



WORKSHEET: GROUP 2

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The happy days of my childhood in my hometown of Neudek, came to a very abrupt halt one evening in 1938 (Kristallnacht) when a political rally was taking place beneath our balcony overlooking the main street. After the people dispersed, my parents looked ashen, and talked among themselves in hushed voices. My brother and I were quickly rushed off to bed while our parents deliberated as to what to do. Several hours later, there were more loud disturbances outside, and we suddenly realized that rocks were being hurled at our windows. Terrified, my mother and I crouched beside the bed furthest away from the windows, while my father and brother barricaded the door and stood by it with some wooden objects in their hands to stave off intruders, should they try to enter our home. Eventually the threatening voices outside subsided, but the terror in our hearts remained. The message 'Juden raus' had been loud and clear. After the noise quieted down, my father ordered each of us to pack a bag of essentials, while he made arrangements for us to flee our home. My father bundled us into our car in the dark of night, and told us to be very quiet. I cried bitterly not only from terror but also because I was not allowed to take my little dog Mopsie with us, though I was assured that our Kindermädchen would stay and take good care of him. Some time later, shaken and weary, we arrived in the early morning at the home of an acquaintance of my father's, not far from Prague. My father, always the optimist, felt we could safely stay with his farming friends until this 'temporary unrest' subsided. Little did we all

realize, however, that we would never be able to return to our home again because soon after, Sudetenland was occupied.

We had to move again to a small apartment in Prague. It was there, shortly before my twelfth birthday in 1939, that my brother suddenly packed a small suitcase, and hugged me goodbye. He was going on a trip, I knew not to where, but my mother cried and my father was not his jovial self any more.

The mood in our temporary home became sad and fearful; the beautiful face of my mother weary and tearstained. Soon after that, my cousin and I, were told that we were going on a holiday to England and that our parents would join us there as soon as they could. It seemed only a few days later, that we found ourselves standing on a gloomy, crowded railway platform in Prague, surrounded by other torn families. A train was already in the station, and slowly, names were being called of those children who were being included in this Red Cross organized transport – the last train allowed to leave Czechoslovakia. Children of all ages, even month old babies, were each given a tag with name and number, to be pinned onto their coats. The children were then assigned to a senior boy or girl of about fourteen or fifteen who would be in charge of a compartment group. We were instructed to get into the train and only then did the realization set in that this was indeed goodbye.



Shouting and screaming broke loose, and then it was no longer possible to hold back the tears that had so long been kept under control. It was a pitiful sight. On the platform, mothers and fathers were holding each other, weeping as the train swept their beloved children away, into the unknown. I was gripped by feelings of panic. A part of me wanted to jump out through the train window, but my feet were frozen and all I could do was press my face against the dirty pane of glass for that last longing look at my parents as the train crept out of the station. We did not know it, but for most of those left behind on the platform, it was the beginning of years of doom and of untold suffering.

Loud officials boarded the train periodically at border crossings inspecting our papers and causing us to feel even more terrified. The echoes of the noises, sobbing, and harsh voices, still ring in my ears, and to this day, any official in uniform evokes in me fear and a trembling sensation. To make things worse, my cousin and I were separated and put in different carriages, unable to be of even the smallest comfort to each other.

My cousin and I were happily reunited in Harwich. From there we were sent to the East Coast of England to be taken care of by a wonderful Methodist farming family in a remote little village. In the beginning there were, of course, months of traumatic experiences. The first time ever being separated from our parents; not being able to communicate with our foster family because we knew no English, trying to adjust to a totally different culture and lifestyle.

I recall being particularly frightened of the pigs in our farm and finding the farmyard odours overpowering! Gradually, we became less timid; learned to eat new foods; speak a few words, then sentences taught by our ever-patient foster mother, who had been a teacher; go to school and church; and help on the farm. An occasional visit from our uncle, or a special trip by us to London to visit him, as well as infrequent but most cherished cards from our parents for as long as they were free to send them, helped us in our adjustment.

Most of all, I will always remember the wonderful aromas and taste of freshly-baked bread, pies, cakes and jam tarts which Mrs Nunn baked weekly in her brick oven, and the great variety of vegetables that Mr Nunn grew behind our lovely flower garden, ready to pick for our daily needs. Although, of course, we still longed for our parents, and shed many private tears, life with our foster mother, father and sister, became secure and strong-lasting bonds were formed. Not only had our foster family shown great generosity by opening their home to us, but by their examples of kindness, caring, and highest ethical standards, so contrary to the inhuman acts of aggression by the perpetrators of the Holocaust, did they give us a renewed sense of hope in mankind. Several of the village families and their children also befriended us and showed their caring. The war seemed far away from our sleepy little village. During this time I learned that my brother, who had left so mysteriously years earlier, had reached Palestine safely and was living on a kibbutz.



In the latter part of 1943 I left my foster family in order to work in London, at the Jewish Agency for Palestine, and to live with my uncle and new aunt. Among other secretarial jobs, I updated lists of names of people who had been sent to various concentration camps in Germany and Poland, and thus was able to trace where some of the members of my family had been sent. It was an ominous sign as the list of names supplied by the International Red Cross Organisation shrank, and those of loved ones no longer appeared.

Later, after the Allies swept through the camps and released the few remaining inmates, my worst fears were confirmed. From our immediate family a handful survived the camps. The remainder of our family in Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Germany had been annihilated according to Hitler's design.

Source: I Came Alone: The Stories of the Kindertransports. Editor, Bertha Leverton. Book Guild, 1990, pp. 161-163.

