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The experiences of Kindertransportees and their parents: evidence from the archives of The Wiener Holocaust Library

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The Wiener Holocaust Library is the world's oldest collection of material on the Nazi era and the Holocaust.[1] Founded by Dr Alfred Wiener in Amsterdam in 1933 and relocated to London in 1939, the institution has since that time gathered evidence on the activities of the Nazi Party, particularly in relation to the position of Jewish communities in Germany and Austria under Nazi rule and British responses to those developments.[2] During the Second World War, the Library amassed material relating to the persecution of Jews and the Holocaust. Postwar, the collections have expanded to include, among other items, the complete Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal documents, an extensive collection of eyewitness accounts of the Holocaust gathered by Library staff during the 1950s, institutional records of refugee organizations in Britain, and hundreds of collections of papers donated by the families of Jewish refugees from Nazism who came to Britain in the 1930s and 40s.

The refugee family papers in the Wiener Library (now The Wiener Holocaust Library), which consist of official records, passports, and other identity and travel documents, letters, diaries, and photographs, are a central part of the Library's substantial holdings of material on Jewish refugees. A wide range of these collections relates to the Kindertransport rescue of about 10,000 mainly Jewish children from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland between late 1938 and early 1940. As such, the Wiener Library constitutes a major archive on the Kindertransport programme. Materials include documents on the bureaucratic processes of the Kindertransport; institutional records, such as those of the Hampstead Garden Suburb Care Committee, a small charitable

1 See www.thewienerlibrary.co.uk (accessed 13 June 2019).

2 For more on the history of the library, see Ben Barkow, *Alfred Wiener and the Making of the Holocaust Library* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1997).

organization that tried to arrange sponsorship or foster placements for a number of the Kinder; press images; pamphlets about the debate on child refugees in Britain; the results of a substantial survey of Kinder conducted by the Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR) in 2007; material from the Kinder reunions organized by Bertha Leverton; some of the accounts given in the collection of audio-visual testimonies, AJR Refugee Voices (such as that of Otto Deutsch); memoirs; testimonies and personal documents, including letters, drawings, diaries, and telegrams from both Kinder and their parents.

The Wiener Holocaust Library Collections (WHLC) thus feature a variety of contemporary evidence that can enrich historiographical understandings of both the organization of the Kindertransport and the experiences of the Kinder. As a number of recent scholars have pointed out, the Kindertransport is widely known about and remembered in Britain, and it is usually presented in a celebratory fashion as a story of heroic British rescue.[3] In Caroline Sharples's words, this narrative is resonant as it "sets up a stark moral contrast . . . between liberal, democratic Britain and the murderous Third Reich. The history of the Kindertransport supports Britain's self-image as a haven for the oppressed."[4] According to Tony Kushner, "the Kinder, by the start of the twenty-first century, had become a safe story . . . with a redemptive ending."[5] These kinds of public and popular narratives are reflected in the mythology that has grown up around Sir Nicholas Winton, who helped organize the Kindertransport in Czechoslovakia, and in the establishment of the British Heroes of the Holocaust medal in 2011.[6] Sometimes, allusions to memory of the Kindertransport seem to provide a kind of cover (admittedly not always successful) for a political climate in which refugees and other migrants are often treated with suspicion or hostility (as perhaps in the case of Prime Minister Theresa May's invocation of Winton in her resignation speech in June 2019, which was widely criticized, not least by Winton's daughter Barbara and Lord Dubs, himself a Kind, because of their view that May

3 See e.g. Tony Kushner, "The British and the Shoah", *Patterns of Prejudice* 23, no. 3 (1989): 3–16.

4 Caroline Sharples, "The Kindertransport in British Historical Memory", *Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies* 13 (2012): 15–27.

5 Tony Kushner, *Remembering Refugees: Then and Now* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 165.

6 See ibid., 166; Sharples, "The Kindertransport", 16; Jennifer Craig-Norton, "The Kindertransport: History and Memory" (MA thesis, California State University Sacramento, 2010), 2–3.

had not done enough to allow child refugees to come to Britain). As the academic Andy Pearce has pointed out, public and political discourses around the Holocaust in Britain often prioritize memory over history, with the implication that "intricacies and complexities are neither desirable nor necessary."[7] Public discussions and commemorations of the Kindertransport also reflect this trend and often seem part of a political attempt to use these historical events "for the purposes of fashioning national identity".[8]

Scholarship in recent times – such as that of Tony Kushner, Andrea Hammel, and others – has differed substantially from this public discourse in that it has offered both a critical approach to the "heroic" account of the Kindertransport and also provided new insights into the experiences of Kinder.[9] This article aims to contribute to this work, through utilizing the under-explored Wiener Library Kindertransport collections to examine the experiences of Kinder and the often overlooked experiences of their parents, including exploring the significance of the experiences of separation for those involved.

