Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport

By Mark Jonathan Harris
I still have dreams... 
... and certain things come back.
I don't know what age I am,
but life is quite normal.
Whatever we're doing 
is an everyday happening.
And this is when I wake up.
And as old as I am, I'm still sobbing.
In 1933... 
... few of the Jewish families who lived 
in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia... 
... foresaw how much... 
... their lives were about to change.
None of their children realized...
... how soon their childhood 
was about to end.
I was a very happy little girl growing up.
My father absolutely adored me.
There was never anything that I 
could have possibly done wrong.
My father used to go out with me...
... shopping.
And I always used to admire this one suit...
... which was for ladies.
I was only a kid, you know.
And I always said,
"Daddy, I would love to wear that suit."
So, one day, he said,
"Shall we go in there?"
And I said, "That's for big ladies, I can't... "Let's go in there." And he went in there 
and they took my measurements...
...and that suit was made for me.
And I came home,
and my mother was devastated.
"What are you buying this little girl
all this stuff for?
"She doesn't need that."
And my father said,
"She is my pride and joy...
"...and she needs everything
I can get for her."
My parents were 
sort of middle-class people.
My father was a middle-level bank manager. My mother was a lady of leisure. And I was a very-much-desired first child. They were both around 30 or so. We had one of these very nice apartments in Vienna, with a high ceiling... lots of light, as I remember it, and big windows... and I guess I was spoiled. In addition to them, there was the inevitable maid... nursemaid in the house in those days. My grandmother looked in often and lived nearby. It was, in many ways, a rather idyllic life. And I was indeed the center of the universe. There was my mother, father... and my sister, who was four years younger than me. We had a very happy, carefree childhood. My father was always busy during the week... but when he was home, he often took me for walks. By the river mostly. And we talked about everything. That brought us probably closer. I always felt that my father and I were protecting my mother and sister. I don't know what we were protecting them from. I was about... 8 years old... when Hitler came to power. I had got some school friends... and my mother tried to make a birthday party for us. The table was set. I was very excited. Nobody came. Not a single child came to this birthday party.
That was the first...
...terrible blow to me.
I know it sounds trivial...
...but it was the first
sort of comprehension for a child...
...to understand that you're ostracized.
That there's something different about you.
For Jewish children...
... life under Hitler became increasingly
isolated and threatening.
While the Nazis stripped their parents
of their jobs and citizenship...
... the children were gradually barred
from schools...
... parks, theaters, and swimming pools.
I was overprotected...
... because of the Hitler dangers
outside the home.
But very much loved in the home.
My mother sitting on my father
for a cuddle...
...was an everyday occurrence.
I had to join in,
or else I would have been jealous.
He had to have both of us on his lap.
My father used to say:
"I'm too old to start again."
Although he spoke perfect English...
... he felt he was just not young enough
to start in a new country.
And the other sentence,
which was because...
...his father and grandfather, and so on...
...were born in Germany was:
"This has got to change.
"This madman, Hitler, can't possibly last."
I feared every day.
I was most unhappy going to school.
I was walking down the street...
... six or seven boys came,
called me "Jew bastard"
... and then attacked me and threw me
through a plate-glass window.
I was cut severely...
...and I had to go
to the hospital for stitches.
I didn't want to go
to the school there anymore.
I just felt that I was threatened constantly.
As Hitler strengthened his control...
... he began looking for opportunities
to extend Germany's power...
... beyond its borders.
In March, 1938...
... German troops entered Austria...
... and without firing a single shot...
... annexed the country to the Reich.
The first thing that happens
when a disaster strikes...
... is that nothing changes.
You think there's going to be
some great drama...
...and you go to put your nightgown on...
...and you say the Shema to your mother
and then you go to bed.
And you think, "Oh, this isn't so terrible."
But the next morning, my parents
took me downstairs into the street.
The streets were full of new uniforms
I'd never seen.
And the young people wore the red bands
around their arms with the swastika.
I didn't know what that meant.
And they were stretching out their arms
in the Hitler salute.
And there were flags everywhere,
these new red flags...
... with the white circle
and the black swastika.
My main sense
of something being wrong...
...was the haste with which my parents
got me back into the house.
Suddenly I couldn't go
to my normal school anymore.
I was sent off to a makeshift school...
... at the end of the tramline.
And I did it alone, even at aged 7.
I went to the end of the line, and I would just walk on until I came to this house. Word got back to my parents that while on the tram, I was a very talkative boy. I told them all the bad things that Herr Hitler was doing. I thought that "Herr" was his first name, of course. And word got back to my parents that maybe... 

...I shouldn't be traveling alone. And my father then came with me. He didn't say much, he hardly ever did... 

...but he let it be known... 

...that it wasn't wise to go around saying bad things about Hitler. 

In the weeks following the annexation of Austria... 

... Nazi authorities had enacted all the anti-Jewish laws... 

... it had taken Hitler five years to put into place in Germany. 

For anyone coming from Vienna, it was very dramatic. 

The reality of it struck me when my parents talked about... 

...giving up the apartment, that we had to leave. 

That was something, you know, the bottom falls out. Everything falls out of you. 

This is all I knew... 

... and we had to give it up, we had to leave. 

That was probably the biggest blow I had. Just the idea... 

...it'll all end the way it is. 

My mother was an activist. She knew something had to be done. The decision was to go... 

... to England to be hired... 

... as a domestic, because the English would take young women... 

... who would not interfere
with the labor market.

The plan was:
She'd try to get me and my father out.
This is the time when I remember...
... there was no conversation
among the grown-ups...
... except how to get out of Vienna.
It's interesting because we're now asked,
"How come you didn't leave?"
And when I think
of what it meant to leave...
... how impossible it was to leave.
First of all, you had to have a sponsor...
... in the country you were going to.
Someone who would promise you would
not become a burden on the government.
You would have to get a visa
from the state department...
... or the government to be allowed in.
Then you had to get an exit permit
from the Nazis.
All these things had to come together.
And they had a time span
in which they would expire.
You had to collect all these things together
so that they would be ready.
And it usually didn't happen.
The hardest thing
was to find a country to go to.
The countries under discussion were:
Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Venezuela...
... Shanghai, Cuba, the Dominican Republic.
I remember going with my father
to the American consulate.
There was a queue around the block...
... up the stairs...
... and around the room.
We are now in the late summer of 1938.
I got to the United States on May 1, 1951.
It was a 13-year...
... quota for us.
German troops
had barely entered Austria...
... when Hitler demanded the annexation of Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia. He insisted that the province... which was home to over three million ethnic Germans... be allowed to secede and join the Reich. On October 1, with international agreement... German troops marched into Sudetenland... adding one-fifth of Czechoslovakia to the Reich... and opening the way for further dismemberment of the country. From then on, people were wondering... what would happen next. Father was an optimist because... he did business with people in France who wrote and said: "It's going to be bad, get out." But for Father, no, things like that wouldn't happen. He had a greater faith in mankind. He used to say that he would rather trust people and be disappointed... then go through life not trusting anybody. Less than half a year later... Hitler would destroy the Czech state. But now, the Nazis continued their persecution of the Jews. In November, they orchestrated a vicious pogrom... which they later called Kristallnacht: "The Night of Broken Glass." I had had a strange dream in the night... that my father was being arrested. Our evening meal that evening... was the last meal I ever remember having with my father. I looked at him... and I thought, well, I hadn't really... seen his features properly. You know how you look
at somebody intensely?
And something told me...
...that I must imprint
that image of him in my mind.
Before I went to bed...
...my father, in a rather stern voice,

