Kindertransport

From November 1938 to September 3, 1939 a British organization, The World Movement for the Care of Children, helped 9,254 mostly Jewish children (but including 1,772 gentiles) escape from the imminent Nazi Holocaust. The children, mostly girls, whose ages ranged from a few months to 17 years, had to leave without their parents. They traveled by train from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia to the Netherlands, from where they were sent by boat to England and safety. Many never saw their homelands or their parents again; about 80% were orphaned by the Holocaust. Since about 1988 the historian of the movement, Bertha Leverton, has kept track of the later progress of the children. There is an international organization for the children, Reunion of Kindertransport, and also national associations in countries where the children have dispersed since the war. Some have never recovered psychologically and have spend the past 50 years in mental institutions. Most have lived relatively normal lives, considering the traumas of their childhood. Others have become high achievers in many walks of life.

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A Newsletter for German-Born Adoptees

Geborener Deutscher®

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Journey Out of Innocence

Locals Recall Fleeing Nazi Germany as Children, Leaving Loved Ones Behind Forever

by Linda Matchan, Globe Staff

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NEWTON, MA (2/9/00) — When 9-year-old Eva Schlesinger asks her mother "Why will I be safer with strangers?", the question pierces through history, to the heart-wrenching era of Nazi Germany. The setting is a stage at the New Repertory Theatre, the play "Kindertransport." And the scene propels at least two members of the audience—Eve Nussbaum Soumerai and Fred Manasse—six decades back in time to a pivotal moment in their lives: when they, along with about 10,000 other German, Austrian, and Czech children, were sent to havens abroad.

The central tension of the play lies in the horrifying predicament Jewish parents had to confront, and the emotional and psychological resources they had to muster to send their children to an unknown fate. And how did these children —some as young as 2—survive the trauma of separation? Only about 1,000 were ever reunited with family members.

At a recent Friday evening performance, there were several audience members who had grappled with these questions, men and women from the Boston area and beyond who had been on the actual transport trains.

"My story is 'Kindertransport,' " says Soumerai, 74, of West Hartford, CT. Originally from Berlin, Soumerai was sent to England by her parents at the age of 13; she learned after the war that her parents had been killed by the Nazis.

"I watched the play with shock and sadness," she says. "Many people do not understand the complexity and tragedy of the whole event."

The story of the Kindertransport remains something of a footnote in Holocaust history; "considering that there were 6 million people killed, so 10,000 saved is perhaps not lots numerically," says Kurt Fuchel of New York, former president of the Kindertransport Association of North America.

"The story does show that a country would reach out to needy children," he says. It also reflects the ability of young children to exhibit bravery, though not without long-term cost; to forge new identities; and in some cases to build productive lives for themselves without parents or other relatives.

The transports, which were accepted by Germany's Nazi government, were sponsored by the governments of England, Belgium, and the Netherlands, and facilitated by Jewish refugee organizations. Local Jewish leaders were asked to provide names of eligible children, who were limited to only as much luggage as each could carry. A cash bond had to be posted for each child.

The first transport left in November 1938, the last one just two days before war broke out in September 1939. The British Kindertransport took the largest number of children—mostly from Germany but also some from Czechoslovakia and Austria. They were taken in by foster families or placed in orphanages, group homes, or farms. (Two transports were also sponsored by the governments of Belgium and the Netherlands, which each took 500 children.)

After the war, about 25 percent of the children eventually found their way to the United States and Canada. (Between 25 and 30 of them are currently living in New England states, according to Kindertransport Association records.)

A Range of Destinies

The children's stories range far and wide. One Kindertransport child—Munich-born Arno Penzias—grew up to win the 1978 Nobel Prize in physics. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala became a screenwriter for the producing-directing team of Ismail Merchant and James Ivory. Another, the late Ruth Morley, was an acclaimed costume design-

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er. One woman married an Amish farmer and lives in Pennsylvania Dutch country with her seven children. Peter Garfunkel and Ilse Wulff, who were on the same Kindertransport, ended up marrying; they now live in Newton.