Much of the research for this article came about as a result of a project in 2018 to produce a new travelling exhibition for The Wiener Holocaust Library based on its holdings on the Kindertransport. The exhibition was funded by a Heritage Lottery Fund project, Harwich Haven: Surrender and Sanctuary, established partly to mark the eightieth anniversary of the arrival in Harwich of the first Kindertransports.[10] The Harwich Haven's project intern Annabel Cohen conducted research and curated the exhibition, overseen by the library's Senior Curator, Dr Barbara Warnock. Designed as an educational resource, the exhibition needed to present an overview of the Kindertransport. It also aimed to make a contribution to public discourse in Britain surrounding the Holocaust by offering a more implicitly critical approach to the "heroic" Kindertransport

7 Andy Pearce, "An Emerging 'Holocaust Memorial Problem?' The Condition of Holocaust Culture in Britain", *Journal of Holocaust Research* 32, no. 2 (2019), 119.

8 Ibid., 131.

9 See e.g. Louise London, *Whitehall and the Jews: British Immigration Policy, Jewish Refugees and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Craig-Norton, "The Kindertransport"; Andrea Hammel, "Gender and Kindertransport Memoirs", *Exile and Gender I: Literature and the Press*, ed. Charmian Brinson and Andrea Hammel, *Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies* 17 (2017); Kushner, *Remembering Refugees*; Stephanie Homer, presentation critiquing "resilience", Association of Jewish Refugees Kindertransport forum, "Remembering and Reflecting", 15 April 2019.

10 See https://harwichhavenhistory.co.uk (accessed 13 June 2019).

narrative through a focus on the Kindertransportees' experiences and the contemporary reactions of their parents.[11]

Popular representations of the Kindertransport, for example in the press, are frequently illustrated by press photographs taken of children who arrived on the first transports.[12] These images serve to reinforce a narrative presenting the Kindertransport as an overwhelmingly positive experience for refugee children who were welcomed to Britain with open arms. This somewhat simplistic account leaves much out, such as consideration of those left behind. As Louise London has pointed out, many people are familiar with images from newsreel footage and the press of the arrival of the Kinder, but will never have seen a photograph of a parent stranded in Nazi Europe.[13] The published memoirs and accounts written by Kinder can also contribute to these narratives, as Kinder themselves may distort the reality of their experiences of the transport and their early years in Britain, since the passage of time, the creation of the "popular" narrative, and the gratitude that many undoubtedly feel towards the rescuers and Britain create unconscious pressure to present a certain version of events. Gerda Stein (later Mayer), for example, seems to have continued to feel particular gratitude to Trevor Chadwick, an organizer of the Czech Kindertransport, as her efforts after his death to publicize his work and have him recognized as a "righteous among the nations" suggest.[14]

In order to overcome these possible distortions and to provide an alternative perspective, we decided to focus our research mainly on contemporary letters, diaries, and other documents held in the individual collections of the British Kindertransportees, rather than on the Library's sizable collections of reunion material and Kinder memoirs. Secondary material such as memoirs and oral histories were mainly used to flesh out the stories revealed in contemporary material, and precedence was given to unpublished memoirs such as Gisela Eisner's (née Spanglet) "Cottage

11 See www.wienerlibrary.co.uk/Stories-Of-The-Kindertransport (accessed 18 June 2019); see also Michael Berkowitz, *Jews and Photography in Britain* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 65, 127–8, 130–31.

12 E.g. "Kindertransport Children Ask Britain to Open Its Arms to Refugees Again", *The Times*, 30 Nov. 2018, www.thetimes.co.uk/article/Kindertransport-children-ask-britain-to-open-its-arms-to-refugees-again-9xsz9btd7 (accessed 26 June 2019).

13 London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, 13.

14 See Gerda Mayer Collection (1809), files 1809/4 and 1809/5, Wiener Holocaust Library Collections (hereafter, WHLC).

Pie on Tuesdays".[15] Following the lead of Jennifer Craig-Norton, we also wanted to give prominence to the often overlooked experiences of parents left behind who had taken the painful decision to send their children to an uncertain future without them.[16] Letters from the Kindertransportees' parents are some of the most numerous and striking documents in the papers surveyed, so merited inclusion on this basis too.

We decided that the exhibition should take a chronological approach, told primarily through case studies of individual Kinder whose papers are housed in the WHLC. The papers of 19 Kindertransportees were initially surveyed for the exhibition and 11 collections were comprehensive enough to be used. Nine children featured in the final exhibition, including 2 whose families were able to provide additional information and 1 for whom an oral history is held at the British Library. The Kindertransportees whose documents and stories were studied for the exhibition and who feature in this article ranged in age from seven to sixteen. Eight of these 11 were girls. Seven of them came from Germany (Gisela Spanglet, Otto Lichtenstein, Kurt Katzenstein, Lilli Jacobson, Hannele Kuhn, Arno Jacobius, and Ruth Peschel), 3 from Vienna (Ilse Majer, Evi Finkler, and Ilse Grünwald), and 1 from Czechoslovakia (Gerda Stein). For the rest of this article, Kinder will be called by their birth names, not by married names or names later adopted in Britain. We have also used the Library's International Tracing Service (ITS) Digital Archive to check details of the fates of the family members of Kinder.

