



## WORKSHEET: GROUP 1

### Testemonies

#### **Susi Bechhofer/ Grace Stocken - Munich (Germany), Rugby (England)**

*Susi Bechhofer was just three years old when she and her twin sister Lotte were sent on the Kindertransport from Munich to England, where they were adopted and raised as Christians under the names Grace and Eunice Stocken. Only when she was in her fifties did Grace Stocken discover her true identity.*

Hazel Bell, a friend of Susi/Grace:

„Suddenly you have a Christian lady, whose son plays the organ recitals from time to time in the parish church of St Andrew – and you have this sudden idea that she might be Jewish. And it caused quite a consternation with her – and with me too really. Because I had always regarded two of the things that she and I had always had in common were being English women – all right so that had been wiped out – she’s not an English woman at all – she’s German or at least basically so. And then the other thing – that we are both Christian ladies – well that’s suddenly sent into touch as well because maybe she isn’t. Maybe she’s Jewish.“

I am walking down the corridors of childhood again. I’ve got to recapture this childhood I was denied; my Jewissness, my heritage too. We Kindertransport children have carried invisible labels around our necks for fifty years. Only now we are being recognised. Of course it must have taken courage to put us on the trains and boats. But the screams still echo in our hearts today.

The most important piece of the whole jigsaw was to have found out the truth about my mother, and in so doing about myself. Even though what I found was more horrific than anything I had ever imagined. In my life that remains I will always have her in my heart. So how can I feel anything other than delight that I went on that voyage of discovery? Because at least now I know who I am.

My Germanness seems to irritate some people. But I don’t apologise for it all. Germany did carry out the Holocaust. Not all Germans were responsible for that though. And I certainly wasn’t. So I don’t feel that I need to reject my German roots at all. I was denied being a German for many years, just as I was denied my Jewish roots. Now this has been given back to me. In fact I feel rather privileged in that I can now choose how much of the culture I wish to take on board and assimilate.

*Source: Excerpts from the book Rosa’s Child: One Woman’s Search for Her Past. By Jeremy Josephs, I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1996. pp. 85, 89,154, 158-9.*



Ruth Michaelis - Berlin (Germany), London, (England)



Fifty years ago I came to, England as a four year old child, one of many children to escape Hitlers Final Solution. There seems to be something significant about this 50th anniversary. Perhaps it is only now that we can look properly at what happened then without shying away from the thoughts and feelings involved, feelings that were too frightening or unacceptable to be allowed at the time. I remember feeling terrible because I didn't feel grateful for being rescued by all those good people who planned to get me out [of] Germany and then looked after me until I had grown up. Angry, hateful feelings were out of the question, protest was unthinkable. I remember trying to pretend gratitude that I patently did not feel. I punished myself mercilessly by thinking I ought to have perished instead of some other child who would have made much better use of the chance to survive than I did. It was only years later that I learnt about what is technically called 'survivor guilt'. I had just felt it during my childhood. And I realise now, only fairly recently, that with all this I made things far harder for myself than they need have been.

Last spring my husband and I took up the Bürgermeister's invitation to all former refugees from Berlin to spend a week there. I knew very well that I was going to search for memories I had lost. And, sure enough, at the Bahnhof Zoo I remembered the start of our journey to England. We had arrived there in a car and I threw a tantrum because I didn't want to go on the tram to England. I wanted to go and visit my favourite monkeys in the zoo where my Tante Ella used to take me. I am pretty sure it was the last tantrum I threw as I think perhaps I connected being abandoned in a foreign country with punishment for being so naughty. Try as I might, I could not get in touch with any other memories in Berlin but I was unusually anxious whenever I heard any noise that I could not immediately identify. In the Weißensee cemetery in East Berlin we found my grandmother's grave. It was an icy cold day and there were many frightening noises. Most horrific was a leaking tap in the cemetery spurting water rhythmically. Until I saw what it was, the sound conjured up the marching of jack-booted stormtroopers.

I remember the journey to England in considerable detail. It seemed endless. I was amazed that the world was so big that you could go on and on without coming to the end. The boat was huge and I couldn't understand how anything that big could possibly float and not sink. I was put to bed in a bunk when the boat left the docks. I don't remember the sea trip or docking in England, but I remember being very very sick in my bunk.

Without my brother, three years older than me, I cannot imagine surviving those first weeks in England. Indeed, I have always been grateful that we were allowed to be together, or at least in touch with each other, the whole time in England. It was my brother who explained to me all the things that were frightening and bewildering. I think some of his explanations were quite wide of the mark, but they always satisfied me. I think it was just as important for him to have to keep going in order to look after me. I am pretty sure our parents' last instructions to him would have been to look after his little sister. And he did.

We were forbidden to speak German. I learnt English very quickly. I remember not getting food at the table unless I asked for it in perfect English. Many nights I went to bed hungry. Only Martin knew how hungry I was and he crept downstairs and raided the larder in the dead of night to feed me.



And how dead the nights were. For a city child the night in the countryside is terrifyingly black. I had to sleep in a room all alone and I remember lying in the black nothingness and wondering in terror whether anything still existed and whether I was still alive. I was far too frightened to get out of bed to go to the toilet in the dark so I dreamt that I had gone. I can still remember the dream, feeling the cold floor under my feet and the cold ring of the seat as I sat down on the toilet and then the horror of the warm wetness and discovering that I had been in my bed all the time. I was beaten with a leather belt by the Rector's wife for the bed-wetting. I tried so hard but I just had that awful dream again and again. I remember sleeping on my stomach because my back was too sore from all the beatings. And then the relief when I went to a Quaker boarding school at the age of six and the matron told me to stop worrying. She said nearly all the children wet their beds and that they had rubber covered mattresses, so that it wouldn't matter.

