



qualitalk

Information on Technology and Society

August 2018
Internet Version
ISSN 1615-9667
19. Volume
63. Edition

Printed Version
ISSN 1435-1641
24. Volume
79. Edition

The spectacular rescue of twelve boys and their coach of a soccer team from the flooded THAM-LUANG cavern in Northern Thailand was in the news for several weeks in summer 2018. However, eighty years ago there started a rescue operation of Jewish children from Germany and German-occupied territories in the East, without much if any publicity. Public knowledge of this operation was not desired by Nazi-propaganda; the Jewish initiators of the transports to Great Britain also wanted to keep it under wraps. No wonder then that even nowadays, few people are aware of an action that saved over 10,000 children from certain death.

Today, there exist in several railway stations monuments commemorating these Children's Transport. Next time when you are at a major railway station in the area, look around!

Chris Schuster

Page 2

Ferry to Life

Jewish children escape from Hitler's domain to England.

Page 6
Impressum



Arrival of a Children's Transport from Vienna at Liverpool Station, London, in December 1938, after 20 hours of travel by train, and the crossing of the Channel by ferry from Hoek van Holland, The Netherlands. Note: In those days, when walking outside of the house, adults generally wore hats, children caps.
(Credit: Austrian National Library)

Ferry to Life

Jewish children escape from Hitler's domain to England.

Text of Plaque

»For the Child – Vienna«

Dedicated to the British people in deepest appreciation. They saved the lives of 10 000 Jewish and non-Jewish children enabling their escape during the years 1938 and 1939 from the Nazis to Great Britain, the so-called Kindertransporte.

(exactly from December 10, 1938 till September 1, 1939)

The creation of such memorial sculptures was a brain child of Milli Segal. The project received the full support of ÖBB-Holding AG (Federal Austrian Railways) and the Austrian Ministry of Transportation, Innovation and Technology under Minister Werner Faymann. This particular sculpture was unveiled on March 14th, 2001.



80 years ago, thousands of Jewish children fled Hitler's German Reich and were whisked away to Great Britain. One of them was Harry Heber.

By Alexander Menden

In the nineteen fifties, when for the first time since World War II Harry Weber returned to Vienna, he did so in a group of people on a tour bus. During the trip to Vienna, a guide started to explain to the group of international tourists that in 1938, Austria was one of the first victims of Nazi expansion. When he heard that, Harry couldn't remain in his seat but jumped up and shouted:

„You all weren't victims of the Nazis ... I was one. I was here when they marched in and I can count myself lucky that I got out of here in time, or I wouldn't be alive anymore!“ Now sitting across from him, a short, sprightly 87-year old man, a lively, forceful teller of the story of his life, I could very well imagine the forcefulness of his rebuke at that time. Harry had come in to talk to me, at the London Center of the World Jewish Relief foundation where he has been working as a volunteer for decades — it was that foundation's predecessor, the General British Fund for German Jewry, to whom Harry owes his life: December 1938, Harry, then seven years old,

and his sister Ruth, older by three years, arrived in Great Britain with other Jewish children from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia — all in all 9 354 of them — as part of the so-called Children's Transports.

He is one of the ever dwindling group of refugees who still can remember the circumstances of this unbelievable rescue action, and who still can talk about it. The story is in a way typical for all the others, but in some instances incredible — Harry himself stressed that he had particular luck. Harry's father's family originated from Lemberg, that of his mother from Vienna. His father owned a prospering business selling bed linen in its store in Innsbruck, the city where Harry was born. One of the first things Harry would remember were the feathers his mother stuffed into an eiderdown quilt some of which were whirled around by the wind in the inner courtyard.