The collections surveyed point to the sheer variety of experiences that Kinder had in Britain, from the range of locations and circumstances in which they were accommodated, to the diversity of the care they received. These collections provide texture and nuance about the experiences of Kindertransportees and give a more complex picture of the Kinders' experiences than that suggested by the popular narrative.

The circumstances in which children were cared for after their arrival affected their experiences. Early letters of Ilse Majer and Gerda Stein, both younger girls who were housed with wealthy families (Stein was sponsored by Trevor Chadwick's mother and lived initially with her before going to boarding school – she was eleven when she arrived; Ilse Majer

15 Gisela Eisner, "Cottage Pie on Tuesdays", unpublished memoir 4164, WHLC.
16 Craig-Norton, "The Kindertransport", and *The Kindertransport: Contesting Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019).

was ten and housed with Lady Howard Stepney in London),[17] give a mainly happy picture of their new lives in Britain, although Gerda Stein does not always seem to have found her time at boarding school easy and reported to her uncle that she struggled to make friends.[18] Majer wrote two letters fairly early on in Britain, full of happy, busy accounts of her new life and circumstances. These letters seem to have been for Ilse's parents although their names are not on them – they are addressed to "Meine lieben" (My dears). In late 1939, she reported in a mixture of German and English that "in der Stadt ist es sehr schön. Ich fahre öfters am top of the buss." (it is very nice in the city [London]. I often ride on the top of the bus).[19] Her later accounts of her life suggest that she found the separation from her parents extremely difficult, however. The letters of Arno Jacobius's young stepbrother, Ramon Gartner, who came to Britain on the Kindertransport aged seven, indicate that he was happy with his foster family in Britain, and that he had quickly adjusted to life there.[20]

Others, however, had a much harder time. The contemporary diary of Ilse Grünwald, who was fifteen when she arrived in the UK, reads in stark contrast to the "happy-ending" narratives of Kinder experience. Lacking a support network and forced to work, Grünwald was extremely unhappy in England and frequently recorded her desire to go back to Vienna and her anxieties about her mother whom she missed deeply. At the start of 1939 she wrote: "I'm so miserable here! I don't want to be in England." On her birthday that year she recorded that she cried all day. She was also disappointed with the English: "I don't think I've ever met such stupid people in all my life."[21] The passage of time did not in the main help to alleviate these feelings, as this extract from her diary in 1942 suggests: "I go to work for three days and then take six days off, the work is killing me. I just want to leave England and go back to Mutti. I haven't heard from her

17 See Gerda Mayer (Stein), "The Emigrants – Extracts and Selections from Pre-War/War-Time Journals and Letters in Translation", trans. Gerda Mayer, Gerda Mayer Collection.

18 Paul Eisenberger commenting on previous correspondence to Gerda Stein, 26 March 1940, ibid.

19 Ilse Majer to Berthold and Lilli Majer, 19 July 1939; see also file 1781/3/21, Ilse Majer-Williams Collection (1781), WHLC; all translations Barbara Warnock's unless otherwise specified.

20 See Arno Jacobius Collection (1819), file 1819/1, WHLC.

21 Ilse Grünwald, diary entries, 2 Jan., 17 Feb., 2 April 1939, trans. Jennifer Drew, Ilse Shatkin (Grünwald) Collection (1844), WHLC.

for months now". In December 1944 she recorded that she had spent "six years in this awful country."[22]

The age of children may have affected the nature of their experiences in Britain: as Andrea Hammel points out, foster families often wanted girls aged between seven and ten.[23] Research into the document collections of Kinder held in the WHLC supports the suggestion that younger children, younger girls in particular, were more desirable to British foster parents and therefore perhaps more likely to have a positive experience (although Jennifer Craig-Norton's work suggests that fostered Kinder sometimes faced neglect or abuse[24]). Lady Howard Stepney certainly appears to have been pleased with Ilse Majer, writing to her mother: "your daughter is *very* charming and we are delighted with her."[25] In contrast, Gisela Spanglet, who had arrived in Britain from Berlin aged thirteen, later remarked of her foster mother, "What affected me immediately was a noticeable lack of cordiality and warmth towards me . . . How would she have coped if, instead of me, she had received the younger child they were said to have wanted? Would such a little girl have been expected to stay quietly in her room without books, games or toys to occupy her?"[26]

Those who, like Gisela Spanglet and Ilse Grünwald, were already teenagers when they arrived in Britain were more difficult to house. Both Spanglet and Otto Lichtenstein, aged thirteen and fifteen respectively, came to the UK under organizational sponsorship, without knowing where they would live once in England. Like many other older children, Spanglet was housed for a long time at Dovercourt camp (the temporary set-up for arriving children provided by a vacant holiday camp) before being moved from place to place. Spanglet was then sent to foster parents who used her for cheap labour in their family business, and then moved to live with relatives who made it clear they did not want her around.[27] Otto Lichtenstein lived in a series of group homes and camps and worked in menial labour. He was first housed in a camp in Lowestoft, until it became too cold, at which point he was taken to a boarding house in Broadstairs for six weeks. Then he was relocated to Dovercourt and after that to

