of oral histories, with the added complication that the interviewer can shape the interview as much as the interviewee. This is particularly true in the case of the Shoah Foundation interviews. Launched by Steven Spielberg in 1994 with the expressed goal of collecting as many testimonies of Holocaust survivors as possible, the Shoah Foundation recorded nearly 52,000 interviews over the course of the next six years. While the collection of these testimonies, currently housed at the University of Southern California, has certainly created a valuable primary resource for Holocaust research, the vast scale of the project gives the interviews an almost industrial quality. The interviews are formulaic and volunteers who lacked historical knowledge about the details of the Holocaust conducted many of them. Additionally, interviewers frequently interrupted the interviewees if they felt that a particular topic they were discussing was not relevant, sometimes even cutting the survivors off mid-sentence.

Christopher Browning addressed the issue of survivor memory in his 2010 study of the Starachowice labor camp, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp*, for which he drew heavily upon oral histories from survivors. Browning described memories as being divided

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<sup>11</sup> Caroline Sharples, "Reconstructing the Past: Refugee Writings on the *Kindertransport*," *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 12 (2006): 58.

into four categories: repressed memories, secret memories, communal memories, and public memories. Repressed memories are those that an individual has forgotten because the memory itself is so traumatic and debilitating. In the case of secret memories, the individual does retain them but, either because of shame or embarrassment, he or she often refuses to share them. In the case of *Kinder*, these memories could involve sexual or physical abuse or other mistreatment at the hands of their foster families or caretakers.

Communal memories are those that are shared and discussed among the survivors themselves, but rarely shared with those outside of the community. This lack of sharing results from a tacit agreement among the community that outsiders might not understand and that these memories could be potentially embarrassing to the community. The memories that are provided in memoirs and oral testimonies fall predominantly into the public memory category, although some secret and communal memories are occasionally included. Browning defined public memories as those that are openly shared. Of course, the lines between these types of memory are not static, and can shift over time. For example, secret memories can often become public as we move further in time from the original event.<sup>12</sup>

Oral histories and memoirs can certainly be influenced by the length of time that has passed since the original events, as well as the interviewee's age at the time the events occurred. Individuals can often have difficulty recalling or understanding the specific details of events that took place so long ago. This issue arises often in interviews with *Kinder*, as they are frequently describing events that they experienced as young children. Thus, many of their recollections of their prewar lives have been influenced by information that they have learned since. For example, when asked by the interviewers to describe what they faced in the days and weeks

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<sup>12</sup> Christopher Browning, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 10-11.

leading up to *Kristallnacht*, many of the Shoah Foundation interviewees recounted the assassination of Ernst vom Rath by Herschel Grynszpan rather than their own experiences. In spite of these problems of recollection, memoirs and oral histories remain valuable sources for reconstructing the experiences of children on the *Kindertransports*. As Browning observed, drawing upon a “critical mass of testimony” can lead to the emergence of a core memory that allows the researcher to form reasonable judgments about the experience.<sup>13</sup>

Scholarship on the *Kindertransports* has been hindered not only by a focus on the Holocaust itself, but also by the manner in which the program has been romanticized in British memory. The rather simplistic image of Great Britain as the savior of 10,000 children has long prevented scholarly criticism of the program’s faults and has not allowed for a critical analysis of the trauma that these *Kinder* endured after being separated from their families.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the romanticized image of the program does not place the *Kindertransports* properly in the context of British immigration policy in the 1930s and 1940s.

This imagery of Great Britain as a heroic savior has been further enhanced in the public imagination by the release of The Shoah Foundation’s 2000 documentary and book *Into the Arms of Strangers*. Deborah Oppenheimer and Mark Harris, the producers of the film and editors of the book, draw upon a wide variety of experiences that includes *Kinder*, rescuers, foster parents, and two parents who managed to make it to England before the onset of the war. The film also included the story of Lory Cahn, who was scheduled to leave on a transport from Breslau. At the last moment, her father changed his mind and removed her from the train. During the course of the war, Lory endured one ghetto, six concentration camps, and a forced

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>14</sup> Jennifer A. Norton, “The *Kindertransport*: History and Memory,” Master’s Thesis, California State University, Sacramento, 2010, 4.

march.<sup>15</sup> The inclusion of this story in the film and book effectively accentuated the differences in the experiences of camp survivors and the children of the *Kindertransport*. However, it also served to downplay the trauma that the *Kinder* experienced. While the trauma of camp survivors was certainly harsher, the trauma of the evacuees must not be ignored.

Louise London has emerged as one of the more vocal critics of the image of Great Britain as savior, and of British immigration policy toward the Jews in the 1930s. In a chapter written for David Cesarani's *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry*, she argued that the British government, along with other nations, had "the option of opening their doors" to persecuted Jews, but instead chose to treat the problem as a question of immigration policy rather than as a growing refugee crisis.<sup>16</sup> In her later work, *Whitehall and the Jews*, a study of British immigration policy from 1933 to 1948 published in 2000, London argued that Britain could and should have done more.

After describing the processes and political maneuverings that led to the establishment of the *Kindertransport* program, London discussed the problem of children being separated from their parents as a result of Britain's reluctance to permit the immigration of families. London admitted that admission to Great Britain saved the children's lives, but, she argued, the policy of exclusion sealed the fates of their parents.<sup>17</sup> "The organisers of this exodus knew they were separating families in circumstances where parents abandoned to Nazi persecution had little prospect of survival. This must qualify our view of the admission of unaccompanied children as humanitarian," she noted.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Mark Harris and Deborah Oppenheimer, eds., *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport* (New York, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000), 235.

<sup>16</sup> Louise London, "Jewish Refugees, Anglo-Jewry and British Government Policy, 1930-1940," in *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry*, ed. David Cesarani. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 163.

<sup>17</sup> Louise London, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933-1948: British Immigration Policy, Jewish Refugees and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 118.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

London's arguments are deeply flawed, relying too heavily on the benefit of hindsight, and hindsight is not historical evidence. She also ignores the fact that while the *Kindertransport* program was specifically for children there were other means for parents to immigrate to the United Kingdom. A.J. Sherman responded to such criticisms in the introduction to the second edition of his book, *Island Refuge*. He argued that, in addition to relying on hindsight, such critics consistently choose to ignore key facts that place the policy in its historical context. First, the British Government was also under diplomatic pressure to accept masses of potential Jewish refugees from Poland, Romania, and Hungary. As Britain was already struggling to cope with hundreds of thousands of potential immigrants from Nazi Germany, they certainly did not have the resources to solve the problems of millions of threatened Jews from Central and Eastern Europe. Sherman also noted that actual immigration numbers from the 1930s were widely under-reported, as the Home Office, the Jewish community, and the many refugee organizations all had an interest in minimizing these statistics.<sup>19</sup> Overall, an estimated 46,458 Jews emigrated from Germany to the United Kingdom between 1933 and 1939.<sup>20</sup>

Rebekka Göpfert has also responded to criticisms that the British Government should be held accountable for not allowing parents to accompany their children on these transports. She argued that the British government wanted to avoid the impression that it had opened its doors wide to refugees because they feared that such an action would result in an increase of persecution of Jews in German territory, as well as an increase in anti-Semitic sentiment in Britain. The British used this reasoning both prior to and during the Second World War.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Göpfert argued that the admission of children was far more likely to be accepted by

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<sup>19</sup> A.J. Sherman, *Island Refuge: Britain and Refugees from the Third Reich, 1933-1939* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Newbury Park: Frank Cass & Company, 1994), 7.

<sup>20</sup> Herbert A. Strauss, "Jewish Emigration from Germany," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, 25 (1980), 355.

<sup>21</sup> Göpfert, 22.

the British population than the admission of entire families. Children aroused sympathy and posed little danger to the labor market in the short term. Additionally, the children's stay in Great Britain was originally expected to be brief. Contemporaries assumed that the children would soon be able to return to their home countries or rejoin their families either in the United States or Palestine.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, the majority of the *Kinder* did not reunite with their families after the war, and were left to rebuild their lives on their own. For most of them, the last time they saw their parents was at the train station when they left for England. While it may be tempting to criticize the British Government for not allowing parents to accompany their children on the *Kindertransports*, as Louise London has done, such criticism ignores the wider history of British immigration policy and the patterns of Jewish immigration from Nazi territory in the 1930s.

***British Immigration Policy, the Jewish Refugee Crisis, and the Origins of the  
Kindertransport Program***

In the period between 1933 and 1939, as Nazi persecution made many German Jews seek asylum elsewhere, the British Government found itself continually having to formulate and revise its immigration policies, both in the United Kingdom and its overseas territories.<sup>23</sup> The underlying British policy in the 1930s allowed foreigners to settle in Britain only if they could demonstrate an ability to support themselves and their dependents. Those hoping to take up employment were required to have an additional permit to work. In practice, however, Britain was reluctant to allow a flood of refugees, regardless of their financial means. From a diplomatic standpoint, Great Britain had to consider how its policies would affect relations with the United States, Germany, and several Eastern European nations. Additionally, it had to consider how the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>23</sup> Sherman, 14.

refugee movement impacted its own national interests, and whether or not they even had diplomatic standing to intervene in the refugee problem.<sup>24</sup>

Each department in the British Government had its own concerns regarding immigration. For the British Home Office, the primary concerns were high unemployment, and the fear that allowing an influx of Jewish refugees would cause an increase in British anti-Semitism. The Foreign Office feared damaging relations with Berlin and criticism from Washington and Eastern European allies like Poland and Romania, who warned that an overgenerous response to German Jewish refugees could inspire the expulsion of millions of destitute Jews from Eastern Europe.<sup>25</sup> The Treasury was concerned about the financial liability for the settlement and relief of these immigrants, while the Colonial Office was most concerned about Palestine and the Arab-Jewish conflict, as more Jewish refugees might seek permission to settle there.<sup>26</sup> All of these concerns, combined with continual lobbying both in favor of and opposed to the admission of more refugees, led to an immigration policy that was often inconsistent in its execution.<sup>27</sup>

Jewish flight from Germany in the 1930s occurred in several different waves. The first wave was relatively small compared to later periods and occurred in response to the boycott of Jewish businesses on April 1, 1933 and to the Law for the Reconstruction of the Civil Service, enacted on April 7. This law required that “non-Aryan” civil servants be retired from civil service, with exceptions made for World War I veterans and those in service before August 1, 1914. Subsequent ordinances and decrees clarified exactly who was included in this group, and led to the dismissal of many Jewish university and school teachers, judicial officers, public

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 14.

health and welfare officers, and so on.<sup>28</sup> This law actually affected only a small segment of the Jewish population. Prior to the enactment of the law, there were less than 5,000 Jews employed in civil service. After the law was in effect, 2,500 Jewish officials continued in the civil service.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to limiting their participation in the Civil Service, the Nazis also restricted Jewish involvement in German cultural life. In 1933, the Nazis curtailed Jewish attendance at secondary schools and universities.<sup>30</sup> In September of that year the Nazi government established the Reich Chamber of Culture, under the control of the Propaganda Ministry. The purpose of the Reich Chamber of Culture was to exclude Jews from German cultural life, film, theater, music, fine arts, literature and journalism.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, the Propaganda Ministry barred Jews from working as newspaper editors, although they were later permitted to continue working solely in the Jewish press.<sup>32</sup> While the laws enacted in 1933 impacted only a small portion of Jews in Germany, they demonstrated a desire to exclude Jews from all key areas of society, including the state structure, and culture. In response to this early persecution, an estimated 37,000 Jewish emigrants fled Germany.<sup>33</sup>

In the early months of 1933, the sudden influx of German refugees generated both indignation and sympathy in European countries. Switzerland received the greatest number of refugees, with an estimated 10,000 arriving between March and September of that year. France received approximately 9,000, and Czechoslovakia received approximately 4,000. The Netherlands also received an estimated 3,682, while Great Britain received between 3,600-

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>29</sup> Avraham Barkai, *From Boycott to Annihilation: The Economic Struggle of German Jews, 1933-1943*, trans. William Templer (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1989), 27.

<sup>30</sup> Sherman, 21.

<sup>31</sup> Kaplan, 27.

<sup>32</sup> Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews; Volume 1: The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997): 32-33.

<sup>33</sup> Strauss, 326.

4,800.<sup>34</sup> In many countries local Jewish communities formed private committees to assist the incoming refugees. In Great Britain, the Jews' Temporary Shelter in London, presided over by Otto Schiff, was one of the first organizations to provide such assistance.

The Shelter was a communal lodging house founded in 1884 to help new immigrants get settled, find employment and housing, and navigate the United Kingdom's complex immigration laws. Additionally, the Shelter had provided assistance to Jewish war refugees who fled from German-occupied Belgium during World War I. Schiff was himself a German Jewish immigrant, originally from Frankfurt am Main, who had moved to London in 1896 at the age of twenty-one to pursue a career in banking. He became president of the Jews' Temporary Shelter in 1923, and remained in that position until 1948.<sup>35</sup>

In March 1933, Schiff realized that a larger effort was needed to help the incoming refugees and he helped found the Jewish Refugee Committee.<sup>36</sup> Part of the Committee's agreement with the Home Office allowing them to sponsor refugees required that no public funds would be used to support the refugees, and that the Anglo-Jewish community would see to their needs as required. As the number of refugees increased, so did the financial burden on the Jewish community. Thus, in June 1933, the Committee joined with various other Jewish organizations and established the Central British Fund for German Jewry to serve as the funding arm for refugee operations.<sup>37</sup>

Until 1938, the British government made no distinction between aliens and refugees in Britain. Reich Germans with a valid passport were not required to have visas and aside from

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 354-355.

<sup>35</sup> A.J. Sherman and Pamela Shatzkes, "Otto M. Schiff (1875-1952), Unsung Rescuer," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 54 (2009): 244-246.

<sup>36</sup> Amy Zahl Gottlieb, *Men of Vision: Anglo-Jewry's Aid to Victims of the Nazi Regime, 1933-1945* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), 9-10.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 29.

prohibitions on employment and time limitations and seldom had conditions placed on their stay.<sup>38</sup> Because Schiff had already established relationships with the British Home Office officials through his previous work with refugees, individual immigrants were often admitted to Britain based simply on the Committee's guarantee either to place them in suitable employment or training, or to maintain them until they moved on to other countries.<sup>39</sup>

The second wave of Jewish refugees came after the enactment of the Nuremberg Laws on September 15, 1935. These laws were intended to ensure the purity of German blood and to protect the German people and nation from the perceived Jewish threat. The first law, the Reich Flag Law, proclaimed black, red, and white the national colors, and the swastika flag as the national flag. The second law, the Reich Citizenship Law established a fundamental distinction between "citizens of the Reich" and "subjects." Citizens were entitled to full political and civil rights, while subjects were denied these rights. With the passage of the Citizenship Law, Jews had a legal status similar to foreigners. The third law, The Law for the Defense of German Blood and Honor, forbade marriage and extramarital relations between Jews and German citizens, prevented them from employing German citizens less than forty-five years of age in their homes, and forbade them from flying the German flag.<sup>40</sup>

The Nuremberg Laws caused many Jews and "non-Aryans" to realize that there was no further possibility of maintaining normal lives in the Reich. At this point, refugees who were already outside of Germany sought more permanent places of settlement, while those would-be emigrants still living in Germany began to seek safe havens. Nevertheless, emigration numbers between September 1935 and the end of 1937 did not increase significantly, largely because of the restrictions placed on moving capital abroad, and because the economic base of Jewish life

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<sup>38</sup> Sherman, 273.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>40</sup> Friedländer, 142.

was not yet threatened. In 1935, total Jewish emigration from Germany is estimated to have been 20,000. In 1936, this number increased to 24,000, and in 1937 it was around 23,000.<sup>41</sup>

The Nuremberg Laws did not lead to any significant changes in British immigration policies. However, the British Jewish community now began to focus on helping Jews to leave Germany. In this endeavor, members of the Central British Fund joined efforts with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, commonly known as the JDC, or the Joint. Together, they established the London-based Council for German Jewry to provide emigration assistance to Jews living under Nazi rule.<sup>42</sup>

The third wave of Jewish refugees came in the wake of the *Anschluss*, when Germany annexed Austria on March 12, 1938 and also coincided with an increased effort by the German government to drive Jews out of German society and the economy. By the beginning of 1938, all German Jews were required to surrender their passports and, in July 1938, the Ministry of the Interior ordered all Jews to apply for an identity card before the end of the year. In March 1938, the Nazis launched an investigation to identify and remove all *Mischlinge* and persons related to Jews still in government employment.<sup>43</sup>

The economic campaign against Jews increased dramatically in early 1938, and the Nazi government enacted multiple laws and decrees throughout the year. On April 26, all Jews were ordered to register their property. On June 14, the Nazi government issued a supplementary decree to the Reich Citizenship Law that stated a business was Jewish if the owner, a partner, or a member of the board of directors was Jewish. In July, a law detailed multiple commercial services that were henceforth unavailable to Jews, such as credit and real estate services. Later

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<sup>41</sup> Sherman, 60.

<sup>42</sup> David Silberklang, "Jewish Politics and Rescue: The Founding of the Council for German Jewry," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 7 (1993): 334-335.