"Most of us, when we came to our new homes, did well. Most of us are self-made," says Fred Manasse, 64, of Waltham.

Although he has no records of his journey, Manasse believes he left Germany for Belgium on a Kindertransport in the spring of 1939 at the age of 3½; his parents had entrusted him to the care of his brother, who was 7. Until the summer of 1944 the Manasse brothers were among a group of 100 children who were shuffled through a series of transitional situations in Belgium, France, Spain, and Portugal; these included orphanages run by the Swiss Red Cross and group homes where they were made to speak only French.

"The living situations ranged from nice and idyllic to terrible," he says. They sometimes slept on straw and were often hungry, "with no beds, no toilet, no nothing."

During much of the war, the children in Manasse's group stayed one step ahead of the occupying Nazis, in hiding and on the run. At many junctures "we could have been taken away and sent off for the final solution," he says. Ten of the older children ultimately did get caught and were eventually sent to death camps.

The Manasse brothers' escape to Portugal involved three days of climbing the snowy Pyrenees with no food or water and "wearing only rags and wooden shoes," he says.

But they were alive; their parents were not. Manasse still does not know the fate of his little sister, who was only a year old when he left. After the war, the brothers immigrated to New York City, where Manasse lived in half a dozen foster homes. He attended college in New York, earned a doctorate at Princeton, became a successful engineer, and married. He raised five children, two of them adopted. Manasse's brother is still alive.

Unforgotten

But the Kindertransport years remain with Manasse. "I don't know how to grieve," he says. "It happened so often, that now when someone dies, they die. I have no way of externalizing that grief." All he has of his family are a few photos of his parents and sister that were given to him by extended-family members.

Still, the congenial Manasse says he has managed, in spite of everything, to "live life to the hilt. I'm an American Horatio Alger story." He attributes this partly to the fact that he "was young enough not to know what happened."

Ilse Garfunkel, 74, a Newton clinical social worker, remembers more. Coincidentally, she was in the same group of 100 children as Manasse, together with her future husband, Peter. In 1939, when she was 13, she remembers her father "all of a sudden started speaking French to me. I asked him why, and he said, 'You're going to Belgium.' I was very upset. I could not understand why I could not be with them."

In fact, her parents fled to Shanghai, where no visa was required. She lived in an orphanage outside Brussels until the Germans invaded Belgium, then moved to southern France.

In the absence of parents, older children nurtured younger ones. "I remember Fred very well," she says. "I remember his brother was very protective of him. He was our pet, so to speak."

In the end, Garfunkel fled to Switzerland, where she remained with a Swiss family until moving to New York in 1947, having learned that her parents had died in a refugee camp in Shanghai.

She still remembers the letters her mother sent her—letters that she read with "mixed feelings. I often cried when I read them. It was like reading letters from a stranger. But she would write things like 'Dress properly' and 'Be a good little girl,' which I found obnoxious. I was experiencing things my mother would never have dreamed of."

But such letters—which are an important part of the play "Kindertransport"—were a crucial connection for Eve Nussbaum Soumerai. Her transport took her to England when she was 13, and to a temporary home with a family of "very difficult people who sent me to bed at 6 every night." Desperately lonely, she would remember advice her mother had given her before she left: "Look at the stars and pray."

"It's what I did," she says. While looking at the stars, she would "invent a world of people who would talk to me."

She kept letters from her parents in a suitcase underneath her bed. "They assumed such importance," says Soumerai, a teacher who for 28 years has worked with schoolchildren to create theatrical and literary "tributes" to notable individuals—including those who sheltered refugees.

"I would light a candle and reach down and grab one of them, so it would always be a surprise to read. They were my lifeline," she says. The letters stopped coming, and eventually she learned both parents were dead.

