

HOLOCAUST:

RESISTANCE, RESCUE AND SURVIVAL

Kindertransport

By Stephen Adler, part of the Kindertransport, and a member of the Holocaust Center's Speakers Bureau.

*In November 1938, the Germans had a terrible **pogrom*** during which they burned all the synagogues, looted thousands of stores owned by Jewish merchants and arrested 30,000 Jewish men. My Dad was one of these men arrested. He was in a concentration camp for six weeks.*

After his release in late December, my parents began arranging for my brother's and my emigration.

I was selected to go on a Kindertransport to England. My parents took me to a train station in Berlin for the trip to Hamburg. From there, I boarded a ship to Southampton, England, along with hundreds of other Jewish boys and girls. I didn't know then whether I would see my family again.

I lived in a small house with a new family. I slept in an unbeated attic room. In spring of 1940, I was reunited with my brother, and that summer we met our mother and father again before traveling by ship to the United States in November 1940.



Stephen Adler – 1936 Berlin.

— Steve A. grew up in Germany, and was part of the Kindertransport. He currently lives in the Seattle area.

In 1933, German Jews made up less than one percent of the German population. German Jews saw themselves as fully German. After the Nazis came to power in 1933, the German Jews saw their rights being taken away. Professionals lost their positions in medicine, law, the arts and the universities. Many intellectuals and politically active persons were sent to concentration camps. Jews and non-Jews tried to leave Germany, but many Jews had trouble finding countries that would take them.

In Germany, November 1938, mobs attacked hundreds of synagogues, and thousands of Jewish owned stores had their windows smashed and merchandise stolen. The attack became known as **Kristallnacht** or “the night of broken glass.” The message to German Jews was clear — “Jews must escape from Germany.”

Few countries offered help to Jews. Jewish and non-Jewish activists in Great Britain pressured their government to allow 10,000 Jewish children to immigrate to Great Britain.

The government agreed on the condition that private individuals and organizations take care of them. Jewish organizations in Europe began registering Jewish refugee children between the ages of six and 15. The **Kindertransport**, or Children's Transport, took German, Austrian and Czechoslovakian children to England. Children were sent from their homes to train stations. Amid the tears and sobbing of children and adults, thousands of little children were bundled into trains for a ride to an unknown destination. They carried small suitcases and had nametags on their winter coats.

The trains took them to ports in Hamburg, Rotterdam, Holland and some in France; by ship the children traveled to England and safety.

Most of the younger children knew no English. Some were taken in by relatives and friends they had never met before. Others were sent to hostels where they lived in larger groups. The older boys and girls were often adopted or placed with foster-families. Some of these older children were used by their foster parents as low paid or unpaid domestic help. In some instances they were brought up as Christians. The majority of the children had positive experiences with the English families and homes that took them in.

Regardless of the different accounts of the Kindertransport children, all of them survived because of the refuge offered by the British government and its citizens. The large majority of the children never saw either or both parents again. Those adults, unable to find a way out of Europe to a country of refuge, were eventually sent to one of the death camps in Eastern Europe. Thus, the Kindertransport children were mostly orphaned by about 1942 or 1943.

*Pogrom —

From the Russian word for “devastation”; an unprovoked attack or series of attacks upon a Jewish community. (Jewish virtual library — www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org)

activities

1. As a class, discuss the various feelings and thoughts that the children must have experienced. How do you think they were able to survive emotionally? What tools might they have used to survive?
2. Historically, organized religion has always played an important role in a country. Do you agree? Why or why not? Do you think religion plays a role in our world today? Over the next week, look for articles and images in The Seattle Times that demonstrate religions role in our world today. Write an essay that presents your findings.
3. The role of children in our world is rarely explored in history and in our media. And yet, children have potential to make quite a difference. Look through today's Seattle Times for any mention of children — how do newspapers and media in general treat the role of children in our world? How should they? As a group, discuss how children and young adults' voices might be added to the newspaper. If it were, would you read the newspaper more often? Send your ideas and suggestions to The Seattle Times editors.

Published May 19, 2005

0305288



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