22 Ibid., 6 April 1942; 14 Dec. 1944.

23 Hammel, "Gender and Kindertransport Memoirs", 24.

24 Craig-Norton, "The Kindertransport".

25 Lady Howard Stepney to Mrs Majer, 17 July 1939, Ilse Majer-Williams Collection.

26 Eisner, "Cottage Pie".

27 Ibid.

Richborough camp with a few other boys to prepare a derelict army camp for adult refugees. The boys lived in the damaged huts that they were repairing. After the camp opened, they worked in the camp kitchen for a while and then were sent to work on a farm in Devon. When the funding for the boys' salaries in Devon was stopped, Lichtenstein moved to a group home in London run by Jewish refugees from Germany, where he began learning the tailoring trade, which he did not enjoy.[28]

The complexities of finding suitable placements for older boys such as Lichtenstein were documented by Sophia Friedlander, herself a German refugee, who helped to run the Dovercourt camp: "Whether or not a boy can pronounce 'th' is absolutely unimportant to me at the moment, when I'm meant to be deciding whether he should go to the farm or the factory or the lake, and when I'm meant to be deciding at the same time whether a given placement is good enough that we can responsibly send our boys there. Decisions that parents struggle with for nights and years, in order to do what's right for their children, we have to make several times a day, without knowing any of the things we should about the children."[29]

Older children were also more likely to have difficulties with the British state and its bureaucracy. After war broke out between Britain and Germany in September 1939, all children over the age of sixteen were required to register with the police as "enemy aliens". An example of a police stamp denoting this can be seen in Lilli Jacobson's collection.[30] Older children who lacked guardians also often had to find work once their organizational or temporary sponsors withdrew, as happened in Otto Lichtenstein's case. The work many Kinder had to undertake – in farms, cafés, and in the garment trade, for example – was for some, like Lichtenstein and Grünwald, who came from middle-class backgrounds, a stark contrast with their previously more affluent lives. As Grünwald recorded in her diary, the work she had by necessity to do in Britain represented a marked departure from the life she had been used to in Germany, and she found this immensely difficult.[31]

As Otto Lichtenstein's experience indicates, Kinder were dispersed widely throughout Britain, including to Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland. Ruth Peschel, who had travelled from Breslau, arrived in Harwich

28 See Frank Henley (Otto Lichtenstein) Collection (824), WHLC.

29 Sophie Friedlander to unknown recipient, 21 June 1939, trans. Sarah Arens, Sophie Friedlander Collection (1733), WHLC.

30 Lilli Krieger (Jacobson) Collection (1870), WHLC.

31 Ilse Grünwald, diary entry 6 April 1942, Ilse Shatkin (Grünwald) Collection.

on 21 June 1939. She was then sent to Haddington, in East Lothian, where she was registered by police on 16 July 1939.[32] Peschel and Arno Jacobius, both aged fifteen when they came to Britain, were both housed at Whittinghame Farm, a Zionist farm school in Scotland set up to house Jewish refugee children and prepare them for emigration to Palestine.[33] Neither file contains letters or recollections of their time there, although Jacobius held onto mementos such as a copy of the school song.[34] Jacobius had been involved in the Zionist Youth movement before coming to Britain and was in touch with close friends from Germany already in Palestine. The letters from them suggest that he was happy at Whittinghame and looked forward to a future life in Palestine (although he did not in the end migrate there).[35]

This was, however, not the case for some of the Jewish children sent to Zionist training camps in Britain. Letters in the collection of a German young adult who assisted in organizing the Zionist camps reveal that many Kinder who travelled to Britain on this scheme had no idea where they were being sent to and were horrified to find themselves living in tents and working on a farm. Many were unhappy that the plan was to send them to Palestine.[36] Parents of Kinder seem to have sometimes also shared these anxieties. One mother, Elisabeth Geller, wrote to the London Council for German Jewry regarding her daughter Lotte, who had been sent to Great Engeham Farm in Kent, a temporary training camp for children who would be sent to Palestine: "We were forced by dire necessity to send our child abroad . . . we found out only at a later stage that the children would be sent on Hachscharah [kibbutz training] in England . . . They are accommodated in tents, where they have to feel cold, and water drips into the tents from the top . . . help me get my child out of this camp".[37] Elisabeth's letter gives an indication of the concern that many parents felt about their offspring, and their continuing attempts to care for them from afar, and it is letters like this from parents which are often the most striking documents in the WHLC. These collections provide crucial insights not just into the stories of Kinder but also into the lives and experiences of

32 As indicated on the back of her British identity document, Ruth Peschel Collection (1774), WHLC.

33 For more on Whittingehame see www.eastlothianatwar.co.uk/ELAW/Whittingehame_Farm_School.html (accessed 19 June 2019).

34 Whittinghame Farm School song, Arno Jacobius Collection.

35 Ibid., file 1819/4.

36 Fred Dunstan Collection (1372), WHLC.

37 Elisabeth Geller to the Council for German Jewry, London, 17 Sept. 1939, ibid.

their parents and families left behind in Nazi Europe.[38] By putting these individuals back into the picture, we can broaden our understanding of the lives or, rather, double lives, inhabited by the Kinder. Parents' letters provide a connection to the world the Kinder left behind and highlight that Kinder were often exposed to the increasingly pressing concerns of their loved ones, while at the same time trying to adjust to new, unfamiliar lives in Britain.