Harry also remembered the so-called „Anschluß“ (annexation) of Austria into Nazi Germany, in March 1938: „I was standing with my grandmother and sister in Innsbruck's Maria-Theresia Street and watched the parade. First came a band, then a few armored vehicles, then the soldiers. Behind them came about 200 workers with armbands featuring the swastika. People all around us waved with small flags with the swastika.“ One might find it strange but Harry didn't have any fear: „Being a child one really couldn't understand that.“

But in no more than a couple of days, someone had painted the front of his father's store: Jude (Jew). Harry continued: „He couldn't sell anything anymore. Soon he went bankrupt.“ At his school, the teachers were the first ones who showed up with swastika

pins; shortly after them all the pupils, too. „A classmate asked me where I had my pin; I said: I don't have any, because I am a Jew. He probably didn't even understand what that word meant, but I knew that I was different. Our parents told us: ‚You have to go to England; it's nice there. We'll follow you soon.‘“

In October, the whole family — with the exception of his grandmother — was transported to Vienna guarded by police. „The Nazis wanted all Jews originally from Poland deported back to that country, but Poland didn't want them back“, tells Harry. „My father received a letter from the Polish Government that officially declared that he was a stateless person.“ So, Harry and his family moved in with the family of his mother, in Untere Augarten Straße in Vienna's 2nd district [an area historically heavily populated with Jews]. „That was the first stroke of luck“, Harry continued. „Because during ‚Kristallnacht‘ [‚Night of Broken Glasses‘, a German-wide pogrom] on 9 November [1938] some members of the small Jewish community in Innsbruck were murdered.“

After that pogrom in November, Harry's parents tried everything to get visas to get out of the country but the embassies/consulates of countries that still were willing to let Jews in were jam-packed. „But then the brother of my mother, an attorney who naturally was prohibited by now to practice his profession, told us of a British program of allowing children up to 17 years old into the country. My mother found the idea of my sister and I travelling all by ourselves to England absolutely terrible. On the other hand, my father, more of a practical nature, thought it was the best solution.“



Bronze sculpture: In Vienna's Western Station, a Jewish boy waits for the Children's Transport train to Great Britain.

That program of Children's Transports was, contrary to commonly assumed opinion not based on an initiative of the British Government. Rather, it was launched by the British Quaker community and prominent

become a burden to the British nation.“ The independent funding of the Transports, the finding of homes in British families willing to accept the children had to be ensured. Additionally, a one-time fee for admittance of each child of 50 pounds had to be paid. Several British organizations immediately started to solicit funds and within a short time received a total of 53 000 pounds (equivalent to 29 million Euro), and a campaign to find families willing to accept children, either on a volunteer basis or against payment.

Harry and his sister Ruth got on the 2nd Children's Transport train from Vienna in direction of the Netherlands, on 18 December 1938. „We were taken to the Main Station [now: Western Station]. Our parents told us: ‚You are going now to England; it's nice there. We'll join you there very soon.‘ They also told us over and over not to let anyone separate us.

But of course, the first thing that happened on the train was that they separated us: I was put in a carriage together with children my age, my sister in another one.“

He said he barely remembered the trip itself — the train left late at night, and Harry fell asleep. His sister later told him that SA troopers went through the carriages and did a search through the small luggages of all the children; the rest of the trip was uneventful. Arrived at Hoek van Holland, the young passengers had to transfer to the ferry that entered port in England on 20 December.

Harry Heber showed his entry document — carefully preserved under a see-through plastic envelope — which served in lieu of a passport at that time. In front a picture of little Harry with a tuft of dark hair, on the following pages all kinds of stamps, among them that of the harbor master of Harwich where the ferry entered; another



Sam Morris, the great-grandchild of Sara Schreiber who also escaped Nazi Germany on one of the Children's Transport trains, served as model to the sculptor.

The bronze figure of a boy of around seven years of age has a yarmulke/kippa. At the time the transports happened it would have been very unlikely to show such an ostentatious sign of Jewish faith (maybe the sculptor wanted to make it easy for observers to deduct the Jewishness).

Jewish citizens of Britain, among them Simon Marks, co-founder of Marks & Spencer, the chain of prominent department stores in Britain, Chaim Weizmann, who later was to become the first President of Israel, and the financier Otto Schiff.