<sup>43</sup> Friedländer, 254-255.

that year, in September, supplementary decrees to the Reich Citizenship Law forbade Jews from practicing medicine or participating in the legal profession.<sup>44</sup> The final blow to Jewish economic life occurred on November 12, two days after the November Pogrom, when Hermann Göring issued a ban on all Jewish business activity in the Reich. This ban led to a rapid wave of forced Aryanization of Jewish businesses, which in turn led to a rapid increase in poverty among the Jewish population.<sup>45</sup>

The Nazi takeover of Austria was followed immediately by a mass flight of Jews and others who had reasons to fear the Nazis. Thousands in Austria flooded foreign consulates, and some fled across the border into Czechoslovakia. In response to this mass flight, members of the Jewish Refugee Committee informed the Home Office that they could no longer guarantee that admitted refugees would not require public funds. As a result, the Home Office recommended to the Foreign Office that German and Austrian passport holders now be required to obtain visas.<sup>46</sup>

The volume of refugees seeking to flee from Nazi territory in 1938 led the Roosevelt Administration to propose an international conference to deal with the mass emigration. At the Evian Conference in July 1938, the thirty-two nations in attendance “regretted” that they could not take in more Jewish refugees. High unemployment in receiving nations meant that these immigrants would be competing for jobs with the local labor force. Furthermore, German and Austrian Jewish immigrants were disproportionately old, and no country wanted middle-aged and elderly people who might require public assistance.<sup>47</sup>

Overall, the Evian Conference failed to provide a solution to the refugee problem. In Britain, however, the Evian Conference did result in a change in policy. On the matter of

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 257-258.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 258-260.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>47</sup> Kaplan, 70.

admissions, the Home Office agreed to adopt a more liberal admissions policy. There were still strict limits on certain professional groups such as doctors and dentists, but the only absolute limitation would now be the amount of support that the refugee organizations could provide. In spite of this more liberal policy, however, the limited financial and administrative resources of the refugee committees delayed the admission of many refugees.<sup>48</sup>

Many of the families of the *Kinder*, along with many other German and Austrian Jews, began seeking a means to flee Germany between 1935 and 1938, but often remained committed to emigrate with their families intact. This became increasingly difficult, however, both due to Nazi restrictions on the removal of capital, as well as tightening immigration restrictions in other nations. As Marion Kaplan observed, “While these conditions forced individuals and families to hesitate before emigrating, the more they hesitated, the more conditions deteriorated.”<sup>49</sup>

The events of *Kristallnacht* on the night of November 9-10, 1938, and the increased persecution in the days and weeks that followed, were the catalyst that caused many of these parents to search for a means to send their children to safety. On this night, a wave of attacks against Jewish homes, businesses, and institutions occurred throughout Germany, in response to the murder of Ernst vom Rath, a German diplomat in Paris, by Herschel Grynszpan, a young Jewish man whose family was among the 17,000 Polish Jews the German government had expelled from Germany on October 27 and 28. Grynszpan confronted and shot vom Rath in Paris, and the Nazis used vom Rath’s death as an excuse to launch the pogrom.<sup>50</sup>

Throughout the night, assailants attacked Jewish homes and businesses. Others used bombs and dynamite to demolish synagogues, and mobs destroyed holy items and plundered Jewish homes. Some assailants rounded up Jews from their homes and herded them to public

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<sup>48</sup> London, “Jewish Refugees and British Government Policy,” 178-179.

<sup>49</sup> Kaplan, 71.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

squares and marketplaces so they could be harassed and taunted. During the attacks, police and firefighters did nothing to aid Jews or spare their property, and only intervened when neighboring “Aryan” buildings were threatened. Nazis also invaded Jewish hospitals, old-age homes, and orphanages. On the following morning, the Nazi authorities forced Jews to clean up the destroyed furniture, glass, and other items that littered the streets.<sup>51</sup>

In spite of strong, widespread condemnation of the attacks in Britain, the Foreign Office warned that any intervention from the British Government would make matters worse both for German Jews and for British Jews with vested interests in Germany. Among the members of the Jewish community in Britain, however, these tragic events increased the sense of urgency to aid their coreligionists living under Nazi persecution. On November 15, 1938, six days after *Kristallnacht*, a delegation from the Council for German Jewry and various other Jewish and non-Jewish refugee organizations, led by Viscount Herbert Samuel, the first High Commissioner for Palestine and a former Home Secretary, held an emergency meeting with Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and presented him with a plan to rescue children ranging from infants up to the age of seventeen from Nazi persecution by bringing them to Britain. The Council stipulated that, as with previous Jewish refugees admitted with the help of the Jewish Refugee Committee and the Central British Fund, no public monies would be used to support these children. Additionally, the Council proposed that they would be educated and trained for employment in fields that were in high demand, or be prepared for emigration elsewhere. The proposal also called for the establishment of hostels or camps for the reception of the refugees. Chamberlain deferred the decision to the Home Office, indicating that he would support whatever choice they made.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Paula Hill, “Anglo-Jewry and the Refugee Children, 1938-1945,” PhD. diss., University of London, 2001, 53.

On November 21, 1938, a debate on the refugee issue took place in parliament. MP Philip Noel-Baker gave an account of the crisis in Germany and demanded action on the part of the British Government. Home Secretary Samuel Hoare and several other speakers supported Noel-Baker. Hoare informed parliament of the meeting he had held with Viscount Samuel and other members of the Council for German Jewry and indicated during the debate that if the maintenance of the children could be guaranteed, the Home Office would provide all necessary visas.<sup>53</sup> The Home Secretary supported the program and insisted that it offered Britain “a chance of taking the young generation of a great people” and “mitigating to some extent the terrible sufferings of their parents and their friends.”<sup>54</sup>

In addition to the thousands of children brought from Germany and Austria, 669 children also arrived from Czechoslovakia under the *Kindertransport* program.<sup>55</sup> Nicholas Winton, a British banker who had first traveled to Prague on vacation in December 1938, led the rescue effort in that country. While in Prague, Winton stayed with his friend, Martin Blake, who was working for the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia, an organization that was trying to help refugees who had fled from the Sudetenland escape to England. Germany had annexed the Sudetenland two months prior, in September 1938. Winton noticed, however, that the BCRC was focusing primarily on aiding adults and did not have the resources to provide migration assistance to children.<sup>56</sup>

Winton volunteered to help and declared himself the head of the BCRC children’s section, launching his efforts to help evacuate Jewish children from Czechoslovakia. He first turned to the Refugee Children’s Movement to see if they would be able to assist, but the RCM

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> As quoted in Sherman, 181.

<sup>55</sup> Vera K. Fast, *Children’s Exodus: A History of the Kindertransport* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 23.

<sup>56</sup> Muriel Emanuel and Vera Gissing, *Nicholas Winton and the Rescued Generation* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2001), 66.

informed him that they did not have the funding or resources to rescue children from Czechoslovakia.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, Winton took on the task of arranging the transports on his own. With assistance from a few others, Winton selected children for the transports and found each of them a place to live in the United Kingdom. The first of the Winton children left Czechoslovakia on March 14, 1939, and the last group left on August 2.<sup>58</sup> The British Government established The Czech Trust Fund with contributions from guarantors Winton and others had recruited, and this fund provided for the Czech children upon their arrival in England.<sup>59</sup>

In addition to approving the admission of children from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia under the *Kindertransport* program, the Home Office also agreed to relax restrictions on all Jewish refugees and allow more individuals to be admitted under a transmigration category. This measure was deemed strictly temporary, and refugees were not to be granted permanent asylum. Furthermore, refugees were required to remain off of the labor market for as long as they stayed in Britain. The children admitted under this agreement were expected to leave after completing their education and training.<sup>60</sup> In order to facilitate the rescue of the children, the Home Office agreed to allow them to enter Britain with a single, simplified form that could be issued by the rescue agencies rather than requiring a traditional passport and visa from each.<sup>61</sup>

When viewed in the context of Britain's immigration policy, arguments such as Louise London's fall short. The *Kindertransport* program was consistent with previous policies that allowed Jewish refugees to enter the United Kingdom based solely on the financial guarantee of the Anglo-Jewish community. Furthermore, their parents were still able to enter so long as they

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>58</sup> Fast, 24.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> London, "Jewish Refugees and British Government Policy," 180-181.

<sup>61</sup> Sherman, 183.

could find a guarantor of their own. Thus, the limitation on the number of refugees admitted was based largely on the financial resources of the Anglo-Jewish community, rather than the policy of the British government.

The Council for German Jewry, the Christian Council, the Save the Children Fund, and multiple regional organizations shared the bulk of the costs, all operating under the umbrella of the Movement for the Care of Children from Germany, later known as the Refugee Children's Movement.<sup>62</sup> On December 8, a week after the first group of children arrived, former Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin made an appeal over the radio on behalf of the refugees requesting ordinary Britons to help relieve the burden on the Anglo-Jewish community. In response, private donations flooded in and, by July 1939, the Baldwin Fund had raised over £500,000. The success of the Baldwin Fund demonstrated that, at least in the short term, the program enjoyed popular support as well as the support of the Government. Initially, it was assumed that this amount would be sufficient to care for the children until such time as they could be reunited with their families back home or elsewhere.

Unfortunately, the outbreak of war in September 1939 led to a more permanent refugee crisis for Britain and the children of the *Kindertransports*.<sup>63</sup> Children who had been expecting to reunite with their parents instead found themselves facing an extended stay in a foreign country, apart from their families. The majority of their parents were unable to escape Nazi persecution and perished in the Holocaust. Their parents' deaths were the culmination of a sustained persecution process that began in the early 1930s and permanently altered their family lives.

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<sup>62</sup> Fast, 13.

<sup>63</sup> Hill, 60-61.

## Chapter 1- Family Life Before the *Kindertransports*

Over the course of ten months, from December 1938 until the end of August 1939, approximately 10,000 Jewish children traveled to Great Britain from Nazi-controlled territory in Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. While the journey to the United Kingdom represented salvation for the evacuated children, the majority of them never saw their parents again. This separation from their families followed a period of sustained persecution of Jews that began long before the first *Kindertransport* left for England. Anti-Semitic sentiment in Germany during the 1930s created an increasingly hostile environment for Jewish families that weakened their social status and friendships and diminished the ability of parents to protect and provide for their children.

Before 1938, much of the economic and social persecution of the Jewish community occurred informally, apart from legislation. Early official actions, such as the boycott of Jewish businesses on April 1, 1933, and the enactment of the Civil Service Law on April 7 were limited in their impact. Even before the April 1 boycott, members of the SA and SS targeted individual Jewish business owners for harassment, violent demonstrations, and small-scale boycotts. Overwhelmingly, these early “individual actions” were directed at small businesses owned by Jews from Eastern Europe, although larger firms, such as Jewish department stores and retail shops, were also targeted.<sup>1</sup> The official April 1 boycott, ordered by the NSDAP leadership on March 28, was announced as a defensive measure against “atrocious propaganda” that party members believed Jewish organizations were spreading abroad. On Boycott Day itself, SA and Hitler Youth positioned themselves outside of Jewish businesses with posters and attempted to stop customers from entering the stores. Those customers who insisted were photographed and

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<sup>1</sup> Avraham Barkai, *From Boycott to Annihilation: The Economic Struggle of German Jews, 1933-1943*, trans. William Templer (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1989), 14-15.

their pictures were published in the local papers. In smaller towns and more remote neighborhoods of larger cities, the boycotts were accompanied by vandalism and plundering.<sup>2</sup>

As Avraham Barkai argued, the importance of the April 1 boycott lies not so much in its immediate impact, but rather in the fact that it set the stage for the further economic discrimination and ousting of the Jews from the German economy. The action had legitimized anti-Jewish economic measures, in spite of the fact that official government policy retreated from similar activities in the near term. In conjunction with the Law for the Reconstruction of the Civil Service, enacted one week later, the Nazi regime had sent a clear signal that Jewish retail outlets, civil servants, and the medical and legal professions were legitimate targets for economic persecution.<sup>3</sup>

Between 1934 and 1937, there was a lull in the official economic targeting of Jews. While this lull has often been viewed as a “grace period” in the historical literature, in fact the process of ousting Jews from the economy continued informally during this time. Local laws and ordinances targeted Jews. On April 19, 1933, the city of Baden banned the use of Yiddish in local cattle markets. On May 8, the mayor of Zweibrücken forbade Jews from leasing spaces in the annual town market.<sup>4</sup> Barkai defined this process as a “creeping displacement” carried out at a slow and steady pace. Much of this activity transpired in smaller towns and rural areas, in a relatively quiet fashion. Trade associations sought to prevent the forging of business ties with Jewish businesses, credit institutions denied loans to Jewish businessmen, and cancelled existing loans or mortgages, thereby creating liquidity problems that forced the business owners to sell.<sup>5</sup> Often, Nazi party members resorted to threats, intimidation, and small-scale violence to

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>4</sup> Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: Volume I, The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 37.

<sup>5</sup> Barkai, 64.

encourage Jewish business owners to sell their firms for a fraction of their value. Thus, in spite of the fact that there were very few national laws targeting Jewish economic activity before 1938, many Jewish families still suffered financially.<sup>6</sup>

Jewish families also endured similar creeping changes in their social relations with non-Jewish Germans. For example, even before the Nuremberg Laws had outlawed sexual relationships and marriages between Jews and “Aryans,” these relationships were often openly condemned and occasionally punished.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, although Jewish children were never formally barred from attending public primary schools, many of them still faced harassment and anti-Semitism from classmates and teachers alike on a daily basis. In some cases, school administrators barred Jewish children from certain events and school activities. As with the economic persecution, harassment of Jews in schools tended to be worse in rural areas and small towns.<sup>8</sup>

In response to economic and social persecution, the Jewish community in Germany turned inward and, in the autumn of 1933, formed the *Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden*. This organization initially provided financial assistance and aid to individual Jews who lost their jobs as a result of the Civil Service law. Professional groups of Jewish doctors and lawyers also provided similar support to colleagues affected by the law.<sup>9</sup> The assistance these organizations provided also included job placement services with Jewish firms. As the economic climate became more difficult for Jewish individuals, whether through legislation, or extralegal actions, the Jewish community closed ranks. More and more frequently, Jews worked for, employed, and

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>7</sup> Marion Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 79.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>9</sup> Barkai, 41-43.

did business with other Jews.<sup>10</sup>

This distinction between official legislation and local persecution must be considered when dealing with the testimonies and memoirs of the *Kinder*. Often, the interviewees or authors made reference to how their father was forced from his job, how their family was forced to sell their home or business, or how they were forced out of their schools. In most cases before 1938, the interviewee was likely referring to actions taken by individuals, groups, or, in some cases, governments of small towns. Often, because of their young age at the time, the *Kinder* did not know whether the harassment they and their families experienced resulted from official German policy or individual actions. Regardless, the persecution they endured before departing for England contributed both to the decline in their family's quality of life and to the sequential trauma they experienced.

### *Early Impressions of Family Life*

Testimonies and memoirs describing events that the interviewee or author experienced in early childhood often include little discussion of negative experiences, and the interviewee is often unable to recall many precise details of family life, whether positive or negative. Caroline Sharples observed that the beginnings of individual memoirs consistently involve an overwhelming sense of nostalgia. Descriptions of early childhood are idyllic and revolve around childhood concerns such as schoolwork, holidays, and household chores. These images also frequently convey an irretrievable sense of loss for a past that can never be regained.<sup>11</sup>

These idyllic impressions and sense of loss pervade the oral history testimonies. Due largely to the formulaic manner in which the Shoah Foundation structured its interviews, discussions of early childhood were often guided by a series of stock questions and therefore

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>11</sup> Caroline Sharples, "Reconstructing the Past: Refugee Writings on the *Kindertransport*," *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 12 (2006): 46.

follow roughly the same pattern. Descriptions of early family life frequently revolved around the family business or parents' professions, as well as discussions of relationships among extended family members. The beginning of each interview also includes discussions about the extent of the family's religious observances and holidays, as well as their home. The testimony of Paul Hart provides an excellent example of how *Kinder* remembered their childhood.

Paul Hart, born Paul Herzberg on September 30, 1925, in Vienna, remembered his early life as most people do, consisting mainly of time spent with friends and family, going to and from school, and celebrating holidays. He discussed his childhood fascination with airplanes and talked fondly about riding around on his toy scooter. He was aware that his family was Jewish but could not recall ever being treated any differently because of it. Because of the small size of his parents' apartment, he lived with his paternal grandmother and her husband, just around the corner from his parents and brother. He described his grandmother as a very strict woman who made sure he used correct manners and behaved himself, but added that his life with her was very happy. She was a lovely woman whom he loved dearly. Paul saw his parents and brother on a daily basis as well. His relationship with his father, Wilhelm, and mother, Rosa, was close, and he stressed that his father was always available when he needed him. Overall, Paul remembered his childhood as "nothing exciting, just a nice, normal, quiet life."<sup>12</sup>

Paul's recollections concerning the loss of his younger brother, Heinrich Herzberg, who was born June 6, 1933, and perished in the Belzec extermination camp, demonstrate the irretrievable sense of loss so often displayed by *Kinder*. Speaking with clear regret, Paul explained,

He was just my brother, there was nothing special. I liked him when he got a bit older and more sensible, and didn't cry so much. I used to play with him. But again, he was

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<sup>12</sup>Paul Hart, Interview 33039, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

only six, just gone six, when I left him. So, although we bonded, there wasn't time to really do too much with him, unfortunately...I didn't have him long enough, if you like, to really do things that brothers perhaps do together. And that's something I miss.<sup>13</sup>

He frequently repeats this sense of regret over not having had more time to spend with his brother.

Paul Hart's descriptions of his early life are typical of those found in *Kindertransport* testimonies and memoirs, as well as those of other groups of Holocaust survivors. The significance of his accounts of childhood lies not so much in his descriptions of the family home or memories of a favorite toy but rather in his discussion of his family relationships. This is not to say, of course, that every *Kind* came from a blissful, stable background. There were instances of divorce and strained, distant relationships with parents and other family members found among their stories as well. Yet, even in those cases, these recollections convey a sense of security and stability that was later missing from their lives in England.