The documents uncovered in the research for the Harwich Haven Kindertransport project directed us towards making the theme of family separation and lives cut short a central part of the exhibition. This was encapsulated in the title of the exhibition, *A Thousand Kisses*, the words with which Gerda Stein's parents signed their letters, including her mother's final goodbye. In almost all cases, these letters represent the last remaining contact with families who for the most part did not escape the Holocaust. The daily difficulty of separation, something that has perhaps not received enough attention in Kindertransport scholarship, is patent in the content and volume of letters from parents to their children in Britain.[39] The letters offer a challenge to any suggestion that separation from children was easier for parents at the time of the Kindertransport programme than it would be today, because of changing attitudes towards child development and attachment.[40]

Gerda Stein's parents Arnold and Erna, for example, wrote letters almost every day at first, sometimes returning to a letter at a later point in the day so that it reads almost like a diary. They also kept a diary for Gerda after she left, "Baby's Tagebuch" (baby's diary) – sent to her by a relative after the war – recording their daily lives without her, concerns for her welfare, and the hardship of not being able to see her. On the day that Gerda left Prague, Arnold Stein wrote: "On 14th March 1939, my Gerda flew by plane to England. Mr Chadwick who took twenty children along with him is taking Gerti to his family. God bless him and them. You, Gerti, are starting a new life. Good luck!"[41] A year later, he wrote in a letter to Gerda: "It is one year today that my very littlest little one stepped into the stomach of a big

38 See Craig-Norton, "The Kindertransport".

39 See e.g. the large file of correspondence from Arno Jacobius's mother Johanna and other relatives to him, Arno Jacobius Collection, file 1819/2.

40 See Andrea Hammel, "The Future of Kindertransport Research: Archives, Diaries, Databases, Fiction", *Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies* 12 (2012): 142–3.

41 Arnold Stein, "Baby's Tagebuch", Gerda Mayer Collection.

bird and then the big bird flew away and took my Gerterl along. But it was a good bird and brought my little one to good people who'll make my Gerda into a real English Miss. It's like a fairytale and a very lovely one, although it has a little shadow over it because I can't be there. But that doesn't matter, so long as the fairytale has a happy ending."[42]

Arnold Stein wrote prolifically to his daughter. He frequently expressed his sorrow at not being able to be part of her new life while at the same time clearly trying to protect her from his sadness. He also illustrated his letters with pictures of his daily life and of what he imagined Gerda doing. In late 1939, Arnold Stein was captured by the Nazis as he tried to make his way to Britain. He managed to escape to Lvov, then in Soviet territory, where he continued to write until late June 1940, at which point he disappeared. Letters written by Gerda in later life to various organizations, journalists, and academics indicate that she had learned from a surviving cousin that he might have died in a transit camp near Moscow, having been deported there by Soviet authorities.[43] However, other information suggested he had been deported to Łódz,[44] presumably by the Nazis, and despite decades of effort Gerda was never able to learn the circumstances of his death.[45] Arnold's letters from this time in Lvov are full of pictures of what he discovered there, such as Soviet marches and a cinema where he watched *Gulliver's Travels*. On 15 March 1940, in anticipation of Gerda's thirteenth birthday, he wrote: "On your birthday, look up at the sun for one moment – at 12 O'clock exactly. I'll do it too, and will write about it to Mummy. So we'll all be greeting one another at the same minute. Each of us in another world but together nonetheless."[46]

The strain of separation seems to have been particularly difficult on special occasions like birthdays. Not only were the family apart but also the financial constraints placed on Jews in Nazi territory and, after the war broke out, censorship, prevented most parents even from sending birthday cards. On Gerda Stein's twelfth birthday, Erna Stein, forced to write on cheap lightweight postal paper, drew a picture of a bunch of flowers in place of a card.[47] A letter from Ilse Majer dated 3 September 1941, sent to

42 Arnold Stein to Gerda Stein, 14 March 1940, ibid.

43 Gerda Mayer, various correspondence between 1982 and 2003, file 1809/3.

44 Gerda Mayer to Karl Peter Mayer, n.d., in response to information published in AJR, ibid.

45 Gerda Mayer Correspondence, ibid.

46 Arnold Stein to Gerda Stein, 15 March 1940, ibid.

47 Erna Stein to Gerda Stein, 3 June 1939, ibid.

her parents via America in order to avoid censorship, shows the difficulty of marking these celebrations. Two of the rose petals she included are still taped to her letter in the WHLC.[48]

It was not only special occasions that made separation difficult. As Erna Stein wrote in her first letter to Gerda, dated 28 April 1939, "write to us about everything, my darling, everything that concerns you is important to us . . . How old is the girl whom you've made friends with?"[49] Arnold Stein, who also drew little doodles of everything he imagined Gerda doing, added, "so you've become quite a sports girl – A roller-skate artist! I envisage you gliding along thus . . . Get someone to measure you to see whether you've really grown so much. You were according to medical examination 141cm in height and weighed 35 kg."[50]

