

10. Kindertransport

Study Questions

(Written by Stephen Adler, part of the Kindertransport, and a member of the Holocaust Center's Speakers Bureau)

1. Can you find other instances in today's news of children who are displaced and who might experience the trauma of the Kindertransport children?
2. What are modern governments doing to alleviate the suffering of refugees today that is different from what happened during 1938 and 1939?
3. What new techniques are there for treating the effects of trauma such as family breakup, displacement and separation? Have you heard of post-traumatic stress syndrome, and what connection is there between that and the Kindertransport story?
4. Is there a connection between memory blanks and traumatic experience? Have you ever discovered blanks in your memory?

Stephen A.
Berlin, Germany. 1936.

This picture of Stephen A. appears in the article. It was a custom of long standing in Germany for students to go to school for the first time with a large conical bag filled with fruit, nuts and candies. This bag was called a Schul-Tuete. "Schul" is German for "school" and "tuete" is a paper bag. It was approximately two feet long and about ten inches in diameter at the wide end. The conical bag was to be symbolic of the parents' wish that the child would see school and the time spent there learning as full of sweetness and a delight. Every child was



photographed proudly holding it. The photo we see here was taken before Stephen headed off to school Sankt Ludwig in the fall of 1936 when he was living in Berlin. He attended this school until about 1937 when, by law, he could no longer go to a school with non-Jewish children and had to leave. His parents sent Stephen and his brother to a Jewish private school where hundreds of other Jewish children went, all of them expelled from their schools. The Jewish community of Berlin created many Jewish private schools to accommodate the needs of children who were no longer able to go the schools of their choice.

My Friend Norbert

When we come together to remember rescuers during the Holocaust, we shouldn't forget to say a few words about my friend Norbert Wollheim.

One of the saddest stories during the Nazi years, not often mentioned, was the "Kindertransport." That was the time when parents sent their children to England in order to save their lives. Most of the children never saw their parents again.

But the whole episode started with Kristallnacht, "the night of broken glass." On November 7th, 1938, a young man with the name of Herschel Grynszpan, whose family, longtime residents of Germany, were forced to leave everything they owned and deported to Poland. Grynszpan correctly inferred that his family was in serious trouble, bought a pistol, went to the German Embassy, shot and fatally wounded Ernst von Rath, a legation secretary of the Embassy. As von Rath lay dying, Nazi plans were laid to give free rein to the "spontaneous eruption of popular anger." Synagogues were torched, more than 700 Jewish businesses were looted

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and about 30,000 Jewish men were sent to Dachau, Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen concentration camps.

In all that mess, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain pleaded with the British cabinet to allow 10,000 unaccompanied Jewish children into Britain, an action called the Kindertransport. As soon as the news came out, the Jewish Federation in Berlin sent notices to Jewish parents all over Germany and Austria asking them to bring their children to Berlin, to be transported to England.

As transport leader, Norbert Wollheim, a young married man of 25 years, was appointed to take charge. So Norbert took about 500 to 600 children from ages 5 to 16 in weekly transports to England.

I met Norbert in 1943 in Commando 80 in "Buna" Monowitz- Auschwitz. We worked side by side everyday. However, it wasn't until after the war that I found out what Norbert had done. Norbert was asked many times, "Why don't you stay in England?" But he didn't. With his wife and small child held hostage by the Nazi authorities, he always had to return. He and his family were deported to Auschwitz in March 1943, where only Norbert survived.

After the war, Norbert filed suit against I.G. Farben Industries, as one of 25,000 Jewish slave workers who had to work in the most inhuman conditions producing synthetic rubber and gasoline.

Norbert won his lawsuit, but instead of taking money for himself, he helped establish a fund so that other survivors also received some restitution.

In 1951, Norbert married again, only to lose his second wife, the mother of his two children in 1977. As a lonely man for years, Norbert had the luck to find C., who as his third wife, was his true companion and friend until his death on November 1st, 1998.

Norbert was involved in the production of the documentary "Into the Arms of Strangers," the story of the Kindertransport. Norbert passed away 60 days before the first showing of the documentary after a short illness. He will be missed by all his friends and survivors who happened to know him.

—Klaus S.
 March 2002

Klaus S., a Holocaust survivor living in Seattle, is an active member of the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center's Speakers Bureau.

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Suggested resources for more information on the Kindertransport:

- **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia:** ushmm.org

From the homepage, select "History" at the bottom of the page. Click on "Holocaust Encyclopedia" and then select "Rescue."

- **Teacher's Guide to the Holocaust — Florida Center for Instructional Technology:**
fcit.coedu.usf.edu/holocaust/people/children.htm

Includes articles on the Kindertransport, children in hiding, and the different experiences of children during the Holocaust. Also includes weblinks to individual stories of the Kindertransport.

- **Drucker, Olga Levy. "Kindertransport." New York: Scholastic, 1992.**

"The Levys arranged for their children to be part of the Kindertransport operation: Little Ollie was sent away, by train, to far-off England, where she spoke not a word of the language and knew no one." A powerful autobiographical story.

- **Fox, Anne L. and Eva Abraham-Podietz. "Ten Thousand Children: True Stories Told By Children Who Escaped the Holocaust on the Kindertransport." New Jersey: Behrman House, 1999.**

"The remarkable experiences of these fortunate children are dramatically brought to life in this collection of genuine, first-person accounts."

- **Harris, Mark Jonathan, and Deborah Oppenheimer. "Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport." New York: Bloomsbury, 2000.**

Based on the feature documentary "Into the Arms of Strangers."

"The story of what it was like to grow up in the shadow of the Nazi threat, to escape danger and fear, but also to leave family and friends — perhaps for ever — is poignantly told in the words of those directly involved."

- **"Into the Arms of Strangers." (Video) 2000. 117 mins. PG**

Academy Award Winner — Best Documentary 2000. Filled with "rare archival footage and featuring gripping remembrances by the child survivors, rescuers and parents of the heroic Kindertransport."

- **Holliday, Laurel. "Children in the Holocaust and World War II: Their Secret Diaries." New York: Pocket Books, 1995.**

Not directly about the Kindertransport, but about children's experiences during the Holocaust. "From the Janowska death camp to the Warsaw ghetto to Auschwitz, these eyewitness accounts — written in spare, searing prose wrought from living an unthinkable nightmare — are tales of fear and courage, of tragedy and transcendence."