**said to me:**
"If you hear any strange noises
during the night...
"...immediately get out of bed...
"...and go into that wardrobe
in the hallway."
And I said, "I don't understand."
And quite differently than my father...
...would normally answer my questions,

**he said:**
"Don't ask any questions,
just do as you're told."
I was woken up at 2:00 a.m.
Terrible banging on the door.
There were two...
...Nazis at the door, shouting:
"You're all under arrest!
Put some clothes on and come with us!"
I remember that it was a very cold...
...very dark night. We all went off...
...to an assembly point,
which was like a big square.
And there were just...
...thousands of other Jews.
And I mean thousands.
And there were people I knew
and people I didn't know.
And people getting beaten up.
And people crying.
I think everybody was petrified.
I also remember very vividly
that they were beating up the rabbi.
And they had fetched the Torahs
out of the synagogue.
And I think they were trampling on them.
I took my bicycle
and went to school as always. There was no Jewish business that I passed...
... that wasn't broken into. The merchandise was either on the street...
... or looted completely. As I got closer to school...
... I saw huge pillars of smoke...
... coming from the sections...
... where the two big synagogues in Frankfurt were. And I saw that they were on fire. Our school happened to be just opposite on the street where the synagogue was. I was dragged out with the stream of children. Everybody went to the playground...
... to watch these flames. And suddenly somebody said: 
"There's a Jew! "Let's throw her on the fire as well!"
I don't know how I got home. I still don't know today how I got home. And when I got home...
... my mother was absolutely shocked. My father had been arrested. My father was quite an outspoken person. When they came to Buchenwald...
... and they took away all the men's braces and shoelaces...
... he protested and said, "You can't treat these old people like this."
So they made an example of him. They beat him to death...
... in front of everybody...
... in order to instill terror and obedience. They offered us my father's ashes in return for money...
... and eventually the urn came. And we buried it in the Jewish cemetery. Of course, whether it was his ashes, one never knows. We heard loud banging on the door downstairs...
... and so my aunt, my mother and I...
... ran up into the attic.
We were hiding
in an old wardrobe up there.
And I do remember feeling
as though I had spent my entire life...
... in that wardrobe.
And I also remember
whispering to my mother:
"I want to get out of here,
and not just out of this wardrobe...
"... I want to get out of Germany."

World revulsion was swift.
Yet Britain was the only country
willing to relax its immigration controls.
But only for children who would not
threaten British jobs or public funds.
Days after the Nazi pogrom...
... Anglo-Jewish leaders
met with Prime Minister Chamberlain...
... and urged him to let into the country
unaccompanied children...
... Christian as well as Jewish...
... up to the age of 17.
Six days later,
Quakers joined Jewish leaders...
... to present the government
a concrete rescue plan...
... to be funded by refugee
and religious organizations.
That night, the House of Commons
debated the issue...
... and approved the plan.
My youth leader said:
"Call Otto Hirsch.
"There is a job for you to be done."
So I went and saw him, and he said:
"I have a request.
"We have been informed...
"... that the British government,
the House of Commons...
"... had discussed the destiny
of Jews in Germany after...
"... all this publicity...
"...and they are disgusted."
"They came to the conclusion...
"...to accept children for a certain time.
"We have an office for the operations.
"See what you can do."

As the transports got underway in Germany and Austria...

... thousands of Sudetenland refugees continued to flee to Prague.

English stockbroker Nicholas Winton...

... was summoned by a friend to view the situation for himself.

He toured refugee camps with Doreen Warriner...

... a representative of the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia.

We did have the feeling that the position was much more urgent...

... than anybody in London thought.

Doreen Warriner said, "I don't know what we will do about the children."

Almost spontaneously I said, "Well, when I get back to England..."

"... I find that the Home Office will allow them in..."

"... we'll try and get some of them into England."

And when I went to the Home Office,

**they said:**

"Under certain conditions, you can bring in as many children as you like."

We had to produce...

... somebody who'd guarantee 50 against their re-immigration...

... which is about 1,000 today.

It was quite a lot of money.

And then I had to find a family who'd take each individual child.

It certainly wasn't easy, but it wasn't that difficult.

It's easier to get somebody to take a child than to take a grown-up.

I tried to get America involved...
... and wrote to a lot of the senators...
... and got a lot of answers
saying how concerned they were...
... and all the reasons
why they couldn't do anything.
In the United States...
... a congressional bill
to admit 20,000 child refugees...
... died in committee.
One of the arguments against the bill...
... was that accepting children
without their parents...
... was contrary to the laws of God.

My father said:
"Mommy and I cannot leave,
but you're going to leave."
I said, "What do you mean,
I'm going to leave?"
"You're going to England," he said.
"When?"
"Thursday," he said.
I knew...
... that she ought to go...
... that I ought to send her away...
... but I couldn't imagine
giving permission for her to go.
My husband said, "She must go."
He didn't listen to me.
He just arranged everything for her.
And I had to give in,
and I saw in the end that he was right.
But the hurt is unbelievable.
That cannot be described.
My father died when I was 3 years old.
My mother had to go out to work...
... so I wound up in the orphanage.
When Polish Jews were arrested
all over Germany...
... I'd found out that...
... my mother was deported.
I was on my own.
I had nobody, no one, nothing.
I went to the Gemeinde.
There was this wonderful woman
who knew me there.
She said,
"Pascha, what are you doing here?
"Where's your mother?"
I said, "My mother's been deported."
And she said to me,
"There's something happening now.
"I think you should get onto it."
It was the Kindertransport.
She said, "You'd better register
immediately because you're by yourself.
"What will you do?"
So I said, "Okay. I'll go to England."
Just like matter of fact,
as if it was nothing.
In hindsight...
... I think my sister and I...
... we owe it to my father's death...
... that we have survived...
... because they selected...
... children...
... who had problems...
... who'd lost parents or whose parents
could no longer look after them...
... to go on the Kindertransport.
Mother came home
and said that she'd enrolled us.
About a fortnight later...
... my parents were told that I could go.
A week or two after that...
... my parents decided my sister could go.
Now both of us would go.
That must have been very hard.
That would have been hard to decide
that we would both go.
We had about a fortnight before we left.
Into that fortnight,
both Mother and Father...
... were trying to give their instructions
and guidance...
... that they hoped
to have their whole lives to give.
My bar mitzvah was
a month after "Crystal Night."
It was held in an attic.
My father was not there,
he was still in a concentration camp.
It was just my mother.
I felt terrible.
There was no celebration afterwards.
There was nothing.
You read your part from the Torah, and...
...you did your haftorah
and you were finished.
And we were lucky that a minyan...
...showed up altogether.
I certainly felt...
... that the sooner we left Germany...
... the better off we would be.
My housemother wrote...
... to Baron James de Rothschild...
... asking if he would he take...
... 24 of her boys...
... her husband, herself...
... and her two daughters.
And he wrote back in January that...
...he would.
We thought of England...
... as a land of lords and ladies because...
... of the King and Queen,
and the two little princesses...
... appealed to us very much.
We saw their pictures in the newspapers.
The coronation with their ermine clothes
and crowns on their heads.
And we really thought that in England
that's how people dressed.
Perhaps not every day,
but sometimes on Sundays.
So that was our expectation of England.
I was told this was the best thing
that could happen...
...and I was so lucky...
...because everybody around me
was trying to find places...
...for their children.
And, suddenly, out of the blue...
...I had a chance to come to England.
How lucky can I be?
My parents said
I'd be able to go back to school...
... I will learn another language...
... I will live in London,
I will be able to travel on the subway...
And painted a beautiful picture.
And added, again and again:
"And we'll follow soon."
However, a few days or so
before I was to leave...
...I accused my parents
of trying to get rid of me.
I said to my parents,
"I'm really a gypsy child...
"...and now you're trying to get rid of me.
You adopted me...
"...and now you no longer want me."
I must have really, deeply,
deeply hurt my parents.
Since German policy in 1938
was to force Jewish emigration...
... the Nazis willingly let
the children leave...
... as long as they did not take
any valuables with them.
Each child was allowed one suitcase...
... one piece of hand luggage...
... and ten reichsmark.
We had four days...
... to pack and go.
My parents were so busy getting ready
the things I was going to take...
... that I don't think they nor I had time...
... to think about what was happening.
My mother prepared all our clothes.
She lovingly embroidered our names...
... on every piece of clothing,
even every handkerchief...
... every sock...
... everything.
I think I took my teddy bear.
My mother...
... always slept on a little pillow on top of her big pillow...
... and I asked her if I could take that with me. She said, "Sure."
Mother had new clothes made for both of us.
We had a dressmaker at home who did all the sewing.
And some clothes she bought.
Otherwise, around my neck... because we were baptized,
hoping that would be... 
... of some help...
...I had a little cross... 
...and I had a little elephant... 
...and I had a sort of... It wasn't a Jewish star, but it was a little angel.
I put them all together because I thought the Almighty could choose... 
...which religion he would like me to belong to.
So sad the things I remember.
I remember that last evening, when all the cousins and all the aunts...
... came to say good-bye.
There was one aunt who had twins. She was extremely angry with my parents...
... for getting me onto this transport, and for not having managed to get...
... her twins onto the transport.
There was grief and panic and fury in that room.
There was a moment...
...that my father took me between his knees...