Some stories had happier endings. When he was just 7, Kurt Fuchel's parents arranged for him to go on a Kindertransport to England. He lived with a Jewish family in Norwich for nine years; his parents went into hiding. When the war was over, his parents contacted him from France.

"It was an enormous shock to me," says Fuchel, now 68. "I had no desire to go to France." He couldn't speak German anymore. Eventually they reunited, moved to the States, and had "a very loving relationship," he says. But "it was difficult. My mother wanted to resume where I'd left off as a 7-year-old and I was just desperate to meet girls."

Even reunited families suffered. Ed Klugman, 74, was put on a Kindertransport to England in August 1939, when he was 13.

Seven months later, he joined his brother in New York; his parents followed shortly afterward. But two grandparents died in concentration camps, as did an uncle and aunt. His mother suffered emotional breakdowns, and his parents were divorced.

Now a professor of early childhood care and education at Wheelock College, Klugman returned to Germany about five years ago, a journey he calls "cathartic."

But there is what he calls "an aftermath." Six years ago, a cousin in Chicago died and in her will asked that he care for her daughter, Helen, a 61-year-old who was put in a Dutch concentration camp at the age of 2. She was "so badly damaged, physically and emotionally" that she has been hospitalized for the last 40 years. Klugman says that though his Kindertransport journey lasted only 48 hours, the trauma continues as he struggles to care for Helen.

"This shows how Hitler reaches into many more generations. It is a terrible legacy, and it is never gone."

Play Injects Emotion into War Story

"Kindertransport" Examines a Little-known Chapter in History; a Walnut Creek Woman Who Lived it Provides Empathy

by Georgia Rowe

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CONTRA COSTA, CA (1/11/98) — Susanne Prager was only 15, but she clearly remembers the day she left Germany. It was December 1938. Her father's store had been destroyed by Nazi soldiers during Kristallnacht, the "night of broken glass" that marked the official beginning of Hitler's reign of terror. Her parents took Susanne and her younger sister to the Berlin train station, and the girls boarded a train bound for Sweden.

They Never Saw Their Parents Again

Prager was one of many unaccompanied Jewish children who escaped Nazi Germany through Kindertransport, a program started by the Movement for the Care of Children. During the months between Kristallnacht and the declaration of war, the organization placed nearly 10,000 children in foster homes in England, Sweden and the United States.

A Walnut Creek resident for the past eight years, Prager recently shared her experience with the cast of "Kindertransport" at the Moraga Playhouse. Diane Samuels' drama, which opened Saturday night at the company's Miramonte Little Theatre, chronicles the journey of a 7-year-old girl named Eva who escapes Germany to a life in England. It's a play that dramatizes the pain of assimilation and the price paid by those who survived.

The soft-spoken Prager has told her story many times to different organizations, and says that people often ask her the same questions. "They ask if I knew I would never see my parents again, and of course I didn't," she says. "I never gave it a thought. And they want to know how it felt, how it could be possible. And I don't think anyone knows the answer to that. It seem-

ed the whole world had gone crazy."

Prager said she read a review of another Bay Area production of "Kindertransport" a few years ago, but didn't go to see it. "It's been almost 60 years, but I felt it would be hitting too close to home," she says. "And it didn't seem to emphasize the way it was, it was like children going away to a camping trip. I felt that way even with *Schindler's List*. It was a beautiful thing to introduce this story to people and show how horrible it was. But nothing matches up to the reality; the reality of it still seems much worse."

Prager's feelings are not unusual among adult "kinder," according to Ralph Samuel, co-chairman of the Northern California Chapter of Kindertransport Association, a group with about 500 members in North America.

"We were the Holocaust survivors to which nothing happened which, of course, was not true," says Samuel, who lives in Point Richmond. "It wasn't until the 50th anniversary that we started getting together and we realized that we are survivors, and we lost our childhood. Many of us lost our parents either one or both and our brothers and sisters."