### ***German and Jewish Identity***

Between 1933 and 1938, Jewish families in Germany faced a series of mixed messages from their non-Jewish German neighbors and German officials. Marion Kaplan has argued that the experiences of Jews in Nazi Germany during these years represented a daily "social death" in which they suffered through excommunication from the social and moral community, and relegation to a "perpetual state of dishonor." In spite of these humiliations and the increasingly difficult circumstances in which they found themselves, the majority of Jewish families adjusted to their new circumstances as best they could. After all, the majority of their families had lived in Germany for generations and most of them viewed themselves as German patriots and part of German culture.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Kaplan, 4-5.

As they continued to maintain their families and communities under increasingly harsh conditions, they clung to the mixed signals they received from the government and non-Jewish neighbors. As an example of this, Kaplan cited a young Jewish girl who recalled Nazis marching through Berlin in 1933 carrying signs and placards that called for a boycott of Jewish businesses and for Germans to defend themselves against the Jewish enemy. Two years later, in 1935, this girl's father was decorated for active service in the First World War and received a citation commending him for this service, signed by Berlin's chief of police.<sup>15</sup> In the first instance, members of her community were declared a threat to Germany and, in the second, her father was lauded for his defense of the nation. Jews viewed such contradictions with a mixture of fear and hope. The occasional lull in anti-Semitic actions or occasional friendly greeting or conversation with a non-Jewish German gave them hope that the situation was temporary and would improve. Thus, while many did think about and make preparations for emigration, they also hoped that they would not have to leave their homeland.<sup>16</sup>

Many *Kinder* shared the loyalty and patriotic sentiment their parents felt for Germany. Walter Hartmann, born October 17, 1922, in Chemnitz, Germany, explained that his father, Hans, had served in the German Army during the First World War and was wounded in battle. Because of his bravery, he was awarded the Iron Cross, Second Class. After the war, he completed law school and was a well-established lawyer when the Nazis came to power. Walter recalled that, as a result of his time in the military, his father was hesitant to leave Germany. At one point, Walter asked his father why he wanted to remain in Germany, in spite of the many restrictions against Jews. His father replied, "My position in life, and my attitudes toward [Germany] are not determined by some person like Adolf Hitler." Walter believed that his father

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

never gave up on the idea that the situation was temporary and that, as a loyal German soldier, he did not need to make preparations for emigration.<sup>17</sup>

Steven Mendelsson, born May 7, 1926, in Breslau, Germany, remembered his parents expressing similar nationalistic sentiments. Like many German Jews, they

considered themselves firstly Germans of Mosaic persuasion. They never denied the fact that they were Jewish, but their German nationality seemed to be predominant, as it were. Rather than saying we were Jews who happened to have German nationality, they were Germans who happened to be of Jewish religion.<sup>18</sup>

This notion of German identity taking precedence over Jewish identity was common among Jewish families during the 1920s and early 1930s. German Jews belonged overwhelmingly to the middle class. By the end of the nineteenth century, they had achieved legal equality and financial success, although they never really obtained full acceptance. Strict religious observances and practices declined, while marriages with non-Jews steadily increased in the 1920s. By 1927, 25 percent of Jewish men and 16 percent of Jewish women married non-Jews. Generally speaking, the children of these marriages were raised as Christians and were not aware of their own Jewish lineage until after 1933.<sup>19</sup>

Peter Prager, born on June 26, 1923, in Berlin, was unaware as a child of his Jewish origins. His parents had divorced when he was very young and his mother, a non-practicing Jew, had remarried a Catholic. Peter did not learn about his Jewish heritage until the age of seven, when he was playing with friends in the street. He recounted the experience in his memoir:

I was seven and was playing a game in the street. We had started a new hopscotch game when suddenly a girl said:  
 “Jews are not allowed to play this game: Are you Jewish?”  
 “What is a Jew?” I asked.

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<sup>17</sup>Walter Hartmann, Interview 24515, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>18</sup>Steven Mendelsson, Interview 27340, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>19</sup> Kaplan, 11.

“One who doesn’t believe in God.”

“Oh, I’m a Christian.”

“All right then, you can play with us.”

When I recounted this conversation to Mutti, she said nothing, but a few days later Vati explained:

“You are Jewish, and we also believe in God.” I was interested and relieved because it enabled me to join in all future games.<sup>20</sup>

Prager claimed that his lack of awareness of his Jewish heritage stemmed in part from his mother’s desire to be viewed as a German and her negative view of Judaism. His family celebrated Christmas each year and never celebrated any Jewish holidays. His mother frequently expressed contempt for Jews from Poland who insisted on living in the traditional manner, even going so far as to blame the rise of anti-Semitism on their refusal to assimilate.<sup>21</sup>

While Peter Prager’s mother’s hostility to Judaism was not the norm, it is true that many assimilated German Jews looked down on Eastern European Jews who had more recently immigrated to Germany. Bertha Leverton, who was born in Munich on January 23, 1923, grew up in an Orthodox Jewish family of Polish background. Her mother had been born in Warsaw, and her father was from Galicia. She recalled that at the Orthodox school she attended Polish Jews were neglected and treated poorly by teachers and students alike.<sup>22</sup>

In spite of the differences that existed between the assimilated German Jews and the more traditional Polish Jews, they were all subject to the same legal restrictions and harassment. German Jews were, of course, able to blend in more easily and many *Kinder* recounted incidents of when they were able to conceal their Jewish identity in public. While this ability to blend in did not protect them from the legal restrictions, it did occasionally enable them to avoid

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<sup>20</sup>Peter Prager, *From Berlin to England and Back: Experiences of a Jewish Berliner* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002), 5.

<sup>21</sup>Peter Prager, Interview 43997, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>22</sup>Bertha Leverton, Interview 12503, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

harassment in public. Additionally, some German Jews who had served in World War I were afforded special treatment at first, such as being able to keep their government jobs in spite of the Civil Service Law.

The children of World War I veterans also benefitted from their father's service. In April 1933, the Nazi government passed the Law against the Overcrowding of German Schools. Under this legislation, secondary schools and universities had to reduce the enrollment of Jewish students to no more than 1.5 percent. In regions where Jews made up more than 5 percent of the population, this enrollment could be increased to 5 percent. Exceptions were made for students whose fathers had served during World War I, for children of mixed marriages, and Jewish children who held foreign citizenship.<sup>23</sup> Margaret Lowe, born September 12, 1922, in Munich, had been allowed to attend high school longer than other Jewish students because her father had been on the front lines during the War. Margaret believed that, tragically, this school exception was one of the main reasons why her parents had not made preparations to emigrate and therefore perished in the Holocaust.<sup>24</sup>

Despite some exceptions, the increasingly hostile anti-Semitic climate and harsh legal restrictions on Jews put great stress on families who had lived in Germany for generations, as well as those who had only recently arrived from the East. Rather than driving Jewish families and the Jewish community apart, however, this pressure often led Jews to form closer ties with each other. For those who considered themselves to be patriotic Germans, this mistreatment by their country left them wondering whether they should stay and hope things would improve or make preparations to leave their homes.

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<sup>23</sup> Kaplan, 94-95.

<sup>24</sup> Margaret Lowe, Interview 22803, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

### *The Economic Impact on the Jewish Family in Germany*

Anne Fox, a *Kind* born in Berlin in 1926, detailed in her memoir, *My Heart in a Suitcase*, how her family life was affected after the Nazi seizure of power. Anne lived with her parents and her older brother, Günter, in an apartment in west Berlin. Her father, Eugen, had fought for Germany during the First World War and had lost his left arm on the battlefield in France. He earned the Iron Cross for his wartime service and proudly displayed it in the apartment's entryway. In the 1920s, Anne's father managed to secure a position working at an international bank in Berlin, thus assuring Anne and her family a comfortable life. They employed a full-time maid who lived in a small room in their apartment, and were able to afford family vacations to the seaside.<sup>25</sup>

In 1933, Anne's father lost his job at the bank. While Anne wrote in her memoir that his termination resulted from "Nazi decree," the more likely scenario is that it resulted from the creeping displacement Barkai described. In the early 1930s, Jewish-owned banks suffered from a decrease in deposits from "Aryan" customers, as well as from the dwindling assets of Jewish clientele. Many small banks were liquidated in the early years of the Nazi regime, and larger banks began to be liquidated toward the end of 1935.<sup>26</sup> It is possible that Anne's father lost his job either as a result of such liquidation or as a result of the attitude of his particular employer.

As with many other Jews who lost their livelihood during this time, Anne's father was able to find work in the expanding Jewish economic sector, in his case as a clerk in the offices of a Jewish organization. This was a far less prestigious position, and Anne recalled the effect that this change in employment had on her father. She wrote, "Vati was visibly crushed by the loss of his prestigious job. The wrinkles deepened on his face, and he wore a constant expression of

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<sup>25</sup>Anne L. Fox, *My Heart in a Suitcase* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1996), 2-3.

<sup>26</sup>Barkai, 76.

worry. Mutti guarded his privacy by keeping us children in the kitchen with her.”<sup>27</sup> Even though the family was able to maintain financial stability, Anne’s description of her father’s demeanor during this time demonstrates the emotional impact of their changing economic situation. He was often visibly upset by the difficulties in supporting his family and assisting his three unmarried sisters on his reduced clerk’s wages.<sup>28</sup>

As a result of her father’s declining income, Anne’s family found it necessary to take in boarders, renting a room to a non-Jewish man who lived with them until a few days before *Kristallnacht*, when the rising tides of anti-Jewish sentiment led him to move out of their home for fear for his safety. As Anne’s family’s finances declined further, they also rented out their sitting room to a young physical education teacher.<sup>29</sup> Thus, as a result of the creeping economic pressure against Jews, Anne saw her family’s financial stability decline. While these economic difficulties were not a major problem when compared to later persecution, they did take an emotional toll on Anne and her family.

In some instances, Jewish families were forced to give up their homes. Nora Danzig, born Nora Braunschweiger on April 3, 1930, spent the first seven years of her life living with her parents, Joseph and Cecilia, and her older sister Inge, in the town of Hösbach, Germany. She recalled her childhood in Hösbach as being particularly happy, although she admitted that she actually remembers very little about her life there. In 1937, when she was seven years old, she claimed that her family was “half-forced” to sell their home and relocate to Frankfurt am Main, where they lived in a small block of apartments with several members of her extended family.

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<sup>27</sup> Fox, 18.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

Each apartment in this building was very crowded.<sup>30</sup> Nora does not elaborate further on why her family moved. Since there was no national legislation regarding the seizure of Jewish property in 1937, it is likely that her family moved to escape the anti-Semitic pressure so often experienced in small towns at this time.

Fred Katz, born on November 10, 1927, in Oberlauringen, Germany, also recalled the impact of Nazi regulations on his family. His father, Max Katz, was a kosher butcher, and Fred described him as an emotionally distant man. On April 21, 1933, soon after the Nazis came to power, they prohibited kosher slaughter, and Fred's father lost his livelihood. Because of his relatively young age and a lack of understanding of the political climate in Germany at the time, Fred came to view his father as an ineffectual man who was unable to provide for his family. He frequently expressed anger over his father's inability to support the family. In one instance, he recalled growing angry with his father for spending money on pipe tobacco when they did not have money to buy food.<sup>31</sup> Fred also recalled how his father resorted to selling non-kosher meats to their Jewish friends and telling them it was kosher. This deception further lowered Fred's opinion of his father at the time. In hindsight, however, he realized that his father was simply trying to feed his own family.<sup>32</sup> At the time, though, the economic impact of this policy had a negative effect on his relationship with his father.

### ***The Social Impact on the Jewish Family in Germany***

Legal restrictions, as well as creeping social pressure, negatively affected Jewish social life under Nazi rule. Many *Kinder* recalled being forbidden to swim in certain pools or play in certain parks. They frequently discussed how many of their close friends suddenly refused to

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<sup>30</sup>Nora Danzig, Interview 18654, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>31</sup>Fred Katz, Interview 27748, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

play with them. More important, however, was their experience in school. While Jewish children were never forced out of elementary schools by legislation, many families opted to transfer their children to Jewish schools. Those who still attended public schools faced daily harassment from fellow students and from their teachers. Additionally, they often sat separately from their classmates, endured a pro-Nazi curriculum, and could not attend school events.<sup>33</sup>

For Jewish children daily attendance at school was a trying experience. Fred Katz started attending the public school in Oberlauringen in 1933, months after Hitler first came to power. He recalled his experiences at school as “a picture of pain and horror. Being beaten up going to school every day, dreading to go to school. And what pervades the atmosphere for me is one of fear.” Fred did not remember any cruel teachers, but he remembered “that the Christian children seemed to think they had a duty and a right to beat me up every day.”<sup>34</sup>

Peter Prager was able to continue attending secondary school as a result of his father’s military service during World War I. In April 1933, Peter enrolled in the Grünewald Gymnasium, a selective grammar school in Berlin. He recalled that over an extended Easter holiday, a party member replaced the headmaster of his school and dismissed all “unreliable teachers.” When Peter returned to school, he was envious of the children in the Hitler Youth, as they were able to attend weekend hikes and other extracurricular activities from which he was excluded.<sup>35</sup>

Prager remembered one incident in which he had to stand in front of his class during a science lesson so the teacher could measure his head. He described the incident in his memoir, as follows:

I still remember my feelings while I stood there as the teacher measured my head. At

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<sup>33</sup> Kaplan, 94-95.

<sup>34</sup> Katz, VHA Interview 27748.

<sup>35</sup> Prager, *From Berlin to England and Back*, 54.

first I was terribly frightened, but soon gathered courage when the teacher patted me on the back and said: 'There is no need to be afraid, I shall do you no harm. After all, it is not your fault that you are inferior.'... This kind of lesson not only gave the majority a sense of superiority but I no longer felt it strange when I was excluded from participating in playground games...<sup>36</sup>

He continued in public school until 1935 or 1936, when his parents decided to transfer him to a Jewish school after a teacher had told his class that Jewish people commit more crimes than non-Jews.<sup>37</sup>

When children had to endure such treatment at school, it had an impact on their family life at home, particularly for their mothers. Marion Kaplan argued that mothers more often dealt with their children's distress than did fathers. It was usually the mothers whom the teachers contacted to inform them that their child would not be allowed to participate in certain activities. Additionally, mothers frequently supervised their children's homework. As Kaplan wrote, "One can imagine the contradictory emotions of a mother who was reassured to learn that her son had sung patriotic songs, said 'Heil Hitler' to the teacher, and received praise for his laudatory essay about Hitler."<sup>38</sup> Incidents such as this must have been particularly distressing for parents of young children, who often shared their experiences openly with their parents, whereas older children tended to keep the pain of persecution to themselves.<sup>39</sup>

Students in Jewish schools had a somewhat easier time, as they were not subjected to daily harassment. However, they often faced open hostility as they traveled to and from school or engaged in activities outside of the home. Ellen Davis, born Ellen Wertheim on September 1, 1929, in Hoof, Germany, recalled that many of her close non-Jewish friends who had played with her before Hitler came to power began throwing stones at her and taunting her almost daily

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>38</sup> Kaplan, 100.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 101.

afterwards.<sup>40</sup> Egon Guttman, born January 27, 1927 in Neuruppin, Germany, and his family relocated to Berlin when he was three years old. He remembered being unable to evade persecution in public and recalled that non-Jewish children even taunted his sister, even though she was just an infant in a baby carriage. He described these experiences as follows:

When I took my sister to the park, some other kids would start picking on us, trying to do things to a baby in a baby carriage. Or when she was playing in the sandbox building whatever it was, destroying it, throwing things at us. And no one to go to to complain about it...the parents in that particular park were not prepared to take any disciplinary action against their children.

As a result, Egon got in several fights with children while protecting his sister, and his parents warned him that he should not attract too much attention to the family by fighting.<sup>41</sup>

As the economic and social stress of daily harassment affected children and their families, parents began to make preliminary preparations for emigration. While economic and social conditions made life in Germany increasingly intolerable, the process of leaving Germany was made even more problematic by immigration restrictions in other countries. Moreover, the German government made it difficult to leave by placing restrictions on the amount of capital that families could take with them. Thus, in the latter half of the 1930s, many families found themselves faced with a desire to leave, but without the means to do so.