...and he said:
"Now, when you get to England...
"...you must talk to all the English people you meet and you have to ask them...
"...to get your mother and me out,
and your grandparents out."
And because this aunt was there
and had been so unhappy...
...and so angry, he said,
"And Aunt so-and-so's twins."
Before long, I had a list...
... of people whom I, at 10 years old,
had promised to save from Hitler.
The transports began in December...
... barely three weeks
after the Nazi pogrom.
Although a few children traveled by plane...
... the majority departed by train.
Some trains left during the day...
... many others in the dead of night.
Each child was given a number.
My number...
... and I still have it, was 152.
This was a number that every child...
... put around its neck...
... and a similar number
was attached to our suitcases.
There we stood, in our groups of fifty,
I think it was...
... and there was my mother and my father.
My mother kept up...
... a conversation with me
as if this was an ordinary and interesting...
... thing that was happening.
But I remember that she wore...
... a pony fur with a fox collar...
... and her face was inside the fox collar.
I remember that although her speech was
as if everything was ordinary...
... her face, I remember, was hot.
It was red and hot.
Every parent promised their child:
"We will soon come and follow."
How otherwise did the parents...
... get the little children onto the trains.
"Give us a few weeks, when things...
"... will either blow over
and you'll come back again...
"... or we'll come join you."
That was a promise
every parent made to their child.
There came the time to say to the parents:
"You cannot go to the platform.
The police will not allow it.
"You have to say good-bye here."
So I ascended a chair there...
...and addressed the people.
Where I got the courage to do that,
I don't know.
But I told the parents:
"This is your last good-bye."
They didn't want the German public
to know what was going on...
... because they had experiences
of parents weeping...
... and fainting at the platform.
So we had to say good-bye...
...groups had to say good-bye,
in an anteroom.
The scenes were pretty horrendous.
When my sister and brother left...
... all the other parents were crying bitterly.
I was so afraid.
I didn't want my mother to cry...
... because she was a very strong person.
I thought, "If she cries"
"...terrible things will happen."
I kept on looking at her, and I said,
"Don't cry. You won't cry." And she didn't.
I got to the station,
which was crowded with people.
All the children had parents with them...
...and I was sitting there all by myself.
I had no parents. Nobody.
I was just there with a suitcase.
There was nobody's shoulder
I could cry on.
All I knew was I was going away.
I was going to England.
Whatever would happen would happen.
Every day my father said:
"Pupela, I don't want you to go.
"But I want you to go
because it'll be good for you."
The day came and we went.
My mother and dad
went with me inside the train...
...and put my suitcase up.
My seat was right at the window.
The German trains
had great big windows...
... and my father pulled that
all the way down...
... so I could be leaning out of the window.
He hugged and kissed me.
I could see my father's face getting...
... whiter and whiter.
I thought, "I only hope nothing
is going to happen to him."
He looked so terribly, terribly pale.
My poor mother
was getting worse and worse.
I couldn't wait for the train to go...
... because I didn't want to remember that.
The guy came...
... and he waved the signal.
When the train started to go,
my father says, "Pupela..."
"... let me hold your hands!"
And I held my hands and said,
"I have to let go! I have to let go!"
"No! I don't want you to go!
I don't want you to go!"
And we were already...
My father couldn't walk very fast...
... because he walked with a cane.
We went a little bit more...
... and he took me by my hands
and he pulled me out of the window.
And I fell.
I could have fallen in-between...
... the platform and the train.
There was only a small amount of space.
I didn't, but I got hurt and I was bleeding...
... and I was devastated.
Absolutely devastated.
And my father was in seventh heaven...
...that he had his little Pupela,
his little girl, back.
The parting was terrible.
That's the one thing I have never...
... forgotten in all my life.
And she had been so controlled.
She'd always been...
... a sort of solid...
... support to us.
And suddenly she showed her feelings...
... and it was terrifying, really terrifying.
We saw this face...
...which showed all the hurt...
...and agony she'd been through.
And I can still see my father that mealtime.
But I would have liked to have had
a happier image of my mother.
That's the only image...
...of this contorted...
...face...
...full of agony.
It was very sad.
I remember standing by the window
and waving good-bye...
... and just trying hard to believe...
... that we really would come back.
That it won't be for very long.
But when the train moved
and they disappeared from sight...
...both Vera and I
cried in each other's arms.
My parents ran along the train...
...on the platform.
And I still remember, sort of in my head...
...I heard that refrain,
"You're leaving! You're leaving!"
I watched their faces.
Tears were streaming down their faces...
...down their cheeks.
And I knew then...
...these people really love me.
This is why they're sending me away.
I immediately started to write
to my parents.
And I apologized
for what I had said to them...
... that they were trying to get rid of me.
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.
The children went with the hope
that the parents would follow...
... or that one day they could come back
and see them again.
I did not realize...
... and I could never have realized...
... that only a year and a half later...
...from the same railway station...
...trains would go in the other direction...
...to Hitler's slaughterhouses.
I remember all that day we sang songs.
We ate the things
that our mothers had given us.
When we got to the border,
it got very frightening...
... because the train stopped
at the last station...
... before Holland.
The big girls were very frightened
and they scared us.
They said, "Don't move."
You know what happens when you sit
and don't move?
You begin to tremble
if you tense yourself enough.
I remember that I was sitting there
so tense that I was vibrating.
The Nazi border guard...
... very officiously came around...
... and made some of the children
open their suitcases.
They shouted at us...
...and threw their weight about.
They were looking for
new things people had.
Children had new clothes and things.
They didn't like that.
They gave the children a tough time.
Children kept crying and crying.
We were there quite a while.
They took their time
and enjoyed doing what they did to us.
Then suddenly we were in Holland.
Everyone was cheering:
"Those damn Nazis!
They should drop dead! Now we are free!"
There was howling, yelling, shouting,
and singing.
It was the best party I've ever been at...
... although I didn't really understand
what was happening.
I was holding a big girl around the waist,
and she was holding me.
They knew the songs they were singing.
They were probably Zionist songs...
...but I sang along
because it was so much fun...
... to be part of this party.
Not only were the frontier guards
on the Dutch side very nice...
... they had a contingent of ladies...
... who brought us cocoa...
...and Dutch zwieback.
It was like manna from heaven.
It was wonderful.
You suddenly felt
as though you'd been clad...
...in a cloak of lead or iron...
...and it had been taken from you.
It was a wonderful feeling of freedom.
We started to smile.
I don't think any of them
had smiled for a long time.
It was wonderful.
Then the train went on
to Hoek van Holland.
We got onto the boat...
... which took us to Harwich. It was an unpleasant trip because...
...the English Channel...
...is one of the worst places in wintertime to cross.
We had small children and people got seasick. It was some how-do-you-do.
I have a very vivid memory of waking up...
...and seeing the sea for the first time, with the sunrise on it...
...and thinking how beautiful it was.
It was only the British Channel...
... but it seemed a long way from home in 1939.
And so, it was a mixture...
...of elation because we saw something so beautiful, and saw the sea, while this...
...fear within me, which never left me for those six years, of:
"What's going to happen...
"...at home?"
Refugees from terror.
The first boatload from Nazi Germany.
Vanguard of an army of helpless children.
Uprooted from their homeland in a modern exodus.
Each Kindertransport was lead by adult escorts...
... on the condition that after delivering the children...
... all escorts would return home...
... or else the transports would be ended.
A couple of times I traveled with them.
At one transport the customs official...
... checked and said, "We have a problem."
He said, "This young man here brought a violin...
"...which is very, very expensive.
"This is not an ordinary violin."
I said, "Well, don't forget...
"...these young people take music lessons...
"...and obviously
he liked music very much...
"...so he took his violin along."
This didn't sit well...
... so I gambled.
I said to that boy:
"Can you play something?"
And he said, "Sure."
And he was playing God Save the King.
And that boy couldn't be stopped.
He played all three stanzas.
When he was finished,
the guard looked very happy.
I asked the fellow, "Are you now
convinced, sir, that he likes music?"
And he said, "Yes!"
So, the boy got his violin into England.
Then came the arrival...
... at Liverpool Street Station.
Everyone was being picked up...
... and I wasn't.
I remember sitting
in an enormous arrival hall.
And I just sat.
Nobody came to me, nobody talked to me.
I think I must have sat for an hour.
Maybe longer, I don't know.
Then came two people,
who were my guardians...
...and they introduced themselves.
They explained that they lived in Lincoln.
They didn't speak one word of German...
...and I didn't speak one word of English.
If they said, "Lincoln,"
that could have been anywhere.
Never heard of the place.
My mother sent me off saying:
"Whoever is going to be good enough
to take you in and give you a home...
"...you must treat as a temporary mother."
When we arrived back
from Liverpool Street...
...and we all went to bed...
...in the evening...
...I went up to her,
put my arms around her...
...and she pushed me away.
And her words were, "That's sissy."
She may have said something else like,
"We don't do this, that's sissy."
But the words "That's sissy"
have never left me.
The children arrived in England
at the rate of about 300 a week.
Those who were not already placed
in foster homes...
... were taken to temporary centers
hastily set up in summer holiday camps...
... like Dovercourt.
They did try and keep us busy.
The memorable part
of this camp experience was...
... that it was one
of the coldest winters in history.
We all went for breakfast to this big hall.
The snow came in through the cracks.
We had this curious food. We had kippers.
What little Austrian-Jewish child
has ever heard of kippers?
Here was this salty,
shoe leather on our plates...
... and it had snow on it. It was interesting.
While we were sitting around the stove...
... always with our coats on
and with our little gloves on...
... groups of people would come...
... to choose children
to take away with them.
We called it the "Cattle Market"...
... because every Saturday and Sunday
we were told to put on our best clothes...
... and visitors used to come.
We felt a bit like the monkeys in the zoo.
We were being stared at and evaluated.
People were chosen, taken away
from the tables, and interviewed...
... if you were suitable
to be taken to their families.
Most families...
of about three to seven.
Little boys were accepted as well.
And the older children found it
a bit more difficult...
...to find foster parents.
Of course, by that time,
they hastily established hostels...
...to take a big influx of the children...
...who weren't chosen quickly,
because we had to be chosen fast.
In and out, the camp was filled.
Every week,
another transport would arrive.
I was writing a letter to my parents...
... and one of these ladies in a fur coat...
... bent down to me and asked me...
... if I would like to come to Liverpool.
I said, "Yes, I would like
to come to Liverpool."
She said to the other woman,
"Oh, she speaks English."
By speaking English, I mean,
I could understand:
"Would you like to come to Liverpool?"
And I could say "Yes."
Then they said to me, "Are you Orthodox?"
I said, "Yes."
They wrote that down.
It was understood that I was going to go
to Liverpool the next day...
... and when the ladies had gone...
...I wrote in my letter to my parents,
"By the way, what is Orthodox?"
My brother had been chosen first...
... to be the playmate
of a little boy in Coventry.
Then they asked me if I'd like to go
to a family there.
Of course, I jumped at the chance.
I wanted to be near my little brother.
They chose me as a maid, but I didn't know
I was supposed to be a maid.
I hadn't ever thought
of becoming a servant.
But I drew the line.
I point blank refused to wear a uniform.
I think they took me
to show off in front of the neighbors...
...because they were working-class people.
The culture shock was very great...
... and also the fact that my clothes
were better than hers.
She took great exception to that
and she took the clothes and all.
The children whom we brought over
and placed...
...I think, in the main, were satisfactory.
One can never claim 100 percent.
There were certainly some who weren't.
There were certainly some
who were misused...
...and used as servants
if they were of the right age.
I wouldn't claim that it was
a 100-percent success, but...
...I would claim that everybody
who came was alive at the end of the war.
You felt you wanted to do something.
There was a meeting in Norwich...
... of a few Jewish congregates,
and non-Jewish.
They said, "Any offers to take children?"
My husband and I said yes.
Then some photographs
were handed around.
I remember there were some boy twins.
My heart ached,
but we couldn't afford it in those days.
We didn't know what was going to happen.
So that's when we took Kurt.
Percy and Mariam...
... picked me up at the boat...
... and took me back home.
At the entrance stood...
...the maid who, I would learn later,
actually ran the household...
...and halfway up the stairs
sat a little boy of five...
...looking at his "new" brother.
When we got home,
my maid, Selena, was there...
...and she said to me,
"Can't we change it?"
He was filthy, you know,
and smelt of sick and everything.
Anyhow, we gave him a bath.
My grubby clothes,
after three days of travel, were torn off me.
Burned, I learnt later.
I was scrubbed from head to toe...
... and then dressed in English clothes.
Then the family got together
for a chicken dinner.
That I remember.
That's a language I could understand.
And I started to feel more at ease.
I learned English...
... by being sent to a German man,
rather old...
... who lived a few houses down
the same street.
Maybe I thought he was a Nazi,
but I was terrified of him.
In fact, I was so terrified
that I learned English so quick...
...so I wouldn't have to see him again.
Then six weeks later,
I wrote to my parents in English:
"I no longer speak German."
I never have,
and I've never been able to re-learn it.
He was very, very good.
He liked the sweet things
and John liked the savory...
... but they got on very well together.
But I noticed, well, we knew every night...
when it was dark...
...he'd come down the stairs
and he'd see that the door was locked.
That was one thing I remember.
My mother was in London...
... so for me the separation
was not as traumatic...
... because I was going to something.
I came to the London station...
... and she picked me up
and took me where she was working.
Then I stayed in this very cold...
...fancy house in England...
...where they were exploiting
the European maids.
And, of course,
if you've ever been the child of a maid...
...you know maids
aren't supposed to have children.
They're not welcome. You can't stay there.
I don't know how the decision was made,
but I was to be sent to Belfast...
... to the Jewish refugee hostel in Belfast.
When you see your life has been saved
and you're brought into a hostel...
... and there is food there...
... and other children...
...how could you not be happy there?
But, to me, it smelled of orphanage,
...which, in due course, it became.
And orphanages, those things
frighten every child out of its wits.
I mean, Charles Dickens,
to be in a workhouse, to be an orphan.
My first impression of Waddesdon Manor
was like a dream...
... like a castle I've seen in pictures...
... but never in person.
The Cedars was a servants house.
Twenty-six of us lived in The Cedars.
The first thing we did
was throw a soccer ball on the lawn...
... and kicked it around.
The local boys wanted to see what was,
all of a sudden...
... being brought into their little village.
When it was time for dinner...