Source: *I Came Alone: The Stories of the Kindertransports*. Editor, Bertha Leverton. Book Guild, 1990, pp. 213-214.

### **Prof. Tom Bermann - Hronov (Czechoslovakia), Kibbutz Amiad (Israel)**

A letter from his mother to Mrs Miller who gave him a home in Scotland.

Hronov, 14June 1939

Dear Mrs Miller,

Your letter of 11 June which we fervently expected has moved us to tears and we thank Heaven that has led our only child into the house of so generous and good people. Though we have not known more than your name until now (as well as you of us) upon reading your kind letter we can now form an idea of you and I need not assure you of our happiness to know that our child is in such good hands.

We thank you with all our hearts for your great love and care you surround our child with and we only wish that Tommy in his childish ignorance may not presume upon your kindness by his naughtiness. Though Tommy is kindhearted, yet he is a very lively and obstinate boy. I beg you very much to have not only love and goodness for him, but strictness as well, as he must not be allowed all. We are persuaded that the child feels like at home and that his new 'Auntie' and 'Uncle' will soon take him to their hearts.



We are extremely longing for the child, the house is as quiet as the grave and we are very lonely. But if we bring the great sacrifice of parting with the child to save him perhaps from great suffering and know that he is so well kept safe, we master our pain and trust in God who onward may not leave us.

As I have already written to you I am sorry to say that Tommy is a very weak eater and there are few things that seem enticing to him. As you are so extremely good as to be inclined to prepare his favourite dishes, I shall gladly tell you what Tommy likes to eat. He is mostly fond of soups and I gave him them first after meat and vegetable dishes. He does not even dislike vegetable dishes, but least he likes the meat and fish he refused at all. As to the farinaceous food he ate little as well, but he mostly liked a chocolate tart without cream. He is very fond of fruit, especially bananas. His favourite soups are: vermicelli , mushroom, potato, vegetable, lentil, cumin with vermicelli. Vegetable: spinach, carrots, potatoes, cabbage, cauliflower. I prepare that vegetable as follows: I boil it in salted water till it is soft, then I mingle it with lightly roasted flour. He eats all sorts of meat, poultry as well, but only cut to very small pieces. But please, don't worry about his eating, but the child wants particularly little and with a good or bad grace we have not been able to force him to eat more. God may give that he keeps well, it is more than a sacrifice of you if you wish to do for him all in any way and we do not even know how to thank you. Tommy was born on 25 February 1934, he is no more than five years and six months, but he is rather wide-awake for his age, he knows to tell already the time, he can count till one hundred and knows already many letters, he even writes them. I suppose that going to school will surely be a good thing for him and that he will already be able to do so. We beg you to kiss and bless him instead of us. I leave it to your consideration to give our picture into the child's room. I think he would be pleased with it.

Now I wish to tell you something about us for we may well imagine that even you would like to know whose child you have in your house. My husband is forty-one, a commercial and technical manager of a big factory for textiles and hosiery the owner of which stays in London and to whom you may apply for information. The present owner's father and my husband's father were cousins. My husband has worked himself up to his present position, at the age of twenty-two he became a confidential clerk and since the time he has finished the school for textiles he has been engaged in one and the same firm, Edmund Pick, mechanical weaving and knitting factory of Velké Poříčí, which is ten minutes distant from Hronov. At present my husband cannot leave the factory. Yet we do not know how long still, whether six months or only three months. My husband is not only a good and fully reliable man in any line, but a well-known expert in his branch.



Alas! We do not know in which way he will be able to make use of his qualifications. We possess an affidavit to USA, Colorado where our relations live. They are Dr Waldapfel, laryngologist, and his wife. Though we have registered in March we were told at the American consulate that it may take years till we may get the possibility of emigrating the quota being overcharged. Therefore we should like to go to England if it were possible, of course it is very difficult to get a permit there. A cousin of ours in London who is herself an Austrian emigrant writes to us that I should be able to receive a permit only if I took the position in a domesticity which I should gladly take as I can lead the most pretentious domesticity, perfectly cook and bake. But it is much more difficult for my husband as I cannot leave him here until he would get a permit. There may be found a way out by time, we pray to God every day that he may help us. I myself am thirty-three, I have secretarial training, but I was very much engaged in the domesticity and now I have attended many special courses as cold meat, English cookery and I have learned how to make Carlsbad wafers. Next time I shall send you a sample as Tommy likes them as well. My father is a physician and because of his age of seventy, he is living now retired with my mother in Brno. My father's father has been a territorial and chief Rabbi and lecturer of oriental languages at the University of Cernauti and my mother's father has been a cantor. My only sister has married a lawyer and has no children.

On the day of Tommy's leave I have some photographs taken and I send you some pictures as well as some pictures of our house and I beg you to show them to Tommy for, as I suppose he will enjoy them. Please, let me know whether he cries sometimes and about that whether he annoys you and refuses to obey as I know well that the child has bad points which will be polished by time.

Dear Mrs Miller, you make us happy by your detailed writing about our child and I can assure you that we remember you with great thankfulness as well as full of affliction that our child is so far from us, but we are filled with happiness that he had the chance of coming just to you.

We thank you still many thousand times and remain, dear Mrs Miller,

faithfully yours

Charles and Lenka Bermann

*Tom's parents, Charles and Lenka Bermann, perished in Auschwitz.*

Source: *I Came Alone: The Stories of the Kindertransports*. Editor, Bertha Leverton. Book Guild, 1990, pp. 34-36.