Unlike Prager, who lived with three Swedish foster families in three years, Samuel ended up in England. Born in Dresden, he left Germany at age 8. "Some of the younger kids were sponsored," he says. "I was sponsored by a Jewish family in London. The reason they took me was his last name was Epstein and his first name was Samuel, and his son's middle name was Ralph. For that strange reason, he picked me off a list."

Samuel never saw his father again after he left Germany, but he was reunited with his mother. "The Epstein family hired my mother as a housekeeper," he says. "I was treated as a member of the family and ate dinner in the dining room. My mother was a servant and ate dinner in the kitchen. It was mind-boggling."

He also lost his native tongue. "We were separated six months, and by the time my mother arrived in England, I no longer spoke a word of German. I had to go back to school to learn the language."

Samuel first attended a kinder reunion in London in 1988, and the first U.S. reunion was in New York in 1991. "There were about 500 there, but hardly any from California," he recalls. "I thought there had to be some who ended up here, so I organized a reunion in 1992. We found 45 of the original kinder here, from Sacramento to Santa Cruz. They're all in their 80s and 90s. I'm one of the youngest."

He says the organization has helped end an era of secrecy and shame about the experience. "Prior to starting the reunions, nobody ever talked about it," he says. "My co-chair and I knew each other for nearly 20 years before we realized we were both kinder, that we shared this experience."

Samuel has read "Kindertransport" and saw a production of the play a few years back. He says the play has helped to bring surviving kinder into the organization, and has taught a new generation about this little-known chapter in history.

"It's an important play, very moving and gut-wrenching," he says. "It not only tells the facts of what happened, but it clearly shows the results of intolerance. The horror of the Holocaust took place because these people were Jews, not because they were criminals or did something wrong. They were innocent citizens and children. That's what's haunting. The Holocaust happened because of intolerance. We have to learn tolerance of each other, and I think the play teaches that."

Moraga Playhouse director Cliff Beyer agrees. "This is an extraordinary play," he says. "I feel very passionate about it. The Holocaust has always been of interest to me, and we've done several plays that deal with issues of intolerance, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. But this one is special. It's a very feeling play."

"It's not just a historical account," Beyer continues. "It deals nicely with the relationships between the five women, and it flows mysteriously out of the past and the present." Two actresses play Eva, the central character, he explains. One as Eva as a child, the other as Eva at age 50. Also present are her adopted mother, seen in past and present, and her birth mother, as well as Eva's own child.

Beyer says that Prager helped the cast work through the play's complex issues. "There was a lot of hiding among the kinder themselves, and a lot of guilt," he says. "It carried through their entire lives. Eva is a cold person, and there's a reason for that. At first reading, she seems strange. Susanne had a lot to relate about that, and it helped the actresses to find the inner workings of why Eva behaves the way she does."

Prager says she's glad she shared her experience with the cast, and has decided to attend a performance of "Kindertransport." "I think anything that tells this story is important," she says. "It's hard to imagine now the fear we lived under, that constant terror. This is something that is still so close to my heart, as long as I can do it I will talk about it. It's something that should never be forgotten."

"A Little Brown Baby"

An Afro-German Adoptee's Story

Epilogue

The following note was received via e-mail recently from Shirley Price...

Dear Friends,

In March 2000, I located my birth mother and brother living in Brooklyn for the past 38 years. From day one, the reunion was bitter-sweet, and as a sad note, a month after the reunion, my adoptive mother mother passed away. I did not tell her about my discovery and at this point, see no reason to share it with my adoptive father.