...they said:
"We'll see you tomorrow."
I was so excited.
I was absolutely so exuberant.
I ran to my housemother...

…and told her:
"Somebody who's not Jewish
wants to see me tomorrow."
We did start going to school there.
It was marvelous.
That you could participate.
And I did enjoy going to school.
And the wonderful part about it
was that it had a library.
I waded through that library...
…and that's how I learned
to speak English.
Through that
I got a love of English literature.
But altogether...
…it was a wonderful experience,
and the children were so friendly to us.
I knew that I was going
to a school near Bournemouth in Dorset.
It was the headmistress of the school
who guaranteed...
… to look after me.
When I arrived at the school,
it was all these girls...
… who were very polite...
… and very nice, very kind.
I couldn't understand a word they said.
I was given my bed.
The curtains could be drawn,
to give me some privacy.
The first thing I did was...
… put a picture of my parents
on the bedside table...
… so I could say goodnight to them.
The first three months
before war broke out...
… we could still write home.
So I could share my experiences
with my parents...
...and I had letters very frequently.
So I didn't feel quite so isolated.
"As you can well imagine...
"...you have been constantly
in our thoughts.
"We still see your face before us
in that window...
"...of the railway carriage."
"My dearest little mouse:
"Hopefully this letter will reach you
already in your new home...
"...where you surely will enjoy your stay.
"Be a very good little girl.
"Be obedient."

"Dear Parents:
"How are you both?
"Today I had my first English lesson.
"Greetings and kisses."
"I was very happy
with your dear little letter...
"...only there shouldn't be
so many spelling errors!"
"If only I could see you
just for a tiny moment...
"...but, as it is,
I can only write letters full of longing."

"Dear Daddy:
"...for the game of cards...
"...and the brooches...
"...and the bracelet.
"I had a game with them."
"I keep running to the mailbox.
"Every line from you overwhelms me.
"Every day I thank God...
"...that you are in such good hands...
"...but please show your gratefulness."
"My dear, good, darling parents:
"I feel very safe here.
"If only I was not so very scared...
"...about your safety."
"For my birthday, you wrote me...
"...that I'll always have to be brave...
"...because you can't be happy if I'm not.
"And I can assure you...
"...that I always grit my teeth and smile."
"Your letter of yesterday
was again so sweet...
"...and written with so much love...
"...that tears came running down
your mommy's face.
"Your writing is so natural...
"...it makes me imagine
that you're standing before me. "
"Your letters come to us like sunshine.
"It's our future that gives us big worries.
"We yearn to get away from here.
"That's our fondest wish.
"It'll be a difficult task for you
to bring us over there...
"...but I have the feeling
you'll manage it in time."
When I arrived in England...
... I made it my priority...
... to try and find homes for people...
... because I felt people didn't know...
... how desperate it was in Germany.
My biggest problem
was to try and get my parents out.
That was difficult,
because it was either finding them a job...
... and bearing in mind my father's age...
...or getting this 100 guarantee...
...which was just nowhere to be seen.
I proceeded...
... to find large houses...
... and knock at the door to find out...
... whether I could get them a job.
My mother as a cook or bottle washer.
My father as a gardener.
Anything just to get them out.
Sometimes I knocked at the door
and I burst into tears.
Sometimes I knocked at the door,
and with my very poor English...
... tried to explain what it was all about...
...who I was, what I wanted,
what I needed:
I did find someone...
...and it was just...
...like an unbelievable dream come true.
My father had a first cousin...
... in London.
Every weekend I took the train
into London...
... and bombarded him.
I said, "Uncle Paul...
"...you've got to get my parents
out of Germany."
He said, "I can't do it."
After me being so insistent

he finally said:
"I'll give him an affidavit
if he has a working permit."
I went back to the Rothschild estate...
... knocked on the door
and the butler...
...who was about 10-foot-6
came out...
...and said to me:
"What do you want?"
I said,
"I want to speak to Baron Rothschild."
He said, "Wait here."
I waited.
A couple of minutes later he says:
"Follow me."
I said to him, "Baron Rothschild...
"...my father's cousin will give him...
"...and my mother a visa...
"...provided he has a working permit."
Without hesitation...
...he said to me,
"Would he work on a chicken farm?"
I said, "He'll do anything."
He went to a notary...
... and made out a working permit
for my parents.
The family that chose me...
... were the only people
I could rely on to give a visa...
... for my little sister.
She was a beautiful little girl.
They had no children.
I showed them the photograph of Inge...
... and they seemed to like her very much.
But I realized one thing:
Uncle Billy...
... hated red hair.
Uncle Billy was paying maintenance...
... for a red-haired child,
not his, by his first wife.
Well, say no more.
Inge was a bright redhead.
The question of hair color never arose
because I had brown hair.
One day he said to me quite idly:
"What color hair does your sister have?"
I said, "Oh, like mine."
No more was said.
And they gave permission for her
to come and they would take her in.
I went very happily to England.
It was an adventure, you know,
to go abroad, to go on the train.
My sister wrote fantastic letters.
Everything was wonderful.
She was having a marvelous time.
So was my brother.
My brother said he had a dog.
When I got there...
... actually there was a dog and a cat.
The dog bit me.
I didn't think much of that.
Inge arrived, her hair aflame...
... titian-red...
Uncle Billy was furious.
He turned around
and he called me a so-and-so liar.