### *Early Plans for Emigration*

Among the families of the children of the *Kindertransports*, efforts at emigration prior to *Kristallnacht* usually involved attempts to move the entire family. Many *Kinder* discussed their parents' efforts to obtain immigration visas for countries like the United States or Great Britain, and some described their family's preparations for possible immigration to Palestine. Kelly

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<sup>40</sup> Ellen Kerry Davis, Interview 14724, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>41</sup> Egon Guttman, Interview 35204, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

Bernard, born Siegwald Bernhard Keller on November 12, 1926, in Berlin, remembered a lengthy, heated conversation his parents had in 1935 regarding emigration. His father, Max Keller, realized that they would eventually have to leave Germany and advocated that they move to Palestine.<sup>42</sup> Kelly recalled that his family prepared for Palestine by taking Hebrew lessons. However, his mother, Käthe, did not want to go there because of the climate and because she felt that there would be too many Jews there. Kelly's mother preferred German culture, and he believed that she harbored a bias against Eastern European Jews. Instead, she hoped to immigrate to Italy, where Kelly's paternal aunt lived. His father decided that he did not want to split up the family, saying, "Wherever we go, we go together."<sup>43</sup>

Many families began preparations for emigration but were unable to follow through because of limited financial resources. Ellen Davis recalled that her family had begun to make arrangements to immigrate to South America, but were prevented from doing so because of their financial situation. However, her maternal grandparents and several other extended family members were able to make the journey. As she described it,

There was a lot of talk about South America, about horses, and a new life. And we were included in this. And unfortunately it turned out there just wasn't enough money to include us. My parents, and my siblings, and myself. So, my Oma and Opa and three uncles and an aunt and another uncle...they literally just vanished out of my life.<sup>44</sup>

Later in her testimony, Ellen explained that her paternal grandparents had managed to immigrate to New York and, when her father asked them for assistance, they refused to help. Her grandmother replied in a letter to Ellen's father, "I'm not saying I can't [help], I'm saying I won't." Ellen believed that because of her paternal grandparents' refusal to help, her mother and

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<sup>42</sup> Kelly Bernard, Interview 38097, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Davis, VHA Interview 14724

all her siblings perished in the Holocaust.<sup>45</sup>

For many Jewish families making plans for emigration, it was simply a matter of waiting for their number to come up under immigration quotas. Paul Kuttner, born September 20, 1922, in Berlin, described his family's efforts to emigrate. Paul's parents were divorced and he lived with his mother and older sister. Paul's mother took it upon herself to make the arrangements for departure, visiting both the United States and British embassies as early as 1936 or 1937. After waiting in line for several hours at each embassy, Paul and his family were given very high immigration numbers for both countries. The American consul informed Paul's mother that it would take approximately eight years before they were able to immigrate to the United States. Paul's mother made similar attempts to immigrate to the Netherlands and Belgium and faced similar issues there.<sup>46</sup>

The reasons that the families of the *Kinder* in Germany had not managed to emigrate vary greatly. Many attempted to leave but were prevented from doing so by strict immigration policies in other countries. Some families simply felt too much loyalty to Germany and believed that this period of persecution would pass. Others stayed because they were still able to earn a living, either legally or through clandestine means. Still others remained because they could not afford to leave. For Jews in Germany and Austria, the events of *Kristallnacht* highlighted the urgency of escape. Thus, when they learned that the Council for German Jewry had established a program to evacuate Jewish children from Nazi territory, some parents in Germany, Austria, and, later, Czechoslovakia, made the difficult decision to send their children away to safety.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Kuttner, Interview 20083, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

### *Kristallnacht and the Decision to Flee*

As Marion Kaplan observed, nobody expected that the widespread violence that occurred on *Kristallnacht* could happen in Germany. Not only were Jewish public institutions such as synagogues and businesses destroyed, but Nazis also ransacked private homes.<sup>47</sup> In addition to experiencing the violation of the sanctity of their homes, many Jewish families found themselves without fathers, husbands, and sons, as the Nazis arrested 30,000 Jewish men in the days and weeks following the Pogrom. 11,000 men went to Dachau, 9,845 went to Buchenwald, and 9,000 went to Sachsenhausen.<sup>48</sup> The Nazis released prisoners who were able to obtain visas for emigration.

Many *Kinder* described the evening of *Kristallnacht* and the days that followed as the moment when their lives changed forever. Walter Austerer, born on November 27, 1923, in Vienna, explained that he and his family knew the November Pogrom was the beginning of the end of their lives in Austria. He recalled his family's reaction after coming out of hiding the next day, saying "We were devastated- not just the physical devastation, there was also the psychological devastation, realizing what danger we were in...we knew this was it...and we were beginning to make plans about how to leave the country."<sup>49</sup>

Jack Hellman, born Hans Joachim Hellmann on December 9, 1925, in Tann, Germany, expressed similar feelings in the days following the pogrom. Jack had been attending boarding school in Frankfurt am Main at the time of *Kristallnacht*, and his parents had come from Tann to visit him that day. Jack's uncle telephoned him and told him to tell his parents not to return to Tann, but they decided to return anyway. Jack recalled, "As soon as my father got back to Tann,

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<sup>47</sup> Kaplan, 119.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>49</sup> Walter Austerer, Interview 21812, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

he was immediately arrested and sent to Buchenwald. It was a tremendously traumatic time...even as a twelve-year-old, I realized there was no future for Jews in Germany any more.”<sup>50</sup>

Parents who survived the war also recalled that *Kristallnacht* had a major impact on their decision to send their children abroad. Emigration plans prior to this time involved the entire family. There were, of course, some instances of children being sent abroad on their own before November 1938, but these numbers were small. Spurred on by the pogrom, British rescue groups comprised of Jewish community groups, as well as non-Jewish groups such as Quakers, arranged for the first *Kindertransports* in December 1938.<sup>51</sup> Parents who had not previously considered separating from their children began to clamor for a spot for their children on these transports.

Franzi Groszmann, the mother of Lore Segal, a *Kind* from Vienna, who left on a transport for England on December 10, 1938, recalled that her husband had made the decision to send their daughter to England, because she was unable to do so. She explained, “I saw in the end that he was right. But the hurt is unbelievable. That cannot be described. I don’t know how one does that. How does one send one’s child away, not knowing whether she will get across the border of Germany?”<sup>52</sup> In spite of her reluctance to send her daughter to England and separate the family, Franzi Groszmann understood that it was the best option, given the danger that was now apparent after *Kristallnacht*.

Helen Hilsenrad, from Vienna, was the mother of two *Kinder*, Ingrid and Gerda Hilsen.

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<sup>50</sup> Jack Hellman in *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport*, ed. Mark Jonathan Harris and Deborah Oppenheimer (New York: Bloomsbury, 2000), 63.

<sup>51</sup> Kaplan, 117.

<sup>52</sup> Franzi Groszmann in *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport*, ed. Mark Jonathan Harris and Deborah Oppenheimer (New York: Bloomsbury, 2000), 81.

Gerda left Vienna first on a *Kindertransport* in March 1939, and Ingrid followed later that year.<sup>53</sup>

Helen learned about the transports from a neighbor early in 1939 and described the moment when she and her husband decided to send their children to England.

I sat on the edge of the bed and surveyed my husband. Thoughts were jamming through my head incoherently, one fighting the other. This was the first time I had ever considered being separated from Ingrid and Gerda. I had found brave words to utter to my sisters when they relinquished their young in order to save them; now I suddenly discovered that the thought of letting my own go from me was all but unbearable. Still, here was [my husband] Jim, bedridden, locked in Vienna. Our visas to America were nearly two years away. How many of us Jews would be allowed to live for two more years?<sup>54</sup>

Like many other Jewish families, Hilsenrad and her husband had been attempting to immigrate to America with the entire family. However, the events of *Kristallnacht* convinced them to send their children away, in the hopes that they would be able to join them later. Unlike a majority of *Kindertransport* parents, they were able to do so.

Plans for emigration were complicated by the arrests of Jewish men following the Pogrom. These arrests changed the dynamics of family life throughout Germany and Austria and helped further influence the decision to send children abroad on the *Kindertransports*. Prior to their arrests, men had traditionally guarded the safety and honor of the Jewish community and family. Afterwards, women found themselves as the defenders of Jewish community and family life.<sup>55</sup>

With many fathers now absent from the home, several *Kinder* recalled that their mothers took on the burdens of making arrangements for emigration, while simultaneously seeking to procure the release of their husbands and sons. Often, the only way to gain the release of prisoners from concentration camps was to provide the Nazis with proof that the prisoner was

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<sup>53</sup> Helen Hilsenrad, *Brown Was the Danube* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1966), 338-348.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

<sup>55</sup> Kaplan, 128.

ready to emigrate. This process was made more difficult by immigration restrictions in foreign countries, as well as by the bureaucratic and financial roadblocks established by the German government.<sup>56</sup> Faced with these obstacles, the parents of the *Kinder* decided to take advantage of the opportunity to evacuate their children, while continuing to search for a means to escape themselves.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 129.

## Chapter 2- The *Kindertransports* and Surrogate Family Lives in England

### *Preparations for the Kindertransports*

In the weeks following *Kristallnacht*, the personal columns of the Jewish newspapers in London were flooded with requests from parents seeking a sponsor for their children in England. An ad from the December 16, 1938, edition of the *Jewish Chronicle* reads, “A mother begs good-hearted people to get a permit for two charming girls, 11 and 12 years of age. Father in Dachau.”<sup>1</sup> This short ad and others like it show the desperation felt by many Jewish families. The usage of the word ‘beg,’ as well as the statement that the father was imprisoned in Dachau, conveyed the urgency of the situation. The appeal to the good nature of potential sponsors, as well as the description of the girls as charming conveys that they would make a fine addition to any family.

News of the *Kindertransports* spread through Europe in various ways. Word of mouth was one method, and many *Kinder* recalled that their mothers had heard about the program through friends, acquaintances, doctors, rabbis, and so on. In some instances, Jewish communities recruited boys from local youth groups to go visit the homes of families with children and inform them of the program, while groups of Quakers from England also helped to spread the word.<sup>2</sup> In order to expedite the immigration process, the British Home Office simplified the issuance of visas for unaccompanied children by allowing the Inter-Aid Committee to issue two-part identity cards that would serve as both a travel document and a record for the Home Office.<sup>3</sup>

The children selected for the *Kindertransports* consisted of those with sponsors, as well as those without. Guaranteed children were often sent directly to the homes of their sponsors,

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<sup>1</sup> Vera K. Fast, *Children's Exodus: A History of the Kindertransport* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

while unguaranteed children were often sent to a temporary camp until a sponsor could be found. The guarantors were frequently family or friends, though some were found through the placement of classified ads.<sup>4</sup> The procedure for obtaining a spot in the *Kindertransports* involved sending an application and photograph to the local representative of the Refugee Children's Movement in Germany, or Austria, who then forwarded the application to representatives in Berlin. In Czechoslovakia, Nicholas Winton and the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia made the arrangements instead of the Refugee Children's Movement. The application required the parents to agree to entrust the child to the care of the Committee, and to allow their children to be placed in any available home, even non-Jewish families if no Jewish families were available. Orphans or children whose parents were incarcerated were given priority.<sup>5</sup>

Helen Hilsenrad detailed her family's navigation of this selection process. She learned of the *Kindertransports* in early 1939 from a family who was renting a room in her house. After discussing the matter with her husband, she went to the local Jewish Community to put her daughters' names on the list. However, she was told at that time that additional applicants were not being accepted. Hilsenrad was disappointed with the initial outcome, but also relieved that she would get to keep them at home for a bit longer.<sup>6</sup> The conflicting feelings Hilsenrad described serve as an example of the internal struggle that many Jewish parents likely faced while making preparations to send their children to England.

Hilsenrad's feelings changed as the situation in Vienna grew worse for Jews. She wrote:

The girls really were not happy any more. They had never adjusted to the inferior food we had to eat every day. Their home was troubled and overcrowded. The friends who came there were full of anguish and fear. And as the days progressed, I wished only to

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>6</sup> Helen Hilsenrad, *Brown Was the Danube* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1966), 330-331.

register them as soon as possible.<sup>7</sup>

Eventually, her sister Olga discovered that the Director of the Children's Committee in Vienna was an old friend, and implored her to include Ingrid and Gerda on the first available transport. The director agreed but, due to a clerical mix-up, two other children with the same last name were sent in their place.<sup>8</sup>

Hilsenrad described becoming increasingly desperate, particularly as more and more of their extended family members managed to find a way out of Austria. Eventually, after repeated visits to the Children's Committee in Vienna proved fruitless, she wrote a letter to the Jewish Committee in Birmingham, England, asking for two families willing to take in her daughters. The Committee in Birmingham soon replied that they had found two families. Hilsenrad recalled her feelings upon receiving this news: "Our relief could not be measured then. The children would be going to good people; they would be well cared for and at least relatively happy."<sup>9</sup> Although Hilsenrad's situation is but one example of the difficult decision many parents faced, her memoir details the range of emotions likely felt by most parents who decided to send their children to England, as well as the difficulties of navigating the bureaucracy involved in the process. As Hilsenrad described it, this bureaucracy helped compound the turmoil, as she wanted to get her children to safety in England but was also glad to have them with her for a bit longer.

For children, reactions to the idea of leaving their parents and their homes were mixed. Most children recalled being aware of the preparations, while others had no idea that they would be going to England until a day or so before their departure. Older children tended to have a better sense of what their departure meant than did younger children. Walter Austerer, who was

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 331.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 337.

fifteen years old at the time of his departure, recalled his parents' efforts to get the family out of Austria in 1938 and early 1939. They had begun to explore options for leaving Europe as early as 1935, but increased their efforts in the months following the German annexation of Austria in 1938. His mother first contacted her brothers-in-law who lived in the United States, who provided an affidavit for their family. Walter and his mother could get American visas under the German quota but because his father had been born in Romania, he would have to wait to emigrate.<sup>10</sup>

After exhausting efforts, including attempts to emigrate to China and Cuba, Walter's parents decided that they wanted to make sure that they could at least get him to safety. Walter's mother found an English phone book and looked up ten phone numbers for garment manufacturers, under the assumption that they would be Jewish and therefore willing to help. She found a businessman named George Herst, from Bradford, England, who agreed to serve as Walter's sponsor, and Walter left Austria on July 4, 1939.<sup>11</sup>

Olga Drucker, born in Stuttgart on December 28, 1927, left Germany in March 1939. While her father was still in Dachau, her mother decided that it would be best for twelve-year-old Olga to go to England. She submitted Olga's name, and then, as Olga described it, they simply waited for her turn to come up. Olga was aware of the planning and preparation process and recalled that "trains filled with children were leaving every day."<sup>12</sup> As part of her preparation for the *Kindertransport*, Olga began English lessons. She knew that she was being sent to England, but did not want to leave her parents and was worried that she might never

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Austerer, Interview 21812, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Olga Levy Drucker, *Kindertransport* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1992), 31.

return home to Germany again.<sup>13</sup>

Paul Hart left Vienna on a *Kindertransport* on January 9, 1939. He was thirteen years old at the time and learned nothing of his parents' decision until the day before his departure. He described the moment when he found out, saying, "It was just a question of grandmother and mother packing this cardboard box, tying it up with a bit of string, and saying you're going to the *Westbahnhof* and you're leaving at 11:00 tomorrow." Paul further recalled that his parents gave him very little information about where he was going or why it was that he had to leave his family. They told him he was going to England, but he had no idea where specifically.<sup>14</sup>

Ellen Davis also did not find out that she was leaving for England until just before she left. Ellen and four of her younger siblings were all placed in an orphanage in Kassel, Germany, while her father was interned in Dachau and her mother and youngest sibling were interned in a "camp for destitutes." A photographer came to the orphanage and photographed all of the children individually. At the time, Ellen had no idea why she was being photographed. However, she was later called to the school superintendent's office, where she found her father, who had been temporarily released from Dachau so that he could make the arrangements for her departure. Ellen recalled that her father took her from the orphanage to several different locations to pick up papers and then, without telling her where she was going, took her to the train station, where she was able to bid farewell to her mother and youngest brother.<sup>15</sup>

Children who were told of their parents' decision beforehand certainly had more time to prepare themselves mentally for their departure and the opportunity to bid farewell to extended family members. Those *Kinder* who were not informed ahead of time recalled their departure as

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Hart, Interview 33039, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>15</sup> Ellen Kerry Davis, Interview 14724, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

more harried and frightening. There was, of course, uncertainty, confusion, and fear among those children as well, but their awareness of the preparations seemed to have made it more bearable.

### *Moments of Departure*

For the majority of the *Kinder*, the moment before they boarded the train was the last time they ever saw their families. This departure represented the end of their childhood family lives and the beginning of a period of uncertainty. Recollections of this departure vary from feelings of excitement and a sense of adventure to feelings of sadness and fear. At the time, most parents told their children that this separation was only temporary and that they would be reunited soon. In many cases, this served to calm the fears of the children, particularly the younger ones. Vera Gissing, a child from Czechoslovakia born in Prague on July 4, 1928, stated that she probably would not have been willing to leave Prague if her mother had not told her they would see each other again in a year.<sup>16</sup>

Kelly Bernard left his home in Leipzig, along with his brother and sister, in early 1939. He described his feelings at the time by saying, “Well, it was exciting. I was going on a trip to England. I was a very young twelve-year-old. I guess naïve would be a good description...It was an exciting trip for me.”<sup>17</sup> He described his siblings as feeling the same way. Many other *Kinder* recalled feeling a similar sense of adventure and excitement at the time of their departure. In contrast to their excitement, Kelly remembered his parents expressing great sorrow as he and his siblings boarded the train. “We got on the train and my parents stayed on the platform, and my mother was crying and she was bawling her eyes out. I don’t know if I tried to understand

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<sup>16</sup> Vera Gissing, Interview 21626, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>17</sup> Kelly Bernard, Interview 38097, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

why, but to me it was an exciting trip.” In hindsight, Kelly acknowledged, “My mother showed her emotions...she must have realized that she might never see her children again.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Kelly and his parents were never reunited.

By contrast, Nora Danzig recalled feeling great sorrow at the time of her departure. Originally, the plan had been for only her older sister Inge to go to England, but her sponsors agreed to take Nora as well. When her parents first informed her, Nora was reluctant to go. However, they managed to convince her by telling her that the separation would only last a few months and then they would all travel to South America together. While this promise convinced her to go, it did not make the parting easier for her, and she recalled crying bitterly while saying goodbye to her parents at the train station.<sup>19</sup> Nora’s parents did not survive the war.

Martha Blend, born Martha Immerdauer on July 2, 1930, described her departure from Vienna in June 1939. She had been told of her parents’ plans to send her to England months before her departure and was upset when she first heard the news. She wrote, “When my parents broke this news to me, I was devastated and burst into hysterical sobs at the mere thought. After all, I was an only child- the apple of their eye- and had never been parted from them before. How could I leave them now?”<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, her parents managed to persuade her that their separation should be viewed as a holiday, and that they would be reunited in Palestine in a year’s time.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, Martha never saw her parents again.