Arnold Stein's inquiry about his daughter's height and weight is echoed in letters from other parents, showing their level of concern for their children's wellbeing and their difficulties in knowing that they were growing up without them. Parental anxiety at being far away from a child is reflected in a detailed letter from Ilse Majer's guardian, Lady Howard Stepney, to her parents, in which Lady Howard attempted to allay their concerns about their daughter and respond to the pain they felt at their separation:

> yes, she does clean her teeth every night, and is most clean and particular in her habits. Her aunt looked at her teeth when she was staying there at the commencement of the holidays. And here I took her to the dentist, who stopped up one small hole and said she had very good teeth. Ilse has grown a lot and is much thinner and more athletic looking. I think she is growing up very nicely . . . She has a good appetite and her complexion is lovely . . . I know it is terribly sad for you, to be so far away and not to be able to get any direct news of Ilse's thoughts and experiences, but she is simply not old enough to write down all this . . . She has tried hard to write, but she is, what we call, out of touch with her old life – and, at the same time, she does not *realise* that you know nothing of her daily life here. I try to talk to her of you, as much as I can, but then again one does not want to sadden her by thinking too much of the tragedy of your separation . . . So please do not be too much vexed by her careless letters. She simply can't *think*. If she did then she would cry herself to sleep, like she did when she first came to us, every night.[51]

48 Ilse Majer to Berthold and Lilli Majer, 3 Sept. 1941, Ilse Majer-Williams Collection.

49 Erna Stein to Gerda Stein, 28 April 1939, Gerda Mayer Collection.

50 Arnold Stein to Gerda Stein, 28 April 1938, ibid.

51 Lady Howard Stepney to Berthold and Lilli Majer, 11 May 1939, Ilse Majer-Williams Collection.

As this letter illustrates, even when children found themselves well cared for and adapted relatively easily to their changed circumstances, this did not necessarily make the separation easier for their parents. At first, Majer wrote to her parents in detailed German, listing everything she had had for breakfast, drawing them a picture of her new bedroom and promising "I'll most probably write to you 3–4 times a week".[52] However, her guardian's letter shows that as she gradually adjusted to Britain and felt less attached to her life in Austria, she did not keep this promise. Furthermore, by 1941, Majer was no longer writing in German but English. While her parents appear to have understood English, this was not true for many, who had to contend with no longer being able to understand their children, particularly in cases of younger children who often lost the ability to speak German. For example, Arno Jacobius's stepbrother, Ramon, wrote in an undated letter to him, having been separated, "next time you write a letter please could you write it in English because I have forgotten German . . . give my Mother a love when you write [sic]. Can Mother write English".[53]

Another aspect of the difficulty of family separation in the context of the Nazi era and the Holocaust revealed in the WHLC is the increasingly difficult position of many of the parents left behind – a reflection of the uncertain and cumulative nature of the path to genocide and the narrowing of possibilities for escape. As time went on, the focus of the parents' letters changed from matters of daily life to concern about their own escape, which they wrote about more and more desperately. Many parents asked their children for help getting out of Nazi Europe. Just a month after Gerda Stein arrived in England, the urgency in her mother's letters started to become palpable: "We keep making application after application to all the world, most especially to England but we probably go about it in an inept way as we haven't had any success yet. Under no circumstances whatever do I want to approach the Chadwicks – they are already doing so much for you that we cannot possibly trouble them further. But if by chance you should happen to come across somebody who strikes you as a good person, perhaps you could ask him or her to find us a job."[54]

Kinder often became involved in attempts to assist their parents to find a route out of Nazi-occupied Europe. Arno Jacobius's file contains a politely

52 Ilse Majer to Berthold and Lilli Majer, 14 July 1939, trans. Anisha Netto, ibid.

53 Ramon Gartner to Arno Jacobius, n.d., Arno Jacobius Collection; see also Eva-Maria Thüne, "What the Kindertransportees tell us about the Acquisition of English", in this volume, 165–82.

54 Erna Stein to Gerda Stein, 28 April 1939, Gerda Mayer Collection.

handwritten letter from him at Whittingehame to the Scottish National Council, asking them to help raise funds for his mother which she needed to secure her place on a ship going to Palestine. Their typed response of 11 April 1940 was: "I have your letter but am sorry to tell you that we cannot help you in the way you wish. It is, I am afraid, quite impossible to get permission from the British government to send money . . . In any case, my Council need all the money we have and more – to help the refugees already in this country. We have no money to spare".[55] Jacobius's mother, Johanna Jacobius, was deported from Berlin on 29 November 1942 to Auschwitz. She did not survive.[56]