I said to him:
"Because Inge has red hair,
I leave her at home in Germany?
"Now you send her away. Don't mind. Thank you for asking her here."
He calmed down in the end and he did accept her into the house.
I think, I had a sense... while I was playing, while I was laughing...
...that was the moment when I could and should've been doing something about...
...this demand on me that I should bring my parents out.
From Dovercourt camp I wrote a couple of letters... to the Refugee Committee in London.
I think they must have been moved by a letter... from a child asking to get her parents out of Vienna.
They did get my parents a domestic service visa. My parents appeared miraculously, in Liverpool...
... on my 11th birthday.
I remember feeling... that some terrific weight that I had been carrying...
...and hadn't known I had been carrying... was taken off my back.
Everything was being done to get the papers... for my parents to come out... and war started.
And that was the end of that. I just felt the world had come to an end. Shattering, if I think about it.
Everything was built... around this reunion and my temporary stay in England. The fateful hour of 11:00 has struck...
... and the state of war once more exists between Great Britain and Germany.
Only 25 minutes after war was declared came the first air-raid warning. Everything we'd ever talked about
or written about...
... or thought about, had all collapsed.
Everything had collapsed.
I think I cried for not weeks,
not months, I cried for years.
War ended all Kindertransports
and legal immigration...
... from Central Europe to England.
It also ended regular mail
between the children and their parents.
The only way
they could now communicate...
... was by 25-word postcards
sent through the International Red Cross.
The isolation came
when the letters ceased.
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.
I wrote at that time in my diary:
"I never dreamt
that one could be so lonely...
"...and go on living...
"...with this constant fear
for our loved ones.
"The tears I shed at night
do not ease my pain...
"...yet I was told that one feels better
after a good cry.
"All I have is a swollen face...
"...and my heart
is as heavy as it was before. "
My pillow often was very wet
in the morning.
There was a gardener...
... who didn't understand perhaps
what I was going through.
But he always said to me,
"Don't worry, it won't last long."
And whether I believed him or not
it was good to hear him say that.
And he always gave me a flower.
Within a few months
of their arrival in England...
... many of the refugees,
along with other English children...
... were forced to evacuate
to new families in the country...
... to escape the expected bombing
of the cities.
- You consented to take two children?
- Yes, I'll take in two children.
Two little girls. They'll
be happy with you, I'm sure.
- Thank you very much.
- Two nice little girls, aren't they?
None of the foster parents
with whom I stayed...
... and there were five of them...
... none of them could stand me
for very long.
All of them had the grace
to take in a Jewish child.
They were not particularly warm.
They did not love me.
I did not love them.
Nevertheless, they did,
as I say, what most of us don't do...
... which is to burden the household...
... the kitchens, the bedroom
and the living room with this foreigner.
Mariam was somewhat aloof.
It was her manner. She was loving, but...
... she didn't hug and kiss me.
My mother was the exact opposite.
She used to not just kiss me once...
... she sort of kissed me like "rat-tat-tat,"
like a machine gun.
But Mariam was distant and nice...
... and I think that's what I needed...
... because I had trouble...
... really...
... feeling that I belonged there.
To have sort of pushed me into it
would have been difficult.
He didn't cry, not at all.
I couldn't understand it.
This is London calling.
Just once...
... they used to like to listen
to some programs on the wireless.
He used to come sit on my knee.
And there was something in the news...
...I just heard him once go...
A little sob and that was all.
I tried really to please the Cohens
because I loved them...
... and I felt very dependent.
One of my main worries was
that I would be sent away.
I know this happened to
another boy, somewhat older...
...who was taken in by
some friends of the Cohens.
He was arrogant and impossible...
...and eventually they simply had
to send him to some other home.
I'd heard of other places
where this had happened.
So I felt very much...
...on edge.
Word came that my mother
was no longer in London.
She went back to Vienna...
... to get my father to move,
who was impassive.
So I really did make up my mind
that I would be as tough as nails.
Nothing would hurt me.
I would have no emotions.
And it carried me through
for about six or seven years.
I got a scholarship to a grammar school.
People were saying to me,
partly in jealousy:
"You know, they are snobs in these
schools and they're anti-Semites.
"You gotta watch yourself.
They're gonna take it out on you. "
And I went to school.
I had a school tie, I guess...
or a blazer.
I was just entering a new world.
The sun was shining.
I went to school, and a fellow came
up to me and said, "Who are you?"
And I just knocked him down.
There was no doubt a cost...
...trying to be good all the
time and keeping my anger in.
Only once did it slip.
One day John and I
were having breakfast...
... and there was some silly argument
over who got the marmalade first.
And Kurt threw a knife. That
was the only time he was naughty.
John had a little wound here, which
was near his eye. It wasn't nice.
Dr. Rose, who was our friend,
and lived a few doors down...
...he came in and he was furious.
"You shouldn't have
taken this child in."
It terrified the entire family and me, too.
Since then I've been somewhat afraid
of my possibility of letting go to anger.
The other signs that I had
a lot inside me was that...
... I always had some
intestinal problems...
...until I went into the army, and then
I had the most terrible food and felt fine.
I have an analogy for this:
When all of us have had
the experience of finding...
...a bird with a broken wing...
...and you pick up this bird
and you hold it in your hand...
...and you think it's going to sit there,
quietly, sweetly...
...with its warm feathers, and be darling.
It's not. It immediately tries...
...to use its muscles and it's a very uncomfortable thing to hold in your hand...
...because there's this fluttering.
What he wants is to get away.
It may need you to hold it and nurse it...
...but what he wants is to get the heck out of there.
I think that's what we were like.
Certainly, that's what I was like.
I was not nice to have around.
I got a new job in London...
... and I was working there until June 28, 1940.
It was lunchtime and I was having a sandwich...
... when suddenly two guys appeared. Two men.
"CID."
"What have I done?" "Nothing."
"You are Abrascha Gorbulski?"
"You are now under arrest."
"Under arrest? For what?"
"You are an enemy alien, please come with us."
After Germany invaded Western Europe...
... the British began rounding up all refugees from Germany and Austria...
... who were over the age of 16.
Although the vast majority were refugees from Nazi persecution...
... anyone with a foreign accent was viewed as a potential saboteur.
Within a few months...
... the government interned approximately 30,000 men and women.
Plans were made to deport as many as possible.
The good thing about life is you remember all the good things...
... that happened to you.
Bad things, you forget about them.
In fact, you have to make an effort to really remember them.
They came and we had to go to a ship. Soldiers were standing there with bayonets... ... mounted on their rifles. And they pushed us along and said: "Leave your luggage, you'll get it later on." They pushed us along the deck. Before long, we went down stairs, then more stairs. I was on the third deck. Over 2,500 prisoners... ... twice the capacity of the ship... ... were crammed onto the HMT Dunera... ... supposedly bound for Canada. Two days out of Liverpool... ... the Dunera was spotted by a German U-boat. Suddenly, something hits the ship. The lights went out. This is the end of it. Everybody gravitated towards the stairway... ... which led to the deck above. After about two minutes you couldn't get up there... ... because there were many people going up the stairs... ... we were just choking. Suddenly, the lights went on again. Everybody stopped in their... ... steps and went back down. The torpedo didn't explode... ... but I was under the impression that the torpedo hit us sideways. It just bounced off. Our luck, because if it had hit us... ... all of us would have been finished. We were traveling, going west for several days... ... but suddenly our outlook said: "Something's happening and we are not going west. We're going south." We had no idea where we were going, except it must have been Australia. We were starving daily.