At the time Martha and her family received a letter informing them of her June 20 departure date her father was still in jail in Vienna. The letter instructed her to go to a Viennese railway station on the night of June 20, with one small suitcase and cautioned that there were to

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Nora Danzig, Interview 18654, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>20</sup> Martha Blend, *A Child Alone* (London: Vallentine Mitchell & Company, 1995), 32.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

be no emotional farewells at the train station. As Martha reflected, “Jews, it seemed, were not even to be allowed the luxury of expressing their grief at parting from their loved ones.”<sup>22</sup> After receiving this letter, Martha and her mother began to make preparations for her departure.

Martha’s recollections of her departure do not reflect the same sense of excitement and adventure described by Kelly Bernard. Instead, she was filled with a sense of sorrow and resignation about her journey. Perhaps this was a result of her age, as younger children tended to react more strongly to being sent away from their parents. She wrote that “each stage of these preparations seemed like another little death, but by then I was too numb and shocked to put up any serious resistance.”<sup>23</sup>

Martha remembered the days leading up to her departure as if she were living in a trance. On the evening that she went to the train station, she and her mother made certain to obey the rule against emotional displays, and she was surprised to see a mother and daughter with their arms around each other, crying bitterly, despite orders against emotional farewells. Describing her final moments with her mother, Martha wrote

Suddenly, before the expected time, the great doors at the end of the waiting-room were swung back to reveal a platform with a train ready to be boarded. I embraced my mother for the last time. Then with a light suitcase, a heavy heart and a silly red hat that kept flopping into my face, I climbed into a compartment... Suddenly there was an outcry and a rush to the windows. Parents had been told that they must on no account follow their children on to the platform, but some, disobeying orders, had surged out of the waiting-room and on to the platform. Their children, spotting them joyfully, were able to wave a last goodbye. I scanned the sea of faces anxiously, hoping to have a last glimpse of my mother, but she wasn’t there.<sup>24</sup>

Many *Kinder* described similar scenes at the time of their departure, often providing vivid descriptions of the last time they saw their parents. Frequently, they recounted memories of their final conversation with one or both parents.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 44.

Walter Hartmann, who was sixteen years old at the time of his departure, recalled that his father took him aside at the train station in Leipzig to make sure that Walter was aware of “matters sexual.” He also urged Walter to always be circumspect and to never forget his background.<sup>25</sup> Henry Laurant spoke regretfully of his final moments with his father at the station in Berlin. Because both his mother and sister had been ill, Henry’s father was the only one from his family who accompanied him to the station. His goodbyes with his mother and sister were emotional, but he described his farewell with his father by saying, “Unfortunately, in light of what happened, it was a very ‘We’re both men, aren’t we?’ type of farewell. While it was maybe satisfying at that time, in the light of what happened, in retrospect, I would rather it had been a more emotional scene...”<sup>26</sup>

Parents often viewed the moment of departure with a mixture of sorrow and relief. Helen Hilsenrad wrote of her feelings after placing her second child, Ingrid, on the train and watching her leave.

The day came swiftly. Jim and I stood on the platform and looked unceasingly at the window of the compartment where Ingrid was standing now. She nodded to us, her radiant face assuring us that she was happy. And, as with Gerda, we ran doggedly behind the moving train until it disappeared. Slowly, we made our way home. Within it, everything seemed empty and desolate... Jim and I felt strange in this new silence. Already, we ached to hear the voices of the children. But we felt reassured even in our loss, because they were safe. Let anything happen to us now! They were entrusted to good and noble people, with whom they would be happy.<sup>27</sup>

Franzi Groszmann expressed similar feelings of sorrow and emptiness regarding the day she put her daughter, Lore, on a *Kindertransport* from Vienna in December 1938. She wrote

In no time, the suitcase was gone, the child was gone, the other children were gone- just emptiness. Then we turned around and went home. I did not talk. It was awful. People

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<sup>25</sup> Walter Hartmann, Interview 24515, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>26</sup> Henry Laurant, Interview 26111, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>27</sup> Hilsenrad, 349.

have asked me, ‘What did you feel?’ Nothing. This was such a shock. When we came home, we didn’t talk to each other. My parents, my husband and I we did not talk, we didn’t look at each other.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, like Hilsenrad, Groszmann believed that sending her daughter on the *Kindertransport* was the best course of action to save her life.

Parents and children viewed the moment of separation differently. Parents, who possessed a better understanding of the political climate and danger in their home country, believed that getting their children to safety was the best course of action, regardless of what their own fate might be. In many of these cases, parents tried to make the separation easier for their children by telling them that this was only a temporary solution. Among the *Kinder* themselves, age seemed to be one of the primary factors in determining how they understood this separation.

Walter Austerer, who was fifteen years old at the time of his departure, recalled that while he was glad to be getting out of Austria, he understood the pain that his parents must have been experiencing and why they had decided to send him to England.<sup>29</sup> Conversely, Nora Danzig, who was eight years old, remembered crying bitterly and was only willing to get on the train when her parents promised that they would see her again soon.<sup>30</sup> Paul Hart, who was thirteen, remembered feeling as if his parents no longer wanted him and were trying to get rid of him.<sup>31</sup> Older children seemed to be more aware of the reasons behind their departure and of the dangers their parents faced, whereas younger children did not fully comprehend these issues.

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<sup>28</sup> Franzi Groszmann in *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport*, ed. Mark Jonathan Harris and Deborah Oppenheimer (New York: Bloomsbury, 2000), 102.

<sup>29</sup> Austerer, VHA Interview, 21812.

<sup>30</sup> Danzig, VHA Interview, 18654.

<sup>31</sup> Hart, VHA Interview, 33039.

### *The Journey and Arrival in England*

Many *Kinder* were unable to recall specific details of their journey to England. Given the trauma of their recent separation from their parents, as well as the fact that most of the journey took place overnight, this is not surprising. Stories of the journey consist more of impressions than concrete memories, and focus on the routes and methods of transportation involved. However, one common recollection among many of the evacuees concerned the moment that their train crossed the border from Germany into the Netherlands. Often, the *Kinder* recalled harassment by Nazi soldiers during the border crossing. Descriptions of this experience are immediately followed by feelings of relief and jubilation, as well as descriptions of the kindness that was paid to them by the Dutch once they had crossed into Holland.

One anonymous evacuee described how Nazi soldiers had boarded their train when they arrived at the German border, made the children stand in a line in the gangway, searched their luggage, and stole money and small sentimental items from them. The evacuee continued, “Fear was in all of us, until the moment the whistle blew, the Nazis left and the train passed over the frontier. At this moment, we opened the windows, shouting abuse and spitting at [the Nazis]...”<sup>32</sup> Like many others, this evacuee also remembered the kindness and generosity of the people as the train was “met by some wonderfully kind ladies who stood waiting for us on the platform with big trolleys filled with hot drinks, chocolate, sandwiches, etc.”<sup>33</sup>

Martha Blend, who left Germany a few days before her ninth birthday, recalled very little of her journey from Vienna to England, including the border crossing from Germany to Holland. She had heard about celebrations among the children when leaving Germany, but wrote that she

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<sup>32</sup> Karen Gershon, ed., *We Came As Children: A Collective Autobiography* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1966), 27.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

“was either too young or too sick to appreciate it.”<sup>34</sup> Martha’s recollections of the journey consisted of indistinct memories of a boat, a cabin with bunks and portholes, breakfast after a rough night at sea, a train, and the vague realization that she was now in England. At the time, she was entirely unaware of the route that she had traveled, and only figured this out later.<sup>35</sup>

Upon arrival in England, medical officers examined the children, and customs officials validated their documents. Those children with arranged guarantors traveled by train from their port of arrival to London. When they arrived at the railway station in London, they waited to meet their sponsors and fill out paperwork. For the children, reactions to their arrival and processing varied. Once again, older children tended to have a better understanding of the situation than did the younger evacuees, and therefore reacted in a calmer fashion.

Marianna Elsley, born Maria Josephy on June 29, 1923, in Rostock, Germany, left on a *Kindertransport* from Berlin in January 1939, at the age of fifteen. In her memoir, she described the scene upon her arrival at Waterloo Station, recalling that children gathered together on one side of a table, while adults gathered on the other. One by one, the British officials would call out the names of children and their foster parents or sponsors. When Marianna’s name was called, she was introduced to her benefactor, Mrs. Carter, and they shook hands, as Marianna curtsied and smiled. Marianna noted, however, that not all of the meetings were as amiable as hers, particularly for the younger children. “Some of the little children were suddenly overcome with terror, at the sight of all these strangers who could not speak their language, and screamed and clung to us older ones.”<sup>36</sup> Additionally, there were sometimes children whose sponsors had not come to the train station. These children temporarily stayed in the Refugee Children’s

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<sup>34</sup> Blend, 45.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>36</sup> Marianna Elsley, “Without Bitterness” (unpublished manuscript, date unknown), Leo Baeck Institute Memoir Collection, 40-41, accessed March 13, 2013, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results/?qtype=pid&term=554287>.

Movement hostels or other temporary housing until their sponsors arrived to take them to their new homes.<sup>37</sup>

Children without sponsors frequently remained in holiday camps until alternative housing arrangements could be made. The largest holiday camps used for this purpose were located at Dovercourt and Lowestoft. Anna Essinger, a German Jewish educator who had fled Germany in 1933 with a group of mostly Jewish children and established a private boarding school in Kent, administered the Dovercourt camp. With the assistance of some of her teachers and students, Essinger sought to create a stable environment for the children who were temporarily housed there. Local residents also provided the children with gifts of clothing and toys, and some doctors and dentists offered their services to the evacuees free of charge.<sup>38</sup>

Because Dovercourt and Lowestoft had been built as summer holiday camps, the accommodations were uncomfortable during winter months. Moreover, the children in these holiday camps were now suddenly without the guidance of their parents, although there were adults to supervise. They were also surrounded by other children with whom they could communicate and perhaps help make the experience a little less traumatic.<sup>39</sup> The Refugee Children's Movement worked continuously to find more permanent living arrangements for the *Kinder* living in these camps. Some children were placed with foster families after a few days, while others remained for several months.

Before being entrusted with one of the evacuees, foster families had to be vetted and investigated by local committee representatives in order to ensure that they could provide a

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<sup>37</sup> Fast, 35-36.

<sup>38</sup> Amy Zahl Gottlieb, *Men of Vision: Anglo-Jewry's Aid to Victims of the Nazi Regime, 1933-1945* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), 117.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-118

suitable living environment and were financially stable.<sup>40</sup> In his examination of the Central British Fund's archives, Barry Turner drew a contrast between the ideal foster family and the actual types of foster families with whom children lived. Turner argued that the ideal foster family would have been upper middle class, had children of their own, and lived in the countryside. Additionally, the ideal family would be Jewish and speak and understand some German.

In reality, however, the typical foster families were lower middle or working class. They lived in an urban environment, had no children or children who were grown, spoke no German and, in many cases, were not Jewish.<sup>41</sup> The Refugee Children's Movement suffered much criticism because many of the foster families were not Jewish. While their original intention had been to place children with families of the same religion, there were not enough Jewish families who were willing to take in all of the children arriving on the *Kindertransports*.<sup>42</sup> The lack of available Jewish foster homes was not a question of numbers, as there were approximately 300,000 Jews living in England at the time. The Jewish community in England was willing to provide financial assistance to the rescue mission, but reluctant to provide housing to the refugees.<sup>43</sup> In a May 12, 1939, letter to the Jewish Chronicle, leaders of the Refugee Children's Movement expressed concern that there were few offers of hospitality from the Orthodox community.<sup>44</sup> In a letter to Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz, one rabbi lamented the difficult task of finding Jewish families willing and able to take in foster children, and defended the placement of evacuees in non-Jewish homes because "the Jewish public did not come forward with offers of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>41</sup> Barry Turner, *...And the Policeman Smiled* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1990), 107.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>43</sup> Gottlieb, 118.

<sup>44</sup> Fast, 44.

vacancies when the children first came to this country.”<sup>45</sup>

It was much easier for the Refugee Children’s Movement to find a foster family for younger children than for older ones. As Amy Gottlieb wrote, there was no shortage of foster parents ready to care for younger children. “Nearly everybody wanted a small child- a blue-eyed, fair-headed boy or girl, a child under ten years of age.”<sup>46</sup> Families were not as eager to take in older children. A few teenagers ended up living together in groups in the homes of wealthy Christian and Jewish families, but many older evacuees without a foster family went to live in boarding schools or hostels.<sup>47</sup>

In the early days of the *Kindertransport* program, the method of matching children with foster parents took the form of what has often been described as a “cattle market.” One evacuee at Dovercourt recalled that “prospective foster parents were usually shown round at mealtimes, when we sat, boys and girls separately, according to age. The people walked down the rows of children, picking out this one or that, rather like a cattle market.”<sup>48</sup> In these cattle market situations, foster parents gravitated toward the younger children.

Paul Hart described his feelings about the foster family selection process at Dovercourt.

He recalled:

Occasionally, people would come, and you’d see somebody disappearing. They’d be chosen to go with an English family to their home. And you’d wonder why you weren’t chosen. What have you done wrong? Were you ugly, or whatever? You used to sit there and they used to go down the rows and look at the children. Suddenly a child would be plucked out and off they went.

*Interviewer: Was that disturbing?*

It was, yes. As I said, you wondered, ‘Well, why wasn’t I picked? Why didn’t I go? Why am I still here? What have I done wrong not to be picked?’ You know all sorts of

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<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Fast, 44.

<sup>46</sup> Gottlieb, 118.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Gershon, 39-40.

what now seem perhaps silly things go through your mind, but as a child in a strange country you wondered, ‘What happens if they don’t like me if they do take me? What will happen to me then? All sorts of things go through your mind.’<sup>49</sup>

For children without sponsors, this sense of uncertainty was commonplace. One fifteen-year-old girl recalled that, while she was unhappy at Dovercourt, she was also terrified to leave it. She had heard rumors that older girls such as her were only wanted by English families to serve as household help. She explained, “What frightened me was the thought that I would be giving strangers absolute power over me. I didn’t know if the Committee would still care what became of me once I had left the camp.”<sup>50</sup>

The accommodations at Dovercourt and Lowestoft were only meant to be temporary. Whether they were selected by a foster family, or sent to live in a hostel or boarding school, children had to be moved in order to make room for more evacuees. Yet, for many of those children without pre-arranged foster families, these camps provided some measure of stability. Having endured social, economic, and physical attacks back home, as well as sudden separation from parents and loved ones, the *Kinder* were at least able to live in safety in the holiday camps. Leaving meant moving into uncertainty and giving up control of their lives once more.

### ***Life with Foster Families***

The experience of children with foster families varied greatly. A select few were fortunate enough to spend most of the war living with a stable family that treated them as one of their own. Other children remained with the same family throughout the war but were treated as servants or household help. Still others were moved around from house to house, and never really put down roots. Some of these moves were a result of wartime evacuations, while others were because of conflicts or problems with the host family.

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<sup>49</sup> Hart, VHA Interview 33039.

<sup>50</sup> Gershon, 39.

Kurt Landskroner, born December 18, 1927, in Graz, Austria, traveled with his younger sister to England as part of a *Kindertransport* that left Vienna in January 1939. They arrived at Victoria Station, where their sponsors met them. Kurt went to live with the Pinkerton family in West Kirby, while his sister was placed with another foster family nearby. While the Pinkertons were professed atheists, they did take Kurt to the local synagogue on a few occasions, until he told them that he no longer wanted to attend. Like most *Kinder*, Kurt initially had difficulty communicating with his foster family, as he spoke no English and they spoke no German. He did, however, manage to learn English quickly, because his foster family made arrangements to enroll him in a local grammar school with a teacher who spoke fluent German. Interestingly, Kurt recalled that his sister had much greater difficulty learning English because her host family spoke German.<sup>51</sup>

Unlike many *Kinder*, Kurt had the benefit of maintaining close relations with members of his own family during this time. He saw his sister frequently and, in August 1939, Kurt's mother was able to immigrate to England. She also settled in West Kirby, where she found work as a domestic servant with the help of the Pinkerton family. In spite of the fact that his mother now lived nearby, Kurt continued to reside with the Pinkerton family, especially after his mother was classified as an enemy alien and required to relocate to Birmingham at the start of the war. He forged strong relationships with his foster family. At several points in his testimony, Kurt repeatedly referred to the Pinkerton house as his new home and to the Pinkertons as his new family. Kurt noted: "I can't describe how kind and friendly and good this family were to me. So once again, I grew up in a happy childhood, with that brief interruption."<sup>52</sup> Kurt viewed his life with the Pinkertons as comparable to his prewar life with his own family and continued to

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<sup>51</sup> Kurt Landskroner, Interview 48062, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

maintain close ties with them after the war, referring to Mr. and Mrs. Pinkerton as his aunt and uncle, and to his foster sisters as part of his own family. After the war, he continued to live with them in England, rather than going back to Austria with his mother and sister, who made the unusual decision to resettle there.

Vera Gissing developed a similarly close relationship with her foster family that continued even after the war. Vera and her older sister Eva left their home in Czechoslovakia in the early summer of 1939. Upon arrival in London, her sister Eva went to live in a boarding school in Bournemouth, while Vera lived with the Rainford family in Liverpool. Vera's foster family was not immediately available to greet her at the train station, so she was among those children given temporary accommodations. After spending two days staying with another family, she was taken to meet her foster mother. Vera recalled:

Two days after my arrival, I was taken to a house in Bloomsbury. I was left in an empty room, where there was no furniture, just a chair. I stood by the chair, shaking at the knees, wondering who it would be that would open that door and come to claim me. It was an incredible feeling of curiosity and dread at the same time.