Lilli Jacobson, who had arrived in Britain from Berlin aged sixteen in 1939, also tried to get help for her parents from her sponsors at the Worthing Rotary Club and received a more hopeful response. However, other documents reveal that her attempts to bring her parents to Britain were unsuccessful. Her file also contains a number of letters from her father to colleagues in the USA showing his desperate attempts to secure a visa, as well as the details of his and his wife's deportations to the Theresienstadt ghetto and deaths at the hands of the Nazis.[57]

Once war broke out between Britain and Germany in September 1939, the letters from parents became subject to censorship and started to decrease in length and frequency. By late 1940, parents still in Nazi territory were able to communicate with their children only in brief and censored Red Cross telegrams. Between 1942 and 1943, communication from parents in Nazi Europe ceased. In two extremely rare cases, Hannele Kuhn and Gerda Stein received telegrams telling them of their mothers' deportations, news of which hardly ever made it through censorship. Both telegrams, dated December 1942 and 1943 respectively, expressed the hope that they would still survive and be reunited.[58] This did not happen. In all cases, the Kinder had to wait until after the war to find out what happened to their families. Ilse Grünwald's diary reveals her anguish at

55 Arno Jacobius to the Scottish National Council for Refugees, 7 April 1940; their reply, 11 April 1940, Arno Jacobius Collection.

56 "Transport lists of deported Jews from the Gestapo – district I Berlin to Theresienstadt and to the East – 4.11.1942 – 2.2.1943 Wave 36 – 41", 1.2.1.1/11192891/ITS Digital Archive, Wiener Holocaust Library.

57 All documents in the Lilli Kreiger (Jacobson) Collection (1870/4), WHLC.

58 Erna Stein, Red Cross message to Gerda Stein, 20 Oct. 1942, Gerda Mayer Collection; Franz Kuhn, Red Cross message to Milly Levy (Hannele Kuhn's foster mother), Dec. 1942, Hannele Kuhn Collection (1574), WHLC.

her separation from her mother and the agony of not knowing her fate. In January 1942 she noted, “Mutti is now in Poland and I haven’t had any news from her since she got there”. The rest of her diary is peppered with worry. “I so miss Mutti and still have no news from her”; “if only Mutti were here”; “I can’t stop thinking of Mutti – is she still alive?”; “Poor, poor Mutti, where are you?”[59]

Many Kinder also experienced separation from and, ultimately, the loss of not just their parents but also siblings and other family members, sometimes because other children did not meet the medical criteria to be allowed to come to Britain. Many of the Kinder files in the WHLC contain certificates of the medical examination Kinder had to pass to be granted entry to Britain, which had to declare them not only free of infectious diseases but also “healthy in body and mind”. A Home Office memorandum of 9 August 1939 indicates concern about letting in any refugees who might become reliant on public funds: “Several mental cases and a number of other cases in which physical defects have made an immediate or future charge on public funds practically certain have already come under notice and there seems every reason to believe that Germany will be particularly anxious to get rid of all the mentally and physically defectives. It also seems entirely likely that once here we shall never be able to emigrate them.”[60]

Paul Weindling’s recent research shows that worries on this score came not just from the British government but also at times from the voluntary-sector organizers of transports themselves.[61] According to a friend who knew the Spanglet family in Germany, it was because of his alleged behavioural difficulties that Gisela’s brother Helmut was not granted a place on the Kindertransports.[62]

Other children seem not to have been considered sufficiently urgent cases to have been granted a place on the scheme. Gerda Stein’s cousin Susi Kraus aged twelve wrote to her several times expressing her hopes of getting a place on the Kindertransports: “I don’t have much prospect of going to England. I have registered in the Rubeshowa with Mr Chadwick,

59 Ilse Grünwald, diary entries 21 Jan. and 26 April 1942, 2 Aug. 1943, 4 Aug. 1944, 21 Feb. 1946, Ilse Shatkin (Grünwald) Collection.

60 [Signature illegible], memorandum, 9 Aug. 1939, Home Office, Aliens Department: General Files (GEN series) and Aliens Naturalisation and Nationality Files (ALN and NTY series), The National Archives, HO 213/317.

61 See Paul Weindling, “The Kindertransport from Vienna: The Children who came and those left behind”, in this volume, 16–32.

62 Information supplied by Gisela Spanglet’s daughter to one of the authors.

but all the Jewish children in Prague are registered there. I hardly think I'll get my turn. If only I could get to England at least by the summer."[63] A month later Erna Stein wrote: "Just imagine, Susi and Hansi were supposed to go to England. They were already in line. And then, today, they were invited to come to Mr Chadwick's office and were told that it would be impossible because there are many poor children whom one must accommodate first".[64] Susi Kraus was deported to Theresienstadt and perished in Auschwitz, along with her mother and sister.[65] Gisela Spanglet's brother Helmut was also murdered by the Nazis after becoming separated from his parents for several months.[66]