They were treating us like pigs.
Being hungry every day,
people were lining up in the kitchen...
...to get an empty pot where the
jam was, just to scrape it out.
And having one slice of bread.
The existence from one day to
another was worse than the day before.
And we were on the ship
for almost completely two months!
What happened on the Dunera?
Years later, I'm thinking:
"This didn't happen to me.
It must have been somebody else...
"...because it was too
horrible to describe."
From an overseas liner in Sydney harbor...
... a strange contingent of new arrivals
is transshipped aboard a ferry.
Enemy aliens who are being interned
in Australia for the duration of the war.
Before we knew it, we were off the ship.
The first thing I remember
is that each one of us...
...got a box...
...of food. That was the best meal
I ever had in my life.
After starving for two months...
...I opened up the box.
There were two cheese sandwiches...
...thick like this, and a banana...
...and an apple, and an orange...
...and they were giving second helpings.
It was unbelievable.
As the war progressed...
... reports of mass arrests and deportation
of Central-European Jews...
... began to reach Britain.
In the spring of '43, the city of Berlin...
... was cleansed of the last Jews.
They came and took...
...my family and myself along.
We were taken to a collection point.
After a couple of days, we were deported...
to Auschwitz, though we did not know...
when we got to the train,
which consisted...
of cattle cars, where we were going.
We landed in Auschwitz
and the moment we landed there...
we were commanded to leave
the trains...
women with children to the left
and men to the right.
That was the last time that I saw
my wife, my then wife, and child.
Lory Cahn and her family
were deported to Theresienstadt...
the Czech ghetto the Nazis
used to deceive the world...
about how humanely they
treated their prisoners.
In time...
the population of Theresienstadt
exceeded its capacity.
One day...
they came into our barrack,
and my name was called...
to report to the railroad station.
I went to the railroad station.
As they called your name,
you had to go and see this SS guy...
and he crossed you off the list
and then you went into the car.
I got there and I repeated my name.
He said, "You're not going."
I had no idea.
I didn't dare ask why or what...
but that was the end of it
and they sent me back.
And this went on for maybe two weeks.
I'd been at the railroad station,
I think, four times.
And I was a complete wreck.
To say good-bye to your parents...
one time...
a second time, a third time
and a fourth time...
...and once before, when I
was in the Kindertransport...
...it was... just absolutely devastating.
Every time I said good-bye...
... I think I tore a little
piece out of my mother...
... and out of my father,
and also a big piece out of myself.
The last time it happened,
I said to the guy:
"Would you terribly mind,
but I want to go."
"Are you sure of that?" I said, "Yes."
He crossed my name off, and I went.
Little did I know
that we were going to Auschwitz.
It was a long period where I did
not hear anything from my parents.
I said, "Well, it's wartime..."
I found all kinds of reasons and excuses.
Then, finally, I received a letter
from my father in which he said:
"Tomorrow I'm going to be
deported to an unknown destination.
"And it may be a very long time
before you hear from me again."
Then I received a letter from my mother.
She said, "Tomorrow, I'm going
to be deported from here."
She encourages me to be good...
... honest and courageous...
... and to hold my head high...
...and to never give up hope.
And this at a time when I think she knew...
...what might be happening to her.
Then there was
one more communication from her.
A postcard dated September 4, 1942.
It's written in real shaky handwriting.
She's saying that she's traveling...
to the East...
... and is saying a very final good-bye to me.
But for many, many years...
... I would see the postcard in front of me...
... and I would see she's saying:
"Traveling to the East."
Yet I would understand that she's saying...
... she's traveling in an easterly direction.
Then I would say to myself:
"Maybe she's going back to Kippenheim.
And maybe that's good."
And the final good-bye, I didn't understand.
I always felt I should be grateful...
...that we'd been saved,
and that these people had taken us in...
... and that I should be happier there.
But facts are facts,
and it wasn't a good place to be.
Uncle Billy, who was not
a very courageous man...
...every night, he would
go into the country...
...and he took us with him.
We went to escape the bombs...
...until one day, the people
where we were staying...
...we all slept in a
room there in a cottage...
...and the people said
they didn't want the German children.
So we didn't go to the country anymore.
One day the sirens sounded...
... and what was known as
the "Coventry Blitz" started.
And then the bombs started to fall.
We stayed at Auntie Vera's
mother's who had a boarding house.
All night long...
... the bombs rained down...
... and Coventry was a very hot place to be.
We were in one house
and that was bombed.
There was a big fire upstairs
and everybody rushed out.
In the morning, when Auntie Vera
and Uncle Billy came back...
... and they saw one of the
boarding houses without any house...
... just a spiral of a bedstead...
... they were very shocked,
and they thought we'd been killed.
They rushed over to the other house...
...and there we were all drinking tea,
as alive as anything...
...and that was the only time
I saw Auntie Vera cry.
I think relief, because...
...I guess she had a heart after all.
- Jorgensky!
- Here!
- Tzufevich!
- Here!
- Leventhal!
- Here!
- Alba!
- Here!
- Rosenthal!
- Here!
- Tozic!
- Here!
- Tolina!
- Here!
Yes, they all have names like those.
This company, which I command...
...is almost entirely composed of
German and Austrian anti-fascists.
It is one of the fifteen alien
groups in the Pioneer Corps.
The Dunera scandal
and the harsh treatment of refugees...
... began to shift public opinion
in England against internment.
The government started
releasing internees...
... and allowed them to join
the British armed forces.
Those who wanted to go back to England...
... they would send back
under one condition:
They would join the army.
I was anxious to get into this.
First of all, I hated the Germans.
I hated their guts...
...and I wanted to be part of it.
Besides,
what was I going to do in Australia?
Sit in Australia throughout
the whole war? God forbid!
Girls, this is urgent.
If you're over 17-and-a-half and under 19...
... you can volunteer for the ATS.
The sooner you come,
the wider the choice of jobs available.
Come on, girls, it's urgent!
When I was 18...
... I had to do either
work of importance...
... or join the forces.
I decided to join the forces.
I also felt I was saying thank you
to England for saving my life.
I think, as a soldier, I felt...
...suddenly I was in
an environment where...
...I was the same as everyone else.
For the first time in my life, I think.
Because I think in Lincoln, I, more or less...
... think, I existed.
Because I was waiting for tomorrow,
and tomorrow, and tomorrow.
I had lots of friends and...
... I did things I hadn’t done before.
I felt like everybody else.
The people on my left, the people
on my right, we were all the same...
...and that, I think,
was the first time in my life...
...I felt that I could do everything
the other people were doing.
I wanted to do something
to help finish the war.
I said, "I want to go into nursing."
The first year, I nearly gave up.
I found it very difficult...
...but I was determined to do it.
The second year was better.
Then it grew on me.
We were so busy, I didn't have
time to think of myself, anyhow.
After about two years
of not hearing from our parents...
... life sort of stretched on endlessly,
but suddenly...
...we heard that our parents
had reached Spain.
Every night since I left
my parents, I had prayed:
"Please, God,
don't let it take longer than five years."
And five years almost to the day...
... we got the telegram.
The telegram said:
"Arriving Friday, 4:45."
That was all.
Unfortunately, 4:45 was the train...
...that my school friends
were coming back on, as well.
I knew that since the whole village...
...also knew they were coming,
they would all be at the station...
...and my school friends would see me...
...and my brother and sister,
meeting our parents...
...for the first time in five years.
It was a tremendous ordeal.
We went down to the station to wait.
And I couldn't cope with it.
So I went back home...