Then, the door opened, and there stood this little lady, barely taller than myself. Her hat sat all askew on her head, and her mackintosh was buttoned up all wrong. She peered at me from behind a big pair of glasses. Suddenly, her face broke into the most wonderful smile, and she ran to me and hugged me, and spoke to me words I did not understand then, but they were, "You shall be loved." And those were the most important words any child in a foreign land, away from her family could hear. And loved I was.<sup>53</sup>

Almost immediately, Vera developed a close relationship with her foster family, which consisted of her foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Rainford, and her foster sister, Dorothy. She also forged a relationship with her foster grandparents, and recalled the time that she lived with them as a happy one.

In contrast to Kurt Landskroner, Vera was unable to spend the entire war living with the

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<sup>53</sup> Vera Gissing in *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport*, ed. Mark Jonathan Harris and Deborah Oppenheimer (New York: Bloomsbury, 2000), 130.

same family. Because Liverpool's industry made it a prime target for German bombings, Vera and her foster sister were evacuated to Southport two months after her arrival. There they stayed with friends of the Rainford family. In her memoir, Vera described her feelings at the time, writing, "To begin with, I found the change confusing. After all, I was just getting used to the Rainfords and their way of life, and was now faced with another strange family with a very different lifestyle."<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, Vera's feelings regarding this second evacuation were not uncommon. Many *Kinder* were evacuated from their initial placements as the result of war or the impending threat of war. Some of those evacuated, like Vera, were able to find long-term housing with additional foster families. Others, however, were relocated to boarding houses, hostels, schools, or moved around among several different families. Thus, many of the children who had suffered the traumatic separation from their families and homelands were faced with further instability in England. As one child recalled, "he felt as though 'Czechoslovakia was happening all over again...just as I was getting used to my new home, I was shipped off again.'"<sup>55</sup>

While some evacuees such as Kurt Landskroner and Vera Gissing were fortunate enough to be placed with stable foster families who treated them as their own children, many others were placed in foster homes that were not prepared for youngsters. Nora Danzig and her older sister Inge left their home in Hösbach, Germany, in January 1939 and, upon arrival in London, went to live in a home with three elderly sisters. She recalled that her foster mother Anne Morris, whom she called Auntie Anne, suffered from mental problems and gave her sister and her a "hard time." She described Anne and her sisters as spinsters and recalled that they treated them as well as they could, but they had no idea how to care for foreign children. Nora and Inge were not

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<sup>54</sup> Vera Gissing, *Pearls of Childhood*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 53.

<sup>55</sup> Fast, 62.

permitted to speak any German in the home, even with each other, and were never shown affection by their caretakers. They were punished frequently, although Nora stressed that none of the sisters ever harmed them physically.<sup>56</sup>

Nora and Inge lived in this home until late 1940, when the Blitz began. Soon after the start of the Blitz, they were evacuated to the town of Ely, in Cambridgeshire. Here, they were placed into different homes and only saw each other at school. Nora lived in Ely for a year and a half and recalls that she was severely neglected by her foster family there, to the point that she became ill from a burst appendix, pneumonia, and problems with her kidneys. In her interview with the Shoah Foundation, Nora described the neglect: “The elderly couple that I lived with, they weren’t interested in me as a human being...I think they were paid to take evacuees, but that’s how far it went...” Eventually, a teacher at her school noticed that she was sick and took her to the hospital in Cambridge, where she underwent surgery immediately. When she was released from the hospital, the Jewish Refugee Committee made arrangements for her to move to a Jewish children’s home in Cornwall.<sup>57</sup>

Bertha Leverton and her siblings also found themselves living in an undesirable foster family situation. On January 4, 1939, Bertha and her brother Theodor left their home in Munich. Upon arrival in England, they were temporarily housed in a holiday camp in Dovercourt, until a more permanent placement could be found. Bertha’s brother left the camp first, and went to live with a family in Coventry. The Refugee Committee gave Bertha the option of going to live with another foster family in Coventry as well. Later, Bertha was able to convince her foster family to sponsor her sister, Inge, and also take in her brother, who had had a falling out with his

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<sup>56</sup> Danzig, VHA Interview 18654

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

family.<sup>58</sup>

Speaking of their lives with their new foster family in Coventry, Bertha stated, “Now I can appreciate that you don’t become a slave overnight...it’s a gradual process...I didn’t realize that they had wanted a maid. We weren’t supposed to come as a labor force; we were supposed to be children, to have an education.”<sup>59</sup> Bertha’s foster mother was only six years older than she. Her foster father, on the other hand, was significantly older and, on several occasions, Bertha intimated, he made sexual advances toward her. Bertha expressed a reluctance to discuss this matter in more detail, only noting that he was never successful.<sup>60</sup>

While she was reluctant to describe in detail some of the mistreatment they endured, Bertha noted in her written memoirs:

The memory of five years I spent with my foster family can never be erased...the treatment of me by ‘Aunty’ Vera I can now put down to her resentment of my good health, she being a semi-invalid. But her torment of us and me in particular was nothing compared to ‘Uncle’ Billy’s ‘friendliness’ which I successfully managed to avoid for five years.<sup>61</sup>

Bertha also described an incident in which her brother broke his ankle and their foster parents initially refused to take him to the doctor. Her sister’s arms frequently were covered with bruises from being pinched. Bertha had to work in a cotton mill in addition to doing her household chores, and had to give all of her earnings to her foster parents. Twice a year, a young rabbi came to visit them to make sure they were being treated well. Bertha recalled that they never told him of their mistreatment because “there was no point in complaining to him about our treatment. It was our word against theirs, and by that time we were so cowed, we just accepted

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<sup>58</sup> Bertha Leverton, Interview 12503, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Bertha Leverton and Shmuel Lowensohn, eds., *I Came Alone: The Stories of the Kindertransports* (Sussex, England, Book Guild, 1990), 182.

our fate.”<sup>62</sup>

Bertha Leverton and her siblings were not the only *Kinder* who experienced abuse. A few other individuals also reported such experiences. One child named Friederka reported that both her foster father and his nineteen-year-old son had raped her, and another girl named Margaret recalled that she was chased and assaulted any time she was alone with her foster father. Instances of such abuse, fortunately, appear to be the exception rather than the rule. Of course, not every foster child was fortunate enough to be placed in such stable families as Kurt Landskroner and Vera Gissing, but most foster parents took their role as caretakers seriously and many far exceeded their obligations.<sup>63</sup>

Certainly, the experiences of those *Kinder* living with foster families varied widely. A select few were able to live with stable, loving families that accepted the foster child as one of their own. The children in these situations often maintained close relationships with their foster families long after the war, even in cases where their own parents had managed to survive. Children living with less than ideal families were grateful to those who took them in, but they frequently separated themselves from those families as soon as they were able, either through early marriage or going to work. Those children who never went to live with foster families ended up living in hostels, boarding schools, or other group living situations.

### ***Life in Group Housing***

Since many children could not find foster homes, or were too old to fit into a new family environment, or had been placed with incompatible families, the Refugee Children’s Movement established hostels for them in cities throughout Britain, especially in London, Manchester, and Leeds. These hostels, generally run by members of the RCM or Jewish Refugee Committee,

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>63</sup> Fast, 52.

relied primarily on charitable gifts to support their residents.<sup>64</sup> In addition, some children were sent to live in group homes, farms, and boarding schools throughout the United Kingdom. Children older than fourteen who were not able to find foster families were frequently trained in agriculture or domestic service and incorporated into the nation's labor force.<sup>65</sup>

For many of the older Jewish children who had been raised in middle-class homes, the requirement to enter the labor force often resulted in a lowering of life expectations. Their families had placed a high value on education, and they had grown up with the expectation that they would pursue professional careers. In Britain, however, they were expected to learn some sort of technical trade and start earning a living at an early age. This was, after all, the expectation for a majority of British children at the time.<sup>66</sup> This lowering of expectations represented yet another break with their former lives, as their parents' economic status no longer had any bearing on their future.

Because hostels and group homes relied on private donations, living conditions were frequently pitiful. They were often located in poorer urban neighborhoods and staffed by volunteers, many of whom were also refugees. These volunteers were often young and unprepared for the day-to-day demands of running a hostel. Lottie and Freddie Freedman were a young married couple who came to England as chaperones on a *Kindertransport* from Berlin in 1939. Because they were not permitted to work in England, the Refugee Children's Movement sent them to help out at a hostel in London. After a short time there, they were put in charge of the Western Council Training Hostel, a home of forty boys in the slums of North Kensington.<sup>67</sup>

Lottie Freedman described her relationship with these boys and reflected on how

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<sup>64</sup>Turner, 156.

<sup>65</sup> "Kindertransport and KTA History," Kindertransport Association, accessed September 21, 2013, [http://www.kindertransport.org/history04\\_Britain.htm](http://www.kindertransport.org/history04_Britain.htm).

<sup>66</sup> Turner, 178.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 157.

unprepared she was at the time, recalling:

The children in the hostel came from all kinds of backgrounds and all corners of Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. As soon as they opened their bags, I could see a picture of the parents and I knew just what the background was. I was detached then- today I know so much more about development and psychology. I just had common sense then.

One boy would cry for his mother when he had tummy ache- and I would just say, ‘She isn’t here.’ Today, I would handle it differently. I think I was a mixture of surrogate mother and a good friend and fun. I wanted to have fun too.<sup>68</sup>

Overwhelmingly, *Kinder* also recalled poor living conditions, feelings of isolation, and longing for their families.

Upon arrival in England, Kelly Bernard and his siblings settled at the Lowestoft holiday camp. After a week, a Refugee Committee from Leeds sent a delegation to select several children to live at a Jewish convalescent home for young girls. Not wanting to separate Kelly and his brother from their younger sister, the Refugee Committee also selected them to live in a nearby hostel for boys between the ages of twelve and eighteen.<sup>69</sup> During his first two years in the Stainbeck Lane Hostel, Kelly attended daily classes in English and other subjects. Like most *Kinder* without foster families, his formal education ended when he reached fourteen years of age and he had to work. Kelly did not describe his life in the Stainbeck Lane Hostel as pleasant, due in part to a particularly harsh hostel master. This man was an Orthodox German Jew who tried to force all of the boys in the hostel to practice traditional Judaism, subjecting those who did not attend services to beatings. Kelly spoke harshly of this man, stating that he should have been a friend and protector to the children under his care. Instead, he was abusive, and would steal clothing coupons and furniture from the children. Kelly stated that, “If I hate anyone today,

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>69</sup> Bernard, VHA Interview 38097.

it is him. Because he came from us, and he turned against us.”<sup>70</sup>

The manner in which a home’s director treated the children under his or her care was a major factor in the quality of life the children enjoyed. One *Kind* recalled his initial excitement about going to a children’s home. He wrote, “I looked forward to the wonderful home I was to be taken into, which indeed it was to begin with.” The house was located on a very large Elizabethan vicarage, and was surrounded by a moat filled with toy boats with which the boys could play. Despite the beautiful surroundings, his experience was not a pleasant one. The realization that he was likely to be separated from his parents for much longer than he had originally thought, combined with the “intransigent Victorian disciplinary attitude” of the home’s director, made life so unbearable that several children attempted to run away.<sup>71</sup>

The situation in the home worsened as the war continued and donations and assistance dwindled. When he was fifteen, he went out to find work, even though he continued to live in the home. At the time, he felt that his relations with the home’s director and other residents had improved as he grew older. However, he wrote that looking back “in a more adult light, I saw that my years with them had not been at all what I in my necessity had imagined them to be. Later, it became painfully clear how deluded I had been as a youngster to think that I was ever anything else to them than a refugee boy.”<sup>72</sup>

However, even in situations in which a home’s director was kind and treated his or her charges well, many children still felt lonely and isolated. Fred Katz arrived in England in the summer of 1939 and, after brief stays at a holiday camp and a boarding school in London, settled at the Bunce Court Boarding School in Kent, where he remained for four years. Anna Essinger, who had also assisted in the management of the Dovercourt holiday camp, had established this

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Gershon, 71.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

school in 1933. Katz described Bunce Court as an egalitarian environment in which students and staff shared the work and upkeep and where the education was more practical than academic. Most of the teachers were also German-Jewish immigrants and the school administrators made a deliberate attempt to make this school a home for the refugee children.<sup>73</sup>

In spite of the efforts of the school administrators to develop a community, Fred recalled that he wanted no part of it. Speaking of his life there, he said

I did not have an overwhelming sense of ‘I have now arrived.’ I’ve just been bounced to yet another place. I think people were trying to make us feel welcome...there was a deliberate attempt to provide a home, but it didn’t always succeed. And my memory of it was that I was not receptive. I was not available to being hugged. I was not available to being loved. I was terribly scared and inward, and I probably pushed people away...my memory of the school is there were good intentions, but nobody was available to me.<sup>74</sup>

Fred’s tendency to reject attempts by caretakers to reach out to him was not uncommon. Many other *Kinder* recalled a reluctance to let other adults get too close to them, whether in a group home or a foster family. Often, this reluctance stemmed from a sense of loyalty to their own parents, as well as from the sense of uncertainty about how long they would in that foster family’s care.

There were, of course, children who experienced a type of surrogate family life in these hostels. Anne Fox also stayed at the Bunce Court School and recalled her experience there as pleasant. For Anne, who arrived at Bunce Court in February 1941 after living with a foster family in Swineshead, Bunce Court was “like an island in the storm, not only isolated from other habitats but like a large family with many members who were either loved and admired, hated and shunned, or simply ignored.”<sup>75</sup> In contrast to Fred Katz, Anne came to view those at Bunce Court as an extended family.

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<sup>73</sup> Fred Katz, Interview 27748, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Anne L. Fox, *My Heart in a Suitcase* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1996), 91.

Another boy recalled that he was fortunate enough to be sent to live in the Ramsgate Hostel, which he described as “a place with a family atmosphere...designed to minimize any problems of homelessness and homesickness.”<sup>76</sup> This hostel housed about fifteen boys from Germany and Austria. While there were the usual petty rivalries, fights, and small divisions along national lines, Ramsgate provided him with the “warmth and security of family life.”<sup>77</sup> Unfortunately, after the war began, the residents of Ramsgate were evacuated to the Chiltern Emigrants Training Colony, near Reading. In comparison to his life at Ramsgate, life at the second hostel resembled more “the impersonal coldness of army-style living.”<sup>78</sup>

The quality of treatment children received and the relationships they formed with others in the hostel influenced their happiness more than the living conditions themselves. Children who lived in comfortable surroundings, such as Fred Katz, or the child living at the Elizabethan vicarage, still experienced feelings of fear and isolation. In Fred Katz’s case, his unwillingness to connect with the staff or other children contributed to his isolation. The other boy was unhappy because of the home director’s harsh discipline. By contrast, Martha Levy moved to a rundown hostel in the East End of London when she turned eighteen years old. She recalled that she spent long days working in a factory sewing on buttons, and that the food provided in the hostel was substandard. Nonetheless, she remembered that she was very happy there. Martha attributed this happiness to the friendships she made, as well as to her relationship with the English couple who ran the hostel.<sup>79</sup>

For those children who lived in boarding schools, their status as refugees was heightened by the fact that they were enrolled with British children as well. Many *Kinder* in this situation

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<sup>76</sup> Gershon, 84

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Turner, 160.

recalled that their peers, who often viewed them as Germans, mistreated them. Olga Drucker went to live in a private boarding school in London after leaving her foster family because of conflicts with her foster sister. She recalled being teased almost immediately upon arrival by a group of girls because of her nationality and her inability to speak fluent English. The teasing continued until older students at the school befriended her.<sup>80</sup> Olga left this school when the war began and went to live with another family in Wellingborough. Even though she described this family as very strict, Olga recalled that she still felt welcomed as one of their own.<sup>81</sup>

Olga's experience of moving around was not uncommon. A shortage of available long-term housing, conflicts with foster families, wartime evacuations, suspicions about the loyalties of evacuees, and an overall lack of resources resulted in much transience. The instability and trauma of separation experienced by all *Kinder*, even those living with strong, nuclear foster families, was made worse by the uncertainty about the fate of parents, siblings, and extended family members back home. Contact with loved ones on the continent was difficult before the war, and even more so once fighting had begun. Nevertheless, *Kinder* often maintained contact with their families using postcards provided by the Red Cross during the war. For most of the children, these postcards were the last contact they had with their families.

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<sup>80</sup> Drucker, *Kindertransport*, 62-66.

<sup>81</sup> Olga Drucker, Interview 13673, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

### Chapter 3- The Lasting Impact of Separation

Regardless of whether they lived with foster families, or in some sort of group housing, all of the *Kindertransport* children experienced the trauma of separation from their loved ones. For a select few, this period of separation was short, as their parents were also able to emigrate to the United Kingdom, or they were reunited elsewhere. For others, their reunions with their parents were delayed until the end of the war. These families then faced the problem of reestablishing relationships that had been broken for six years or more. Evacuees who had left their home countries as children were now reunited with their parents as young adults. The differences in their wartime experiences often led to feelings of guilt or an inability to relate.

For a majority of *Kinder*, however, the war's end brought the realization that their parents were now gone forever. The last communication many of these children had from their parents during the war was a twenty-five-word postcard transmitted by the Red Cross. When the postcards ceased, usually in 1942, children were left to wonder and worry. After the war, as they received word of their parents' fates from surviving family members, friends, the Red Cross, or other relief agencies, these evacuees faced the prospect of having to rebuild their lives on their own. Their family background, including their parents' socioeconomic status, wealth, and educational and professional expectations, were no longer of any consequence.