The losses experienced by the Kinder studied here are a direct challenge to popular presentations of the Kindertransport, such as the Oscar-winning film *Into the Arms of Strangers*, which minimize this aspect.[67] Of the eleven Kinder whose files in the WHLC were studied in depth, only the parents of Evi Finkler and Kurt Katzenstein and Ilse Grünwald's father, who escaped Austria and Germany before the war, survived. Documents in the ITS archive show that Ruth Peschel's father Emmanuel died in Mauthausen Concentration Camp on 13 April 1945. He had been sent on a death march from Auschwitz in January 1945.[68] Gerda Stein lost her mother, and multiple aunts, uncles, and cousins, most of whom were murdered in Auschwitz. Her father probably died in 1940.[69] Those who made it to Britain had to bear the knowledge of those who had not been as fortunate as them. Gerda Stein's uncle, Paul Eisenberger, urged her in June 1939: "don't ever forget that many thousands of your coreligionists no older than yourself are undergoing very sad times, so don't waste yours."[70] Eisenberger was writing from Katowice; he later managed to come to Britain but went to France as part of the Free Czech army, where he was captured and later killed at Auschwitz by the

63 Susi Kraus to Gerda Stein, 18 May 1939, trans. Gerda Mayer, Gerda Mayer Collection.

64 Erna Stein to Gerda Stein, 30 June 1939, ibid.

65 "Transport list of the Ghetto Theresienstadt – Transport DlDm on 6 September 1943", 1.1.4.2.1/4957722/ITS Digital Archive.

66 Deportation list to Auschwitz, 11193028/ITS Digital Archive.

67 See Kushner, *Remembering Refugees*, 165; Craig-Norton, "The Kindertransport", 20.

68 "Personal Files [male]" – Concentration Camp Mauthausen, 1945, 1.1.26.3/1681934/ITS Digital Archive; "Register of Prisoner Numbers Mauthausen", 1945, 118381-123340, 1.1.26.1/1280410/ITS Digital Archive.

69 Information from "Questionnaire for Archival Documentation", Gerda Mayer Collection.

70 Paul Eisenberger to Gerda Stein, 27 June 1939, ibid.

Nazis.[71] Kindertransportees are often excluded from the post-Holocaust category of "survivor", as they escaped before the switch to genocide began. However, it is clear that they continued to experience the effects of Nazi persecution through these letters, if from a distance.

Conclusion

The contemporary documentary evidence on the lives of Kindertransportees from the WHLC surveyed here highlights the range of experiences that Kinder had in their care in Britain, from Ruth Peschel and Arno Jacobius in camps in Scotland preparing them for future life in Palestine, to Ilse Majer in the home of Lady Howard Stepney. Our research points to the diversity of the care received by the Kinder. Ilse Majer seems to have been welcomed by her foster family and well-treated, while Ilse Grünwald struggled significantly to settle into British life. These collections also reveal the ongoing communications that many Kinder maintained with their parents, through letters and later Red Cross telegrams, and the continuing care and concern that parents expressed in these messages and sometimes in communications with foster parents, as seen in the collections of Hannele Kuhn, Gerda Stein, Ilse Majer, and Arno Jacobius. As time passed, much of this correspondence provided Kinder (and provides us) with a direct insight into the deteriorating conditions, escalating persecution, and narrowing options experienced by Jews in Europe in general and their families in particular. Kinder such as Arno Jacobius and Lilli Jacobson worked to find a means of escape for their parents. These communications also reveal that the separation that Kinder and their family members experienced was not just in the initial departure of children for Britain but was an ongoing process, in which some, particularly younger children, became less interested in corresponding with parents, and switched to using English when they did. Furthermore, focus on the situation for parents and other siblings and family members left behind highlights the extent and the horror of the loss suffered by many Kinder. Of the eleven children studied here, only Kurt Katzenstein and Evi Finkler's parents and Ilse Grunwald's father were able to escape the Nazi genocide. Five of the collections surveyed – those of Gerda Stein, Lili Jacobsohn, Arno Jacobius, Ilse Majer, and Hannele Kuhn – document the families' attempts to emigrate, and their children's awareness of these efforts, and Stein, Jacobius, Jacobsohn, and Gisela Spanglet all

71 J. Erlich to Gerda Stein, 29 Aug. 1989; Gerda Stein, undated notes, ibid.

had family members perish having been denied help from Britain: most of Gerda Stein's close and wider family, Ruth Peschel's father, Ilse Grünwald's mother, and Arno Jacobius's mother. Our research indicates that, contrary to some public presentations of the experiences of Kinder as a redemptive story that is held in contrast to the Holocaust, many Kinder were connected directly with the desperate efforts to escape and ultimately with the murder of their families. Thus the story of Kinder, rescued and ultimately granted citizenship in the country where they had found safety, can be told in parallel with the tragic loss of their families, friends, and the whole worlds they had once inhabited. Reflections such as these highlight how problematic it was to rescue children but not their parents and it is difficult to look at the experiences of this period separately from the shadow of what came later. However, it should also be remembered that the Holocaust was not under way at the time that the Kindertransport rescue occurred between late 1938 and early 1940 and the fate of those left behind could not have been entirely clear at this time. At a time when the future, although doubtless dark, was unclear, many parents could not be wholly confident that in sending their children to a foreign country, to the care of strangers, they were doing what was best for them. Their anguish and uncertainty and continued concern for their children are evident in their letters and responses to them.

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