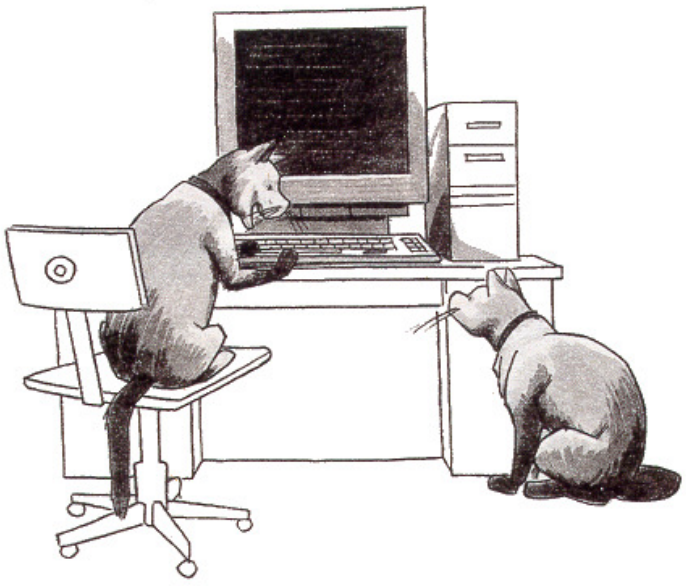
Through the ISS I have discovered that I also have two other siblings: a boy born in 1949, about whom the ISS had no other information, and a girl, born in 1956, who was adopted by an American couple. While the existence of these two children are being denied by my birth mother, I have yet to decide if I will continue searching for them.

While I sincerely appreciate all of the support, encouragement and interest in my search, I must regretfully report that the reunion was not a positive experience for me and we are no longer in contact.

Realizing how profoundly sensitive and personal the decision to search can be, I will not elaborate on the reasons why or give details of my unsuccessful reunion. But I will say, I have no regrets about searching, for at least now I know.

My search, along with the printing of my story in *GD*, has connected me with wonderful people from all across the US and Germany. I've developed friendships for life and I feel blessed for having met each and every one of you.

Through searching, I've learned invaluable lessons about myself, people, life, and living. Truly, "In search of my mother's garden, I discovered my own." — ***Shirley Price***



"So far I've discovered I was in a litter of eight and my mother's name was Fluffy!"

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Separated in 1949 Reunited in 2000

by Brigitte A. Ellis

My name is Brigitte Antoinette Ellis. I was bom Brigitte Henerietta Hoppe on January 21, 1949 in Kempten, Germany. I have always known I was adopted. I became an American citizen when I was 8 years old. While growing up as an only child, I often wondered if I had any sisters or brothers and what my mother looked like.

I also wondered, what was my father's race? To look at me, many people would think I was Spanish or had some Indian in me. Some would even ask me if I was black. Some thought me to be Caucasian! On forms, when they would ask "Race," I would put "Other." My response more often than not was, "I am a person." My adoptive parents were in the military, so I knew of no color barriers (as a child).



Erika Franquis (l) & Margret Lane

I was never an outgoing child, keeping mostly to myself. My mother was very attentive towards me. My father was somewhat quiet, and he ended up becoming an alcoholic. My mother wound up paying more and more attention to me. When I was younger, if I got any dirt on my clothes, my mom would change them two or three times a day so I would look nice when my father came home. That played out after a while. Remembering back, my parents were wonderful and my childhood was a good one.

After graduating from high school, having a little girl and getting married, I decided I was going to have more than one child, because it was a very lonely life. Eventually, I had three very precious children. But in my heart, I still had a void there.

I went into the military myself in 1976. I was stationed in Texas for 18 months, then I went to Germany. I remarried and we were both stationed in Neu Ulm, not far from Kempten. We rode down there, and I took pictures of the place where I was bom. One building had the name of the town on the front of the building. At that time, I still didn't know a whole lot. My adoptive mother was still alive.

Mom died of cancer in August of 1984. I then came into possession of all my adoption papers. There I found my birth mom's name, Erika Gerda Hoppe.

By this time I was out of the Army and could think of no way that I could or would ever be able to return to Germany. My ex had retired from the Army and I had remarried. My husband had retired from the Army, but, of course, my thoughts were on still trying to find my real mother.