Dr. Herbert Kay, born Koniec - Bratislava (Slovakia), Middlesborough (UK)

I was on the Kindertransport of June 1939, beginning my journey in Bratislava, and destined for Glasgow where my sister had gone four months earlier. I knew no one on the train. In London I stayed with a Czech family for two days before proceeding to Glasgow, unable to utter a single word of English. A stranger offered me an apple. I was ten and a half years old.

In Glasgow I was met by my sister, aged fourteen, and her guardians and an elderly lady doctor who was to be mine. I was rather apprehensive but in no position to express my feelings to anyone. She took me to her gaunt large Victorian house in Govan, where in fluent German she detailed the two rooms I was allowed to enter, in contrast to the army of cats which were enjoying the freedom of the house. The house was damp and unclean with a strong cat smell which was most unpleasant. She had no idea how to manage children and, apart from the occasional outing to see my sister, I was virtually a prisoner. When we did venture out to the shops or church, I was announced to all around as a 'refugee', the one and only word of English I could remember but could not understand, though I was aware that it created an interest.

At the end of August I attended the local school for a few days but with the outbreak of war, along with many other children, I was again given a name tag and bundled into a train and sent off as an evacuee to Ayrshire. We arrived at the village hall and were sent off to various families. Initially I went to an elderly lady in the village who, on discovering that I could not speak English, promptly sent me back! Eventually all the children were despatched – except me. The local infant teacher who spoke a little German, persuaded her landlady, who already had one boy, to take me also, which meant that we two boys shared a bed.



The house was much smaller than the Glasgow one, a typical Scottish dormer bungalow, one of a long terrace. It had no electricity, no mains water, a dry toilet at the bottom of the garden, a large barrel to collect rain water and beside the sink a small water pump which to me seemed more exciting than a tap! The landlady and her husband, the village roadman, were in their fifties and had no children of their own. Their attitude towards me was in stark contrast to that of the lady doctor and we took to each other immediately. I had total freedom of the house giving me a sense of liberation and for the first time since arriving in the UK I was very happy. This was reflected in my letters home, no doubt much to the relief of my parents. My letters at that time all went via Hungary and later via Portugal. They were all recovered after the war, having been left with a neighbour before my parents were deported. Regrettably, in the village setting, I rapidly lost all my German, Slovak and Hungarian and within a year I spoke fluent English with an Ayrshire dialect. Consequently my letters were written mainly in English and the letters from home had to be translated for me by my sister.

I made rapid progress in the village school, beginning in the infant class, but within a year catching up with my age group. After three years I went to the secondary school in a neighbouring town where I made a large circle of friends. I was the only evacuee left and my contact with the lady doctor in Glasgow had come to an end.

In 1945 I heard the sad news of the deaths of both my parents and my future became insecure. Steps were taken to have me returned to Czechoslovakia, where I had no relatives and could not communicate. My 'aunt' and 'uncle' offered me a home and following the protestations of local teachers and ministers the authorities were persuaded to let me stay. In 1947 I became a British citizen and in June completed my school education. I was offered a place at Glasgow University to study medicine and qualified as a doctor in 1952, to the great pride and satisfaction of my aunt and uncle.

Attending my graduation was one of the happiest days of their lives and I can still hear my aunt say 'There can be few roadmen and their wives attending such a posh affair!'. Whilst in Glasgow as a student I went back to the old terraced house where I first stayed. It had not changed. I knocked at the door and after a pause it was slowly opened – by the lady doctor. I introduced myself and told her of my progress. She seemed barely interested and did not invite me in. I felt very sad about this, as undoubtedly I owe my life to her.

In 1954 I was married to a ward sister and we have two children. Our daughter is now a theatre director and our son is a journalist. My wife is a District Councillor and I serve on the Bench in the local Magistrates' Court. I frequently reflect on the quite extraordinary events which have occurred in my life and having heard what happened to so many other children on the Kindertransports, I feel that I was among the most fortunate.

Source: I Came Alone: The Stories of the Kindertransports. Editor, Bertha Leverton. Book Guild, 1990, pp. 167-169.



Paths of the youth. Kindertransport - basis and possibilities

It is the nature of every emigration movement, that it is above all a matter of the youth. This also applies for the Jewish emigration from Germany. Considering the migration movement within Jewish youth, the emigration of children must be dealt with separately. Different conditions apply for young people who are still required to attend school than for older people. The adaptation of life, that often inhibits older persons from emigrating, is almost completely non-existent in children. The child is not strongly attached to the life it had lived, so that he can adjust easier and quicker than an adult, who naturally first has to part with many things, that a child does not even understand their importance. Looking at the question of emigration from the standpoint of the country of immigration, the advantages of child migration are very important. Adaptation to the new environment, which is often required very urgently, can be fulfilled particularly easily by the child.

As far as practical experience exists, it confirms this assumption, which is why the emigration of children will continue to be of importance.

It is in the nature of the matter that the migration of children can give cause for concern. It will always be a difficult decision for the parents to let their child – and perhaps their only child – emigrate alone. The child, however, usually gets used to his new environment very quickly, and even though he might perceive a separation from his parents as painful, in most cases the joy of change, of the new colourful world, will prevail over the loss of his sense of home („Heimat-Gefühl“). This cannot be true for all cases. The conditions and circumstances are different for each child.

Each case requires individual consideration and treatment. It is the setting of which the child comes from, as well as the one he is about to enter, that is decisive. That is why the question of child migration is largely an educational problem, that must be solved with care and understanding.

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Source: „Paths of the youth. Kindertransport – basis and possibilities“, *Israelitisches Familienblatt*, 11. March 1937.