...and I said:
I'm going to put the kettle on.
"They'll need a cup of tea."
How English can you get?
I waited and waited and waited.
They took ages.
Suddenly, there's my brother and sister...
...with this middle-aged, elderly couple...
...with suitcases and bags,
coming up the path.
I remember rushing down to meet them.
I knew they were my parents... 
... but they weren't the 
same parents I'd left. 
They were much older 
and they were worn out. 
And we obviously weren't the same 
children that they'd sent off. 
Suddenly I realized I couldn't 
say anything except their names. 
"Mommy and Daddy" or "Mutti and Papa."
Then we just stood there... 
...looking at each other. 
It was such... 
...a traumatic moment. 
It was sad for Inge because she 
couldn't speak German anymore. 
My brother spoke it with difficulty. 
I was the only one 
who could communicate with them. 
But the barriers completely went... 
... and we became a family again. 
The cease-fire began 
yesterday, to be sounded... 
... along all the fronts. 
The German's war is therefore at an end. 
I remember VE Day very clearly. 
It was just wonderful. 
We all danced in Piccadilly Circus... 
... and for me, I just thought, well, this is it: 
I'm going to see my parents next week. 
I went straight back 
and wrote to both of them. 
I wrote separate letters 
because I had separate addresses... 
...through the Red Cross 
messages in Theresienstadt. 
The letters were returned to me 
about three or four months later. 
Took a long time. 
All it said on the back was: 
"Deported to Auschwitz... 
"...October, '44."
And war was finished in May '45. 
That's how I found out.
As soon as war finished...
... Hella and I went to
the Red Cross Community...
... and asked them to search.
Eventually we got a letter from them...
... saying that my mother
had been killed in Minsk...
... in Russia, where she was deported.
It's very hard to come to terms with
when you've always had that hope.
Of course, we've had...
... no grave, really...
... no parting, no end, no funeral.
It's that sort of...
... vague feeling in the air of hope...
... and that hope suddenly fading.
I remember nursing in
the children's ward...
... and I was always joking
with them and laughing.
And I was called to the telephone...
... and there was a telegram for me.
I asked her if she would read it.
So she read over the telephone:
"Your parents were gravely ill.
There was no hope.
"Wait for further news."
I probably didn't quite take it in...
... so I went back to the ward and started...
... carried on making beds, until
one of the little boys said to me:
"Why aren't you laughing this time?"
That's when I burst into tears and ran out.
I remember going out into the garden
and just lying on the lawn.
I didn't want to be with anybody.
It was such a shock.
And suddenly the future,
which we always painted...
... wasn't there. There was no future.
There was just an emptiness.
At the time I was liberated, a
month later, I would have been 20...
... and I weighed 58 pounds...
...and that's after
eight concentration camps.
Many times I've thought about it:
What would have happened if my father...
... wouldn't have pulled me out?
I would have never
mentioned it to my father.
You know, "Why did you do that?"
I think I would have done him very wrong.
And I can fully understand,
being a mother...
...what it would mean if this is
what I would have had to go through...
...with my child, God forbid.
My main concern was always:
Let me be strong and
let me try to make it.
I made it that far.
I want to make it to the end.
Regardless of what the end was.
Survival is an accident.
You cannot ask a soldier
who comes out of battle:
"Why were your comrades,
left and right, killed..."
"...and you survived?" You have no
explanation for that. It's an accident.
At the moment of liberation...
... we were very happy,
but on the other hand really very sad...
... because I realized...
...that I was one of the
last who had survived.
All the others who had gone with
me to Auschwitz or had been taken...
...to Auschwitz would never return.
In July 1945, I went back to Germany...
... to work for the American government.
One of the reasons
was to look for my parents.
The most sensible place to go to,
would be to go back to Kippenheim.
But I didn't go back
until August, 1947.
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 that maybe
they were back in Kippenheim...
...which doesn't really make
a lot of sense, but...
...I think it was just
my survival mechanism.
I just wasn't ready yet to accept the
fact that I no longer had parents...
... that I hadn't had parents for a long time.
Although the vast majority
of Kindertransport children...
... lost their mothers and fathers
in the Holocaust...
... remarkably a few parents survived...
... to be reunited with their children.
My parents managed to get out
of Austria by going to Italy.
And from Italy they got into France.
They were hidden by some
extremely wonderful people there.
After the war ended...
...I was told that my
parents were alive...
...and that some day I would probably
have to go back and live with them.
I think I was horrified by that idea.
Uncle Percy persuaded my parents...
... to wait until I'd finished the
English School Certificate at age 16.
And also, they needed time
to re-establish themselves.
Eventually, in 1947,
they were ready for me.
I didn't want to go,
but the Cohens took me to Paris...
... where I was to meet my parents.
I remember standing outside the hotel.
And I saw, in the distance,
my parents approach.
I couldn't look at them directly.
So I looked at them
their reflection in a shop window...
...as they walked towards me. I felt...
...a very, very strong emotion.
It was a sense of elation...
...and of love.
I suddenly felt it and fought it.
But I felt, you know, I knew it was them.
We met.
Kurt's father, who was more
demonstrative than the mother...
...put his hand through Kurt's curls...
...and Kurt went like that,
and gave him a wallop.
And my husband says,
"Don't you ever do that again, Kurt.
"Your father is showing you his affection."
And that was that.
When it came to say
good-bye to the Cohens...
...I realized for the first time,
I think, consciously that...
...they had loved me, especially Percy...
...because he was in tears,
and I'd never seen him cry...
...I'd never seen him cry before.
Then we had to leave him.
I remember him looking back.
It was very, very sad.
He didn't want to go.
He didn't know them.
My parents let go of a 7-year-old
and got back a 16-year-old.
And my mother, especially...
... wanted to carry on where she'd left off.
And a 16-year-old doesn't like
to be treated like a 7-year-old.
So, when we got back to France,
things were very difficult.
Of course, I'm very lucky. I realize this.
Where as most of the Kinder
never saw their parents again.
I not only had mine back,
but another set of parents as well.
What more could one ask for?
I ceased to be a child when
I boarded the train in Prague.
It's strange that it's only
six years out of a long life...
...and those six years will
affect the rest of your life.
I never belonged when I was a child.
I wanted somewhere to find roots.
I feel in, the latter years of
my life, that I've been accepted.
And nobody's ever said to me:
"You weren't born in this country."
I was as entirely accepted
as everyone else.
And I gradually felt...
... I had somewhere I belonged.
To be a refugee
is the most horrible feeling...
... because you lose your family,
you lose your home...
... you're also without an identity.
Suddenly, you're a nothing.
You are just reliant on other people's...
... good nature, and
help, and understanding.
That's why, I think, living in Israel...
...I feel for the new immigrants. I feel
for the Russians, and the Ethiopians...
...and anybody who's new,
especially if they come without families.
If I can do anything, I do it.
I am dazzled,
from the point of view of a writer.
Who else has
the unbelievably good fortune...
... to live with the Jewish manufacturer...
... the English
working-class union man...
... railroad stoker, the milkman...
... and the Anglo-Indian
Victorian ladies?
Whoever has the sheer...
...but being a helpless member
from the inside of these families?
Seems to me it was a gift.
Didn't seem so at the time.
I now look at my 14-year-old grandson...
... and I think, "This is the age when I lost...
"...parents, home, country."
A lot has been made up to
me from where I lost out.
I have a second cousin here.

