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Kindertransport

On November 9 and 10 1938 in an incident subsequently known as Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass, great violence and intimidation was carried out against Jews by the Sturmabteilung, a paramilitary force associated with the Nazi Party of Germany. Sometimes known as the Brownshirts, due to the uniform they wore, they smashed the windows of Jewish-owned businesses, buildings and synagogues until shards of broken glass littered the streets, giving the name to the incident.

Jewish homes, hospitals and schools were ransacked as the attackers demolished buildings with sledgehammers. The rioters destroyed 267 synagogues throughout Germany, Austria and the Sudetenland. Over 7,000 Jewish businesses were damaged or destroyed, and 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and incarcerated in concentration camps. Nearly 100 Jews were murdered that night, and the Nazi Party ordered the police and fire service not to interfere (except where Nazi-owned buildings were threatened by any fires).



Walking past a damaged shop



A badly damaged synagogue

Kristallnacht was a wake-up call for Europe's Jews, particularly in Germany and Austria, a taste of what was to come in later years and on 15 November, a delegation of British, Jewish, and Quaker leaders appealed, in person, to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Neville Chamberlain. Among other measures, they requested that the British government permit the temporary admission of unaccompanied Jewish children, without their parents.

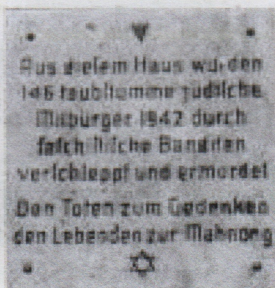
The British Cabinet debated the issue the next day and subsequently prepared a bill to present to the United Kingdom's Parliament. That bill stated that the government would waive certain immigration requirements so as to allow the entry into Great Britain of unaccompanied children ranging from infants up to the age of 17.

On the eve of a major House of Commons debate on refugees on 21 November 1938, particular attention was paid to the plight of children. Enquiries in Germany had determined that, most remarkably, nearly every parent asked had said that they would be willing to send their child off unaccompanied to the United Kingdom, leaving their parents behind.

Within a very short time, systems were established for choosing, organising, and transporting the children from Germany and Austria.

On 25 November, British citizens heard an appeal for foster homes for Jewish children on the BBC Home Service radio station. Soon there were 500 offers, and volunteers started visiting possible foster homes and reporting on conditions. They did not insist that the homes for Jewish children should be Jewish homes. Nor did they probe too carefully into the motives and character of the families: it was sufficient for the houses to look clean and the families to seem respectable.

Israelite Institute for the Deaf in Berlin
where 146 Deaf Jewish children were
removed and murdered in 1942.



In Germany, priority lists were made of those most in peril: teenagers who were in concentration camps or in danger of arrest, Polish children or teenagers threatened with deportation, children in Jewish orphanages, children whose parents were too impoverished to keep them, or children with a parent in a concentration camp. Once the children were identified or grouped by list, their guardians or parents were issued a travel date and departure details.



Arriving at Harwich

Photo: Wikipedia

They could only take a small sealed suitcase with no valuables and only ten marks or less in money. Some children had nothing but a manila tag with a number on the front and their name on the back, others were issued with a numbered identity card with a photo.

The first party of nearly 200 children arrived in Harwich on 2 December, three weeks after *Kristallnacht*. In the following nine months almost 10,000 unaccompanied, mainly Jewish, children travelled to England.

Initially the children came mainly from Germany and Austria (by then part of the Greater Reich). From 15 March 1939, with the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, transports from Prague were hastily organised. In February and August 1939, trains from Poland were arranged. Transports out of Nazi-occupied Europe continued until the declaration of war on 1 September 1939.

Meanwhile, Dr Felix Reich, headmaster of the Israelite Institute for the Deaf in Berlin, wrestled with the dilemma of protecting the deaf children in his charge.

A former officer in the German Army during World War I, Dr Reich was already a target of Nazi aggression, having been arrested, imprisoned and tortured but was surprisingly released on Chanukah day in December 1938 and he was able to join the children for the celebration. The staff and children were shocked by his appearance with his shaven head and walking with a limp, using a cane to help him along. That was why he was determined to rescue the children before it was too late.

Dr Reich eventually decided to take a party of ten children with him to England, accompanied by another older, hearing child. He was only just in time, because the *Kindertransport* carrying the deaf children was one of the last to depart Germany in July/August 1939, only days before the Nazis began the invasion of Poland and putting an end to any further *Kindertransport* sailings from Germany, although several continued from the Netherlands. The deaf children were aged between 3 years of age and 8 years of age, and the hearing child that accompanied them was aged 11, the Aryan daughter of one of the school teachers.

