

Kindertransport: Over 10,000 Spared From Hitler's Wrath (But there could have been more)

“...It's getting dark, it's November, and the street is full of fire engines from one end to the other. The synagogue is aflame, fire bursting out of the top, and glass shattered from those gorgeous windows, all over the street. And I'll tell you, you know what it feels like to crunch glass under your feet, I feel it to this day, every day of my life.”¹

The Kindertransport, translated “Children's Transport”, 1938-1940. This is the rescue effort which brought thousands of refugee children primarily to Great Britain from the Nazi occupied territories. Some children would be sent to Holland and other locations. The British Government and Parliament decided that an “unspecified number” of children, under the age of seventeen would be permitted to exit Germany and the German occupied territories of Austria and the Czech lands. The Jewish refugee children would be permitted exit from Germany when private citizens or organizations agreed to, and guaranteed, that each child's care, education, and eventual emigration from Britain when the Nazi threat was over. The Kindertransport was the result of Britain's frustration over the lack of urgency being shown during German invasion. This led to The Evian Conference, which was the meeting that was held at Evian, France, which was attended by thirty two countries to discuss the treatment of the Jews in Nazi occupied countries.

Life changes in Austria: Hitler's Anschluss on March 10th, 1938. Austria succumbs to Hitler, and he unites Austria, annexing it to Germany. Children in Germany and Nazi occupied territories had to leave public schools and go to schools for the Jews that were geographically much further away from where they were originally attending. Jews were expelled from Universities, men lost their businesses and jobs. Obvious financial problems rose among the

¹Ruth Zimler, Interview: The Museum of Jewish Heritage, November 8th, 2015

Jewish community. The situation continued to worsen for the Jews, and then, the November pogrom changes the course of the war against the Jews by the Nazi's.

Kristallnacht is the name given to this November pogrom, beginning the night of November 9th, and ending on the 10th, 1938. Vicious mobs, led by Nazi police force dressed as civilians, looted and burned Jewish businesses, synagogues, and homes throughout Germany and Austria. Jews were dragged from their homes, beaten, and arrested. Uniform police and firemen did nothing to assist the Jews, nor stop the looting and burning of Jewish buildings and synagogues. This pogrom resulted in 7,500 shops destroyed, 267 synagogues and 171 homes burned, at least 91 people were killed. 30,000 Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps. In complete irony, the Jewish community was expected to, and ordered, to pay a reparation fine of one billion marks (equal to 400 million dollars).

In Parliament, a British Lord spoke to the English Government and to Parliament, and it was decided that the English would lead the Kindertransport to save as many children as possible. Idealist Norbert Wollheim, born and raised in Berlin, his family assimilated in Berlin, and did not feel persecuted and did not separate themselves into any particular population, they lived and worked like any other German: *"I was in a non-Jewish High School. We had not too many Jewish children. I met a certain amount of antisemitism, but not militant antisemitism, but we managed."*¹ At 13, he joined the Jewish Youth Movement, which instilled Jewish values and pride in younger Jews. The members, along studying Jewish writers and music, also participated in social activities, and put very strong emphasis on the importance of helping others. Wollheim stated, *"We all hoped to create a new and better world, and we tried to contribute to that by doing social work."*²

Wollheim attended the University of Berlin, and intended on becoming a lawyer. In less than

1 Norbert Wollheim Interview, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), Oct 5th and 17th, 1990
(www.wollheim-memorial.de/en/lebensgeschichtliche_interviews)

2 Oppenheimer, Deborah and Harris, Mark Jonathan, *Into The Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport* (Warner Brothers Pictures, 2000), p. 32

two years, everything in his world would change. After Kristallnacht, Wollheim volunteered in the relief agencies for the Jewish community in Berlin. These agencies assisted with food, clothing, medical attention, and transportation for those who needed it.

Otto Hirsch, who was the director of the German/Jewish Federation, thought Wollheim, with his background, would be ideal in coordinating the daunting task of organizing and selecting children for the Kindertransport. Often, children with special situations and at greatest risk, would be selected first, for example, those whose father's were imprisoned or in concentration camps, or children with no parents at all. These children had to be well enough to pass health inspection. England did not want the additional burden of caring for sick children. Norbert also collected the documents and passports for the children. Wollheim secured the trains, sent lists of the names to the English authorities, the Gestapo, and the Nazi police. Wollheim had to be sure all of these documents were in order. Coordinating all of these details across three countries required a great deal of time on the ground and on the telephone, communication lines were not good. A single call could take three to four hours. Wollheim and many other social workers labored day and night, scheduling trains and contacting parents where and when to meet.

Lore Groszman was number 152 of the 600 other children from occupied German territories who were seeking safety in England. Her father, an Austrian, registered her for the Kindertransport on December 10th, 1938, her journey began at a train station outside Vienna.:
“There was a confusion of kissing parents-my father, bending down, my mother's face burning against mine. Before I could get a proper grip on my suitcase, the line set in motion so that the suitcase kept slipping from my hand and bumping against my legs. Panic stricken, I looked to the right, but my mother was there, walking beside me... “Go on, move,” The children behind me said. We were passing through...doors. I looked to my right, my mother's

face was nowhere to be seen."¹

In Lore's rucksack, her mom, as most mom's had, stuffed them with bread, sausage, and candies. These were the only things the children were allowed to carry on board the train.

¹ Segal, Lore Groszmann, *Other People's Houses* (New York, Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1958, 1961, 1962, 1964), pp 30

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Ruth Zimler, Interview: The Museum of Jewish Heritage, November 8th, 2015 (I have the actual CD of the interview/discussion)