#### *Letters from Home*

Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, many *Kindertransport* evacuees were able to communicate directly with their family members by letter and, in some cases, even by telephone. When the hostilities began, families began to communicate through intermediaries, such as friends or relatives living in neutral countries, or via the brief letters transmitted by the Red Cross. Werner Cohen, who had arrived in England from Germany on January 17, 1939,

recalled that it was not difficult to keep in contact with his family when he first arrived. Before the start of the war, he was able to speak with them by telephone once or twice a week.<sup>1</sup>

Once the war began, however, he was only able to contact them using the Red Cross letters. Werner remembered that both he and his sister sent these cards to their parents “religiously” but believed that the cards were not actually arriving at their destination, as his parents kept posing questions that he and his sister had already answered in previous cards. Given the problems he experienced with these Red Cross letters, Werner began to send letters to his parents through a cousin living in Seville, Spain. Several of these letters got lost as well, but Werner reflected that he was at least able to go into more detail than twenty-five words allowed.<sup>2</sup> Like many *Kinder* describing their communications with family members, Werner recalled the use of code words in case the letters were intercepted or censored by the Nazis. For example, when his parents informed him that his Uncle Hans had been deported, they wrote that he had “gone on vacation.”<sup>3</sup>

The knowledge that the information shared in personal letters was not private was no doubt disheartening for the evacuees. Vera Gissing remembered that she felt great anxiety about what she was and was not allowed to say in her letters with her parents out of fear that their letters would be read. She recalled thinking, “What can I say? I’m not allowed to speak the truth. I’m not allowed to mention I’m in England. You know, it was so difficult for an eleven year old kid to find the words, how much she misses them, and yet not to make them sad.”<sup>4</sup> In addition to fears about censorship, Vera’s statement also demonstrates a desire to protect her

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<sup>1</sup> Werner Cohen, Interview 35340, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Vera Gissing, Interview 21626, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

parents' feelings. While Vera did not explicitly explain why she wanted to protect her parents, one can speculate that she believed they had enough difficulties of their own. Many *Kinder* expressed similar sentiment and did not want to provide their parents with information that might make them sad or cause them to worry.

In her published memoir, Vera detailed the process by which she and her sister kept in contact with their parents before the war. First, they sent the letters to an elderly family friend living in London, who then censored the contents and sent them on to another family friend in Holland, who would then send them on to Vera's parents. "We were given strict instructions about what and what not to write. We could not mention that we were in England and could not use English names. The letters had to be short, to the point, and not too frequent."<sup>5</sup> The letters that she received from her parents were equally stilted, and Vera recalled feeling "cheated" that she was unable to communicate freely with her parents.

Vera wrote to her parents on her first night in England, and received responses from them soon after. Her mother's first letter articulated how proud she was of Vera, exhorted her to keep a "steadfast faith in a brighter future," and instructed her to "remain good and grateful...to those who are looking after you so well."<sup>6</sup> Vera's father's letter also expressed his pride in her and noted that they had shared her letter with family and friends at home in Celakovice, Czechoslovakia.<sup>7</sup> Initially, Vera was able to write to her parents frequently, and "bombarded them with letters." She described her letters home as "newsy and loving" and, in addition to telling her parents stories of her life, she was able to provide them with pictures as well. In their return letters, her parents continued to share their pride and happiness that she was doing so well and also provided her with parental instructions, such as when her father told her to "always be

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<sup>5</sup> Vera Gissing, *Pearls of Childhood* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 57.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

spotlessly clean” and “always look neat and tidy.”<sup>8</sup>

Before Vera and her sister had left Czechoslovakia, their mother had given each of them a diary to write letters in, and also told them to speak their messages to the sun and the stars. Her mother instructed: “If the time ever comes when we can’t write to each other...the sun and the stars which shine on you will be shining on us too, wherever we are. Let us make the sun and the stars the messengers of our love and thoughts.”<sup>9</sup> This diary and her mother’s message about the sun and stars helped Vera cope with her separation from her parents and allowed her to remain close to them, even after the war when she learned of their deaths. Vera’s father had been shot during a forced march in 1944, and her mother died of typhoid in a displaced persons camp shortly after the end of the war.<sup>10</sup>

The last Vera ever heard from her parents was a letter from her mother, dated November 21, 1939. In this letter, Vera’s mother wrote: “Today the frost is sharp, but the sun is shining and bringing your love...Each night I look at the stars and they seem to be whispering ‘Have faith.’” She also wrote that she was certain they had made the right decision in sending the children to England, and that they would all see each other again soon.<sup>11</sup> After this letter, Vera feared for her parents’ safety and continually worried that they were suffering. She coped with these feelings by writing to them in her diary, by speaking to the stars at night, and by seeking support from her older sister.<sup>12</sup>

While Vera had the support of an older sibling, Eva did not have an older relative to provide her with similar help. Eva recalled feelings of isolation and loneliness when communication from home ceased:

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>10</sup> Gissing, VHA Interview 21626.

<sup>11</sup> Gissing, *Pearls of Childhood*, 65.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 70.

Isolation came when the letters from home ceased. I was in a very nice and very friendly school, but I was the only stranger. It was accepted that you didn't talk about what hurt you. I couldn't speak Czech with anybody. I didn't want to tell my sister how unhappy I was because I felt she was too young anyhow.

I was very, very lonely. I wrote of that time in my diary: 'I never dreamed that one could be so lonely and go on living with this constant fear for our loved ones.'<sup>13</sup>

Eva's feelings of loneliness and despair were no doubt exacerbated by her age, as well as by the fact that she lived in an English boarding school rather than with a foster family. At fifteen years of age, she likely had a better understanding of what the lack of correspondence meant than did her sister. Many *Kinder* recalled similar feelings of loneliness and isolation when letters from their parents ceased to arrive.

Lorraine Allard, who traveled with a *Kindertransport* from Fürth, Germany, in 1939, recalled her correspondence with her parents. A letter from her father dated April 21, 1939, instructed her to "stay well-mannered and tidy and always keep in mind that your foster parents make a sacrifice in caring for you. So in return try to show particularly good behavior and obey them as well as being diligent in school."<sup>14</sup> Additional letters from her father expressed pride and happiness that she was getting along so well with her foster family and was adjusting well to life in England. Repeatedly her father exhorted her to be on her best behavior, as well as urging her to make herself useful by helping out with chores around the house.<sup>15</sup>

Such advice was not uncommon among parents writing to their children in England. As Vera K. Fast observed, many parents reminded their children to be well behaved and to always show their hosts gratitude. Refugee committees also instructed children to express proper behavior and gratitude toward their foster families and hosts. The thinking behind these

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<sup>13</sup> Eva Hayman in *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport*, ed. Mark Jonathan Harris and Deborah Oppenheimer (New York: Bloomsbury, 2000), 204.

<sup>14</sup> Alfred Sulzbacher, letter to Lorraine Allard, in Harris and Oppenheimer, 153.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 153-165.

instructions from both parents and the Refugee Committee was likely that well-behaved children who did not cause problems for their hosts could serve as good examples and possibly lead to more children and family members being welcomed in England.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, well-behaved children would continue to be welcomed in their foster homes.

Lorraine Allard's parents' often asked her to convince her foster family to sponsor them for immigration as well. As the months wore on in 1939, her parents' wrote of this possibility more frequently. In May of that year, her parents received notification from Lorraine's sister in South Africa that their requests to move there had been denied. In her letter from June 4, 1939, Lorraine's mother wrote that she would be happy to accept a job with her host family, but did not want to go to England without Lorraine's father. At one point, her mother pressed Lorraine to obtain a permit for her father also, writing "I'd love to accept the job at the Schreibers' but I wouldn't leave [your father] alone here...my golden one is so efficient that she'll get him a 'permit.'"<sup>17</sup>

As the beginning of the war approached, Lorraine's parents' letters described the dwindling Jewish population in Fürth and discussed anxiously their continued hope that they could receive a visa from either South Africa or England.<sup>18</sup> Lorraine continued her efforts to find a suitable sponsor for her parents up until the start of the war. She had not felt comfortable asking her own foster family, because they had already helped her. So, instead, she went door to door asking families if they would be willing to provide her parents with a job so they could move to England. Eventually, she found someone and recalled the experience as follows, "It was just like an unbelievable dream come true. Everything was being done to get the papers for my

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<sup>16</sup> Vera K. Fast, *Children's Exodus: A History of the Kindertransport* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 48-49.

<sup>17</sup> Selma Sulzbacher, letter to Lorraine Allard, in Harris and Oppenheimer, 159.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-164.

parents to come out, and war started. And that was the end of that.”<sup>19</sup> Lorraine did not reflect further on her feelings about the fact that her parents did not escape Germany, although she later described feeling “a terrible void and a terrible loneliness for love and for warmth” after losing contact with them.<sup>20</sup>

For most *Kinder*, the letters and Red Cross postcards were the last contact they ever had from their parents. Some children continued to hold out hope that their parents were still alive, while others took the lack of correspondence as a sign that they had perished. Because of the uncertainty surrounding their parents’ fates, many children did not mourn or accept their loss until the end of the war. Hedy Epstein, an evacuee from Kippenheim, Germany, received a final postcard from her mother in late 1942. In November 1940, her mother had been deported from Kippenheim to a camp in France. In the final postcard, her mother explained that she would be “travelling east” and was saying a final goodbye. For years, even after the war, Hedy reacted to this final postcard with denial. She wrote:

But for many, many, many years, I would see the postcard in front of me, and I would see she’s saying “travelling to the east,” and yet I would understand that she’s travelling in an easterly direction. Then I would say to myself: well, maybe she’s going back to Kippenheim, and maybe that’s good. And the final goodbye, I didn’t understand either.

Both my parents had written ‘It may be a long time before you hear from me again.’ How long is a long time? Is it a week? A month? A year? Ten years? So I just kept on saying to myself, “A long time just isn’t over yet and I have to wait some more.”<sup>21</sup>

Hedy returned to Kippenheim in 1947 in an effort to discover her parents’ fate. She had been reluctant to return because she did not want confirmation that they had perished.

I think on some level, I knew my parents didn’t survive, but as long as I didn’t go back to Kippenheim, I could still say, well, maybe they’re back in Kippenheim. I know it doesn’t really make a lot of sense, but I think it was my survival mechanism. I just wasn’t ready

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<sup>19</sup> Lorraine Allard in Harris and Oppenheimer, 167-168.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>21</sup> Hedy Epstein in Harris and Oppenheimer, 191.

to accept the fact that I no longer had parents, that I hadn't had parents for a long time.<sup>22</sup>

When they finally learned of their parents' fate, the *Kinder's* reactions varied. In September 1945, Anne Fox received a letter from a family friend in Sweden who informed her that her father had died in Theresienstadt in early 1944, and her mother had been deported to Auschwitz in October 1944. Anne recalled that she found herself unable to grieve for her parents at the time. She wrote: "I did not grieve. I could not grieve. I had lived as an orphan for six years. There was no funeral, no grave, no mourning relatives."<sup>23</sup> Even though she had had minimal contact with her parents during the early years of the war, Anne believed she had essentially been orphaned when she left Berlin in December 1938.

Other *Kinder* responded to news of their parents' deaths with powerful grief. After the war, Lorraine Allard wrote a final letter to her mother and father at their last known addresses in Theresienstadt. Approximately three or four months later, the letters were returned to her, with a note on the back indicating that they had been deported to Auschwitz. Lorraine recalled: "I was devastated. The world had collapsed. I was about twenty then, and everything had changed. Between the ages of fourteen to twenty, I was waiting and waiting, biding time as opposed to living life, I suppose."<sup>24</sup> Lorraine coped with the devastation by realizing that her parents must have been relieved and comforted by the fact that she survived.<sup>25</sup>

Though the reactions to the loss of their parents varied, many *Kinder* expressed feelings of survivor guilt that impacted their lives in later years. After finally receiving confirmation in 1956 that her parents had died in Auschwitz, Hedy Epstein began having recurring dreams that she was back in Kippenheim and was loading her parents onto a train for deportation. Hedy

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>23</sup> Anne L. Fox, *My Heart in a Suitcase* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1996), 125.

<sup>24</sup> Allard in Harris and Oppenheimer, 220.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

attributed these dreams to her sense of guilt for surviving when they did not.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Walter Hartmann expressed a sense of guilt that he had not done enough to save his parents and wondered if he might have been able to find a sponsor for them in England if he had tried harder.<sup>27</sup> The feelings of survival guilt and isolation that these *Kinder* experienced after the war often hindered their ability to develop relationships and establish new identities in the postwar period. However, uncertainty concerning postwar identities and family lives were not limited to children whose parents had not survived. Often, *Kinder* who reunited with their families experienced difficulties in these areas as well.

### ***Reuniting with Loved Ones***

A select few *Kinder* were able to reunite with their families. Some of these reunions took place in England before and during the Second World War, as parents and siblings were able to make their way there. Other reunions took place during the war in another country, such as the United States. However, many of the reunions between *Kinder* and their families did not take place until after the fighting had ended and they had been apart for years. For some of the *Kinder*, reunions with their families occurred during the war, while they were still living in England, or in another country such as the United States. Some parents were able to make immigration arrangements, and, in some instances, the children made the arrangements through their foster families, or through others. In other cases, children were able to bring one or both parents to England with the help of an aid organization or charity. For the most part, children continued to live with their foster families or in their group housing because their parents lacked the means to support them. Some older children ended up living with their parents because they had entered the workforce and were able to help support them.

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<sup>26</sup> Epstein in Harris and Oppenheimer, 243.

<sup>27</sup> Walter Hartmann, Interview 24515, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

Bertha Leverton was among those who convinced her foster family to sponsor a member of her family. While Bertha and her younger brother Theo had come to England on a *Kindertransport*, her sister Inge had not been able to join them. In spite of the fact that Bertha lived in a home in which she was mistreated and lived as a maid rather than a foster child, she realized that her foster parents were the only ones who could assist her with getting Inge to England. Bertha recalled:

I realized that the family who had taken me in were the only people I could rely on – if I worked hard enough – to provide a visa for my little sister, Inge. She was a beautiful little girl. They had no children. I showed them her photograph, they seemed to like her very much, and they gave permission for her to come and agreed to take her in.<sup>28</sup>

At first, Bertha's foster parents treated Inge differently than they treated her. While Bertha was made to do all the cleaning, they treated Inge "like a little princess" and even considered trying to adopt her. This difference in treatment was no doubt a function of their differences in age; Inge was nine years old when she first arrived, and Bertha was seventeen. Eventually, however, they began to treat Inge poorly as well.<sup>29</sup>

Bertha and her siblings were fortunate to have been able to live in the same family and reunite with their parents before the end of the war. In their case, their parents had managed to leave Germany in 1940 and get to Portugal. Because of a law that permitted close relatives of children under fifteen to travel from neutral countries to England, Bertha's parents were able to immigrate to England in 1943. Bertha's foster family assisted this effort by agreeing to sponsor them as domestic servants.<sup>30</sup>

When they were reunited with their parents, Bertha and her siblings' living situation vastly improved. Initially, their foster family had intended to install Bertha's parents as

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<sup>28</sup>Bertha Leverton in Harris and Oppenheimer, 168.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 168-169.

<sup>30</sup>Bertha Leverton and Shmuel Lowensohn, eds., *I Came Alone: The Stories of the Kindertransports* (Sussex, England, Book Guild, 1990), 183.

housekeepers in another home they owned. However, when Bertha's parents arrived and discovered the abuse that Bertha and her siblings had endured for nearly five years, they immediately contacted the Jewish Refugee Committee and made arrangements for all of them to move from Coventry to Birmingham. Thus, Bertha and her entire family were reunited and moved to Birmingham just a few days after Bertha's twenty-first birthday.<sup>31</sup> Because Inge was away attending a grammar school in Manchester, she remained there living at a hostel until she could be properly enrolled in school in Birmingham a few weeks later.<sup>32</sup>

Because she had been nearly sixteen when she had last seen her parents, Bertha was able to recapture her bond with them almost immediately. Her siblings Theo and Inge, eleven and nine respectively when they left home, took longer to bond. Speaking of their reunion, Bertha said, "I bonded immediately. My brother took a bit longer, and my sister took even longer." Inge's bonding with her parents was further complicated by the fact that she did not join them in Birmingham for a few weeks. Bertha recalled that the first time she realized they had started to become a family again was during their Passover celebration in Birmingham in 1944.<sup>33</sup>

Inge also described her reunion with their parents and highlighted some of the difficulties experienced by younger *Kinder*. Whereas Bertha was able to recapture their relationship so quickly, Inge continued to struggle. She wrote:

It was a strange experience, getting to know our parents again. Nearly five years older than the last time we saw them, they were foreigners! They didn't speak English, my father wore a long, long coat and used a purse, and my mother counted the change she was given in the shops! They also wanted us to keep the Jewish customs which I had long since forgotten...it was a difficult period of adjustment all over again; but we made it, and became a loving and loved family again.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>32</sup> Bertha Leverton, Interview 12503, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Inge Sadan in Leverton and Lowensohn, 286.

Having spent the crucial years from nine to fourteen growing up in England apart from her parents, Inge clearly felt embarrassed by her parents' foreign behaviors.

Inge further detailed her thoughts on reuniting with her parents and the difficulties in reestablishing their relationships:

Our parents wanted us to become a family straight away, as we had been in Germany, but we'd had so many different experiences in the five years we'd been apart...It took a long time for us to even talk about the different experiences we had, apart from the language, because it took me about six months to relearn some German.

A normal teenager is mixed up. I was twenty times worse than a normal teenager. I was very shy. I wouldn't mix with people, except at school. Socially, I was a misfit, and that worried my father very much. He forced me to go to youth groups. That was another thing, he and my mother were religious, and we, of course, hadn't kept any religious observances for years.