On his arrival in England on 12 July Felix Reich was arrested and interned for the rest of the war in the Isle of Man. Upon his release, he settled in Manchester where he died in 1964. He never saw his deaf children again. Within days of the Polish invasion, life at the Israelite Institute for the Deaf was never the same again, and eventually in 1942, the remaining 146 children in the school were murdered by the Nazis.

There are a number of memorials to the Kindertransport children at Liverpool Street station, where the trains from Harwich came to.



Earlier in 2020, the BDHS received with grateful thanks a small legacy from the estate of Ruth Fallman, who was one of the ten Deaf children brought to England by Felix Reich. Her death leaves only two survivors of the Deaf *Kindertransport* group still living as of April 2020 - Anne Senchal and Leslie Beiber.

Her story follows this article on the next page.

Sources: Biesold, Horst, 1999. *Crying Hands*, Gallaudet University Press, Washington D.C., USA

www.wikipedia.org

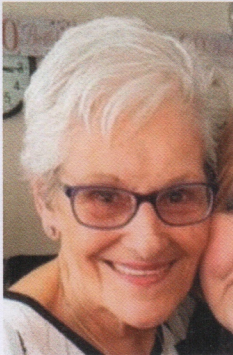
Peter Jackson and Melinda Napier

Ruth Fallman 16.07.1935 – 18.06.2018

Ruth Danziger was born on July 16th 1935 in Schlochau in Germany. Her family consisted of her parents, grandmother and an older brother, Kurt, all hearing and Ruth was the only one deaf. It was believed that she was born deaf. At the age of 3, she went to board at the Jewish deaf school “Israelite Institute for the Deaf” in Berlin.

In 1939 when the lives of Jewish people were threatened by the Nazis, it was decided by Dr Onkel Felix Reich, the headmaster of the school, to save some children by sending them away to safety. He had an agonising decision of which ten children to choose from all the pupils to go with him. He managed in July 1939 to get ten of his youngest deaf pupils (6 boys and 4 girls) under the age of 11 out of Germany and to London before he was arrested as he had been arrested by the Nazis before but released.

Ruth, only 4, was one of the chosen to go on *kindertransport*, along with Anne Senchal neè Marschner and Leslie Beiber. (Kinder is a German word for “children”, also from Yiddish “children”). The children left for England by train to Holland then by boat to Harwich and when they finally arrived at Liverpool Street two days later, they were immediately taken to the Residential Deaf School for Jewish Deaf children at Nightingale Lane, Balham.



*Anne Senchal on her 90th birthday in
April 2019*

Ruth was homesick, felt all alone and bewildered by having no family in England. She thought she would never see her parents again as she didn't know where they were. But she was determined to be positive and learned to read well, acquiring high level of English. She learnt to be independent.

Ruth said she was astonished when her parents managed to trace her through the Red Cross. She was told that they had survived by managing to escape from Germany to Shanghai in China in 1939. She kept in touch with them twice a year via the Red Cross. Her parents then went from Shanghai to USA where they lived in New York, but sadly the grandmother and Kurt did not accompany the parents to USA as they returned to Germany in 1942, believing they would be safer there. They were never seen again and perished in a concentration camp.

After correspondence, Ruth left school at the age of 14 in 1949 and moved to New York to be reunited with her parents. She sailed on Queen Elizabeth to New York with another pupil, Ruthie Rapaport, and was reunited with her parents aboard the ship on 21st November. She could not recognise her mother but her father was easily recognisable. She lived in New York for seventeen years. There is a letter of hers displayed in the Gallaudet University Museum.

Harold Fallman knew her from school in Brighton where the children were evacuated to during the war and when he went to New York for holiday, he fell for Ruth as he had always carried a torch for her from the school days. When he returned home to London, they kept in touch by letters. In those days, letters would take a week or two to reach their destination so Harold had to be patient with a long distance relationship then eventually he told her that he loved her and wanted to marry her.

Ruth was hesitant and asked her father for advice as she was not sure if she loved him and her father told her that as he was a good-looking, healthy young man with good trade as a carpenter, love would come in time. She made her mind up and said yes. Ruth came over to London for three weeks holiday in 1966 and they got engaged.

In 1967 Ruth returned to London and got married to Harold on 12th November and honeymooned in Cornwall and Bournemouth. She started working for Thames Water and stayed with them until she retired. They loved travelling until Ruth's poor health put a stop to their travelling and soon Ruth was placed in a care home.



On their honeymoon



*Celebrating their Ruby wedding anniversary
on 12th November 2007*

Ruth passed away on 18th June 2018 only seven months after celebrating their 50th Wedding Anniversary.

Melinda Napier and Barry David