He says:
you've got now." Which is so true.
And I'm very grateful
and very proud of the whole family.
The younger you were, the more
unforgiving you are of your parents.
You may say they were
so brave and saved you...
... but they really abandoned you.
We were four friends, very close friends.

We all agreed:
"If it ever happens again,
we will not send away our children.
"We will stay and die together."
That's what we said.
Later on, as we grew older,
we said we mitigated it, we said:
"If it ever happens, we promise
to take each other's children in.
"We will not send them to strangers."
I certainly do my
share of remembering...
... but remembering also has to have
a present and future perspective.
You can't just stop at remembering.
I don't think I ever made
a conscious decision...
... to devote myself to human rights...
... and social justice issues.
Someone helped me.
I can't pay back or thank
some of the people who helped me...
... but I can do something for other people.
I've come to a conclusion about myself:
In 1938, I escaped
the deportation of Poland.
I got out of Germany
in the Kindertransport.
I was sent to Australia on a ship.
The ship was torpedoed
and nothing happened.
I got back to England and was in the army.
Why all these coincidences?
I've come to one conclusion:
I was meant to survive.
Not because of myself...
...but because the Jews were to survive.
And I would bring up another generation.
And they would live. I look at my
children and my grandchildren...
...and I know that there was
a purpose to my life.