Although it was very difficult in the beginning, we did manage it. After about a year I felt part of the family again.<sup>35</sup>

Inge's difficulties in reconnecting with her parents were not uncommon and many children who reunited with their families faced similar problems. Children who spent the war living in England had little understanding of the horrors their relatives experienced living under German control. Additionally, since the shortage of available housing in England did not always allow for children to be placed with Jewish families, parents and children were often at odds on matters of faith. Many of the *Kinder* had become acculturated to life in England, and had trouble accepting their parents' more traditional lifestyles.

Olga Drucker also reunited with her family. Her reunion occurred just before the end of the war, in 1945, in New York City. Olga and her older brother Hans had both fled to England before the war. Hans left Germany in the late 1930s to attend school in London, and Olga left in March 1939 as part of a *Kindertransport*. Because he was older and lived on his own, Olga did

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<sup>35</sup> Inge Sadan in Harris and Oppenheimer, 231.

not live with her brother in England, although they did maintain close contact.<sup>36</sup> In August 1941, while attending a summer camp, Olga received a telegram from her brother in London informing her that their parents had managed to obtain visas for the United States and had arrived safely in New York a month earlier.<sup>37</sup> Once her parents were in New York, Olga communicated with them more directly, although she was not able to obtain a visa to join them until March 1945.

Olga remembered feeling anxious during her journey to New York. She explained, “I was apprehensive because I hadn’t seen my parents now for six years. I had forgotten most of my German, and I didn’t know whether they’d recognize me...in their minds, I was still that eleven year old that had left them.”<sup>38</sup> When she arrived at Grand Central Station, her parents did not recognize her, but she was able to recognize them. Olga moved into her parents’ home, an apartment in the Kew Gardens neighborhood of Queens, New York, and enrolled in high school. She recalled feeling like an outsider among many of her friends and classmates but after a period of adjustment, began to feel like she fit in.<sup>39</sup>

Situations such as Olga Drucker’s and Bertha Leverton’s, in which entire families were reunited after the war, were rare among children from the *Kindertransports*. In many cases, children were only reunited with one parent. Often, in these cases, children and their parents found the new family dynamic difficult. Walter Austerer traveled from England to Hoboken, New Jersey, in 1940 to be reunited with his mother. At that time, his father was interned in a concentration camp near Belgrade, and the Nazis executed him in 1941.<sup>40</sup> Even though Walter and his mother were only separated for a year, the loss of his father had a lasting impact on his

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<sup>36</sup> Olga Drucker, Interview 13673, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>37</sup> Olga Levy Drucker, *Kindertransport* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1992), 108-109.

<sup>38</sup> Drucker, VHA Interview 13673.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Walter Austerer, Interview 21812, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

relationship with his mother. Since he had had no siblings, Walter's only family was his mother. He remembered that it was "a strange feeling, knowing that we weren't a family anymore." Walter's mother was never able to discuss her experiences with him or anybody else, and this reluctance on her part made it difficult for them to grow closer.<sup>41</sup>

A more extreme example of a rift developing between an evacuee and her father can be found in the case of Ellen Davis. Ellen was the only one of her siblings to make it onto a *Kindertransport*, and she left Germany in June 1939. Ellen's mother and six siblings were later deported to Riga, Latvia, where they all perished. A month or two after Ellen's arrival in England, her father was also able to escape from Germany, at the urging of Ellen's mother, and made his way to England. Upon arrival, he was interned as an enemy alien and, after his release, joined the British Army Pioneer Corps and was sent to Australia.

After the war ended, he decided to remain in Australia. Father and daughter corresponded briefly for a while but, in 1948, his letters stopped coming and she never heard from him again. Eventually, she was able to find out that he had died in 1976. Ellen did not speculate in her interview as to why her father had broken off contact with her, nor did she really discuss her feelings on the matter, saying only "This means I'd lost everyone, even my father." She was able to find and contact her father's widow, who told her that he always kept a photograph of Ellen's wedding, as well as the photograph taken of her at the orphanage in Kassel.<sup>42</sup>

Ellen Davis's experience is certainly extraordinary. In most cases in which only one parent survived, the evacuee and the parent managed to reestablish their relationship, although the absence of the deceased family members and the pain associated with that loss certainly had

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ellen Kerry Davis, Interview 14724, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

an impact. Suse Rosenstock left Germany in July 1939, at the age of eight. Her father died in Theresienstadt in 1942, but she received word after the war that her mother and sister were still alive. In May 1946, Suse immigrated to the United States. Her mother and sister joined her in 1947.<sup>43</sup> It had been eight years since Suse had seen either her mother or her sister. Because of the differences in their wartime experiences, they had difficulty reestablishing their family connection. Suse recalled, “It was a difficult time to readjust. It wasn’t easy. My mother and sister had had a special relationship. I was not part of it. And we all worked very hard to establish a family relationship once again. I realized that we all had to work together to do it...I put every effort that I possibly could into it, and it certainly paid off.”<sup>44</sup>

Those *Kinder* who were able to reunite with their family members after the war often had a hard time. Differences in wartime experiences left evacuees feeling guilty about their relatively easy lives in England. Furthermore, many of them had spent the war years growing acculturated to life in Great Britain. Thus, when they reunited with their families they struggled with how to reconcile their new identities with their old. However, for the majority of *Kinder*, there was no connection to that old identity. They had spent their formative years living in relative safety in a different culture. Some of them had been raised in Christian foster homes, and many had not practiced Judaism for years. They had adopted British mannerisms and customs. These children had adapted to life in England, while their parents were foreigners. Thus, the end of the war left many struggling with questions of national and religious identities, as well as an overwhelming uncertainty as to how to reestablish stability in their lives.

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<sup>43</sup> Suse Rosenstock, Interview 11067, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

*Reconstruction of Postwar Lives and the Lingering Effects of the Kindertransports*

Like all victims of Nazi persecution, the children of the *Kindertransports* faced the difficult task of rebuilding their lives after the war. Their ability to do so was most certainly influenced by the patterns of sequential traumatization that they had experienced. Citing a 1985 psychological study of 300 *Kindertransport* evacuees conducted in Britain by Vernon Hamilton, Rebekka Göpfert noted that there were higher incidences of “depression, relationship problems, extreme insecurity, fear of abandonment, and restlessness as well as mistrust of their surroundings” among *Kinder* in comparison to the rest of the British population. Hamilton also found differences in lasting effects between groups of men and women, as well as different age groups.

Women appeared to be less satisfied with their later lives, perhaps because men had been able to join the armed forces, which helped them overcome their refugee status.<sup>45</sup> Göpfert also discovered through her own discussions with *Kinder* that those who immigrated elsewhere, such as the United States or Israel, often viewed their lives with greater satisfaction than did those who remained in Great Britain. Göpfert speculated that this might be related to the fact that further migration usually involved reuniting with family or friends, while those who remained in Great Britain were less often reunited with relatives.<sup>46</sup> Although a few *Kinder* did return to their home countries, for most there was nothing to return to. Even among children whose families had emerged intact, returning home was not an option. Their family homes and businesses had been taken away, and many of them felt a sense of revulsion at the idea of returning to their prewar homes.<sup>47</sup>

Evacuees who were raised in a stable foster family had similar postwar experiences to

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<sup>45</sup> Rebekka Göpfert, “Kindertransport: History and Memory,” *Shofar* 23 (2004): 25.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>47</sup> Barry Turner, *...And the Policeman Smiled* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1990), 260.

those who were reunited with their own families, as the care of the foster family seemed to minimize the effects of sequential traumatization by providing the child with a normalized environment. Kurt Landskroner was taken in by the Pinkerton family and continued to live with them even after his own mother and sister returned to Austria. The Pinkertons encouraged him to stay in school and helped provide him with a graduate level education after the war. After completing his degrees in agriculture, he was able to join the British Foreign Service and served the British government at various posts around the world. Kurt married an Englishwoman and became a British citizen. Kurt's stable foster family, as well as his service to the United Kingdom and marriage to a British woman, helped him cope with the loss of his prewar life and develop a sense of British national identity.<sup>48</sup>

Many *Kinder* who neither reunited with their families nor grew up in stable foster homes sought stability in other ways. One way was by getting married as soon as possible after the end of the war. Sadly, many of these marriages ended in divorce. While exact statistics are not available, there were many stories of hasty marriages immediately after the war. The *Kinder* often described these marriages as miserable experiences that ultimately ended in divorce. Military service was another way in which they sought stability. Kelly Bernard joined the British Army in 1943, when he was seventeen. After the war, he enlisted in the newly formed Israeli Army in 1948. He lived in Israel for a few years and, during that time got married and divorced.<sup>49</sup> He later moved to the United States, where he remarried and put down roots.

Unlike Kurt Landskroner, Kelly did not develop a sense of British national identity. Whereas Landskroner had been able to establish roots in Britain with the assistance of his foster

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<sup>48</sup> Kurt Landskroner, Interview 48062, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

<sup>49</sup> Kelly Bernard, Interview 38097, *Visual History Archive*, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, accessed January 8, 2013, [vhaonline.usc.edu](http://vhaonline.usc.edu).

family, Kelly had no such relationship. Even though both of his siblings lived in London, they had spent the war living apart. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that Kelly served in both the British and Israeli armies, he never developed a sense of national identity for either country. As of 1998, he and his second wife had been married for nearly thirty years. In the end of his interview, Kelly's wife joined him on camera and speculated as to how his experiences had affected his life and personal relationships. She commented: "Kelly never had a childhood beyond age twelve. He never had an adolescence." She believed that this made it difficult for him to relate to his own stepchildren and created problems in their relationship.<sup>50</sup> In spite of these problems, it appears that Kelly's relationship with his second wife allowed him to establish roots in the United States, which he had been unable to do in the United Kingdom or Israel.

Ellen Davis also married soon after the end of the war, in 1948. Since her mother and her siblings had all died during the war, and her father had moved to Australia, she remained with a foster family with whom she did not get along. When her foster father died, she ran their family business. Ellen soon married her foster mother's nephew in 1948, and described her experience as a "marriage made in Hell." Ellen and her husband had two children and divorced when the oldest child left for college. She married again in 1972 and as of 1996 she and her second husband had been married for twenty-four years. In addition to having a strong marriage, Ellen reestablished a connection to her prewar family life by locating, contacting, and visiting with several extended family members in the United States in the 1980s. Such reconnection was important to her. She noted: "This is my birth family. My new family is terribly important to me, because I have no one else. But *this* family is even more important. This is my *own* family. This is my roots."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Davis, VHA Interview 14724.

The national identities that the *Kinder* adopted after the war primarily depended on where they settled. The majority of the evacuees decided to remain in the United Kingdom, and considered themselves to be British.<sup>52</sup> Many of those who remained in Britain had married young or enlisted in the army. Both of these actions helped them develop a connection to the United Kingdom. Those claiming American nationality represent the second largest group.<sup>53</sup> Some of those who chose to migrate to the United States did so because they had relatives waiting for them there.

In addition to having to establish new national identities and rebuild their broken family lives, many *Kinder* also faced the issue of their fractured religious identities. Because of a lack of available Jewish families to care for them, *Kinder* were placed in whatever homes were available. The children themselves came from a variety of religious backgrounds as well, including Jews, Catholics, Protestants, and atheists. Once in England, children were housed in homes with a variety of religious groups, including Quakers, Christadelphians, Catholics, Anglicans, atheists, and Jews.

In the postwar period, the religious identities of the *Kinder* were as varied as before. Some who had come from non-practicing religious backgrounds felt a new sense of obligation to the Jewish faith, as it helped provide them with a connection to their roots. Werner Cohen had grown up in a non-observant family. Inspired by his wife, and the birth of his daughter, Werner decided to raise his children in a kosher home and provide them with a Jewish education. Speaking of this decision, Werner said, “In our family, Hitler has not triumphed. I think my wife’s vision was that the physical extermination...should not be followed up by a spiritual

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<sup>52</sup> “Kindertransport Survey,” The Association of Jewish Refugees, accessed November 24, 2014, <http://www.ajr.org.uk/kindersurvey>.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

Holocaust.”<sup>54</sup> In Werner’s view, keeping the practice of Judaism alive was a means to honor those who had perished.

By contrast, some *Kinder* rejected Judaism after the war. Speaking of her postwar religious identity, Nora Danzig stated, “I’m not religious anymore. I’m fiercely Jewish, but I’m not religious...I have found that people who have gone through similar circumstances to me have either become more religious or completely unreligious.”<sup>55</sup> Bertha Leverton, who had been raised in an Orthodox home before the war, expressed great regret at the fact that the spiritual and religious needs of the *Kinder* were not taken into consideration when they were brought to England. In particular, she lamented the fact that many of the youngest children who were too young to remember where they came from were placed with non-Jewish families. She argued: “That is something I’ll never forgive the Refugee Committee for as long as I live. To let the little children go into non-Jewish homes...and lose their identities and lose their roots and lose the generations. That is something that I cannot forgive or forget.”<sup>56</sup>

As Leverton indicated, the youngest children often had the most trouble reconciling their postwar lives with their past. In some instances, such as the case of Susi Bechhöfer, children were entirely unaware of their past. Susi and her twin sister left Munich at the age of three and were adopted by a Baptist minister and his wife. Her adopted parents gave them new English names and never told them of their past. Susi did not discover her identity until she was in her fifties and, with assistance from Bertha Leverton, was able to track down information about her past and discover her roots.<sup>57</sup>

Regardless of age, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds, all *Kinder* bore scars from

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<sup>54</sup> Cohen, VHA Interview 35430.

<sup>55</sup> Danzig, VHA Interview 18654.

<sup>56</sup> Leverton, VHA Interview 12503.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

the trauma they endured. Even those who reunited with their families had to struggle to redevelop those relationships and, in some instances, they were unable to do so. Questions of lost national identity, broken childhood aspirations, confusion about their religious identity, and the uncertainty of what their future held contributed to their sense of confusion. Survivor guilt and a lack of awareness of the size and scope of the *Kindertransport* program led many of the *Kinder* to feel that their situation was not true suffering. Since the reunions of the 1980s and early 1990s, *Kinder* have been able to share their experiences more openly. The sharing of oral testimony and the writing of memoirs has proven to be a cathartic experience for many of them, and has provided us with an understanding that just because they escaped the horrors of the concentration camps, that does not mean that these evacuees do not also bear the scars of Nazi persecution.

## Conclusion

In her study of children evacuated from London during the Second World War, Anna Freud observed, “All of the improvements in the child’s life may dwindle down to nothing when weighed against the fact that it has to leave the family to get them.”<sup>1</sup> This statement is also applicable to the experiences of the children of the *Kindertransports*, all of whom left their families behind in exchange for relative safety in the United Kingdom. Yet, as we have seen, their evacuation to England did not spare them from all trauma or suffering. The impact of the persecution they experienced before leaving home, the often permanent separation from their parents at a crucial stage of their childhood, and the uncertainty and lack of stability they faced while living in England were all factors in their trauma and had a lasting effect on their lives.

Prior to *Kristallnacht*, many Jewish families who were seeking to leave Germany were still planning to do so as a family. The aftermath of the November Pogrom, however, led many parents to get their children to safety as soon as possible, with plans to reunite later. The reactions of children to leaving their parents at this time varied greatly. Some viewed the chance to go to England as an adventure, while others were scared to go and felt as if their parents were trying to get rid of them. Often, parents eased children’s fears by telling them that they would all see each other again soon. Unfortunately, in most cases, this did not happen.

Regardless of their initial reaction at the time of departure, all *Kinder* faced the uncertainty of not knowing when and if they would be reunited with their families. They were able to correspond with their parents before the war, as well as during, but German censorship and the brevity of the Red Cross postcards did not allow for much open communication. When the postcards stopped coming, usually around 1942, the children were left to wonder and worry.

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Freud, quoted in Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe’s Families after World War II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 18

This uncertainty about their parents' fates contributed to the emotional trauma of their separation.

The lasting impact of their separation was either mitigated or worsened depending on several factors. *Kinder* who were fortunate enough to reunite with their parents often fared better in the long run, although they certainly faced difficulties reestablishing family ties. The length of time that children and their parents were apart contributed to these difficulties. Some reunited within a year or two, while others did not reunite for six or seven years. Those who were separated for longer periods of time often reunited with family members who had been interned in concentration camps or ghettos and had trouble relating to their experiences. Additionally, many of these *Kinder* had been young children when they last saw their parents, and were reunited as adults.

For those children who never reunited with their families, the lasting impact of their separation was influenced by their living conditions in England. Those who spent the war living with strong, stable foster families frequently maintained close relationships with them after the war and, in some cases, became like one of the family themselves. These *Kinder* frequently referred to their foster families as their own. Conversely, children who spent the war living in a bad foster home, in a hostel, or moving from one group home to another had more difficulty overcoming the trauma of losing their parents. Young men in this situation often sought stability by joining the military. Some *Kinder*, particularly younger women, often married soon after the end of the war. Many of these first marriages ended in divorce, as the *Kinder* struggled to deal with the loss of their pre-*Kindertransport* lives.

In spite of the fact that they had been spared the trauma of concentration camps endured by other survivors, children of the *Kindertransports* still endured their own form of sequential

trauma through their sudden separation from their families and the uncertainty that followed. While each of the 10,000 children on the *Kindertransports* had a unique experience, the testimonies and memoirs examined in this thesis reveal Christopher Browning's "core memory." For the children of the *Kindertransports*, that core memory allows us to see that, although their lives were saved, they still experienced an overwhelming traumatic loss: the loss of national identity, the loss of their childhood aspirations and future plans, and perhaps most importantly, the loss of their family lives.

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