In 1996 I ordered a book, the "Locator." Inside it has tapes and information for every state in the U.S. and country in the world. I picked out one page from the book, of course: GERMANY. On the back was a lady's name and address. She was from Germany but lived in New Mexico. I called her up and explained my problem.

This wonderful lady charged no fee for her services. Ms. Boehmer would write to various places in Germany and translate the responses back to me in English. Ms. Boehmer also sent me newsletters with stories of people who have found family members and other information.

Ms. Boehmer was able to get a copy of my mom's marriage license. It had lots of information in it: Mom's married name, date of birth, where she was bom, where they were married, what year, etc.

I wrote to Social Security, but they were no help. All they wanted to know was, if money was involved. You see, I did not have a Social Security number to go by.

Then I wrote the Vital Statistics for New Jersey to see if my mom was deceased or her husband was deceased. The sent me a copy of his death certificate. From there, I tried to call the funeral home, without any luck. Because Mr. Franquis's body had been sent back to Puerto Rico to be buried, my neighbor and I called there to talk to whomever was in charge of the cemetery. The person there could not understand what we were saying. Once again, I was at a standstill and set it aside.

To make a long story short, in November of 1999, I finally contacted "1-800-You -Search." They sent me a list of approximately 184 people with the name "Franquis," including ending names, short versions, sound-alikes, etc. Using first name, middle initials and last names, I narrowed it down to two possibilities, both the same. At Christmas time I sent two Xmas cards, one to each address. One card cwne back and the other did not. Christmas came and went; then months passed.

I knew that my mom's 74th birthday was on March 13, 2000. I went and got a birthday card and mailed it to the address of the card that did not come back. I put my address label and phone number on one side and "Love, Brigitte" on the other side, thinking, "if this doesn't work, what will I do next?"

I went to work as usual, and when I got home from work there was a message on my answering machine. My son had become a father that morning. I went straight from work to the hospital to see my new grandchild (a girl). I stayed a couple of hours. When I got home I went next door and my neighbor and I celebrated. My husband was there, too, and shortly he went back over to the house. A few minutes later he was on his way back over to tell me I had a phone call.

All I remember is a lady saying, "My name is Margret Lane Robinson and I'm your sister." Then she asked me where I was bom. I replied, "Kempten, Germany." Then I think she asked me what my mom's name was. I replied, Margret and she said. "That's where I was bom also."

I went to praising God, saying "I finally did it." I cried and cried. My husband came in from the kitchen, asking me what the matter was. I still could hardly talk. My husband kept asking me what was wrong. I gave the phone to my husband. My husband asked the person, "Who are you?" Margret repeated herself. I am Margret Lane and I just told her I am her sister.

I finally calmed down to where I could talk. One of the first things that my sister told me was that Mom wanted me know that she didn't give me away. Our dad took me from her. Mom was very sick right after she gave birth to me and the next day Dad gave me away. So Mom never saw or held me. My sister and I believe that my adoptive dad, and possibly my adoptive mom, all three knew each other, because of the dates on my adoption papers. Later, I found out that Ms. Lane remembers from my dad that Dad gave me to Lt. Caldwell and his wife. My dad enlisted and my adoptive dad was an officer in the military. So, they knew each other. My dad had wanted boys.

My mom just found my sister one year ago. Mom had given Margret to our dad so she could have a better life in America.



Margret (l) and Brigitte

I need to ask my sister about her story.

Ironically, my dad died on January 21, 1994, which is my birthday.

My sister had a heart attack last year and my mom spent time with her in Austin.

Mom went back to New Jersey in January 2000.

My sister and I visit often and talk a lot on the phone. I also talk to my mom in New Jersey often. I look forward to August and meeting my mom.

For those of you looking for a parent, sister, brother or anyone that is important to you in your life, don't give up. Remember, believe and God will be there. ***— Brigitte A. Ellis***