When first approached, the British Premier at that time, Neville Chamberlain, couldn't warm to the idea. But despite his continued reservations toward the Jewish people (in 1939, he wrote to his sister that „without doubt they are not a very endearing people“), he gave, after continual talks with the initiators, his approval to the program during a cabinet meeting.

The foremost condition was that the under-age refugees should „not

stamp that certifies that the holder of this document does not have the permission to work in Great Britain. All children were issued that document; many years later, World Jewish Relief collected many of them and digitized them.

Harry Heber, now 87 years old, and his sister then had luck again: Their parents could leave Innsbruck and move to London where Harry resides still today. Many other members of his family were killed in the Holocaust.

After spending several days in Davenport Camp, a vacation camp remodeled into a reception center for the refugee children the children were distributed among their foster families, Harry in a separate one from Ruth's. Harry recounted: „I was put into a farmer's house in East Sussex, far away from anywhere. Snow was meters high, there was no electricity, and it was terribly cold. The pair there didn't speak German, I couldn't understand English. I cried three days and three nights; then they sent me back to the organization.“ He was put into a boarding school in Kent where he acclimatized quickly and learned English.

In the meantime, Ruth had convinced the family that had taken her in to get her parents from Vienna to England. „She said: ‚My mother is a wonderful cook, and my father is adept in gardening.‘ That wasn't really true but it led to her parents come to Britain because for domestic workers there existed exceptions in the restrictions for admission of foreigners. They arrived in August 1939, three days before start of World War II. In those nine months between my arrival and that of my parents, I had forgotten all of my German. When my mother real-

ized that I didn't understand her, she broke out in tears.“

That families got reunited in these times, like the Heblers, was very rare indeed because Britain did not provide for it, or foresee it. Many of the children of the Children's Transport never saw their parents again. Harry's father was the only one of his family who survived. Harry's grandmother was murdered in Auschwitz.

As Harry's father officially was stateless he wasn't put into an internment camp like all the other refugees from Germany and Austria. Nevertheless, the family had to move several times. His father worked as a painter, his mother contributed to the family budget cutting out of waxed cloth holders for gas masks who were then



Shoes with Velcro straps
— they didn't exist yet at that time, said an elderly viewer.

distributed to the people fearing German gas attacks. Harry lived in Bedford and London when the war drew to an end. After it, he apprenticed at an optician; his sister opened a boutique on Oxford Street. Harry is retired now but as a volunteer at World Jewish Relief, he still manufactures eyeglasses for Jewish communities in Eastern Europe.

The change in way of life was different for the different members of his

Event note:

**REPRESSED YEARS
— THE RAILWAYS IN
AUSTRIA DURING
THE TIMES OF
NATIONAL SOCIALISM
1938 – 1945**

Exhibition

at Mauthausen, KZ's Memorial
18 April – 24 August 2018

see: Milli Segal Agency

family. „My father was very grateful for what the British people did for him and his family“, says Harry. „He even got up and saluted every time they played the national anthem on British Television. I myself also think of myself as a Brit. But the most important thing for me was that I am a Jew.“

He keeps his distance from his country of birth. „In the year 2000, the Austrian Government offered me Austrian citizenship, in addition to my British one. I said: No, thank you; I am a Brit.“

When his stepson said to him after the Brexit decision: „Too bad we are not related by blood; then I could apply for Austrian citizenship.“ Harry couldn't see the point: „You can travel on a British passport to any country. And to get in the United States, anyone needs a visum. And now also for

the other European countries.“

Even though World Jewish Relief nowadays helps refugees in many countries, from Nepal to East African countries, Harry doesn't think that the refugee situation today is comparable to his own many years ago. The worry that anti-Semitism is spreading again is palpable for Harry: „People from Islamic countries move to our countries, and they hate Jews. There is anti-Semitism on the extreme right and the extreme left in the whole of Europe“, he says. „And there are enough people who deny that the Holocaust even happened. Even our own children apparently think: That's way in the past, that doesn't concern us. Nothing could be further from the truth.“ □

Impressum



Chris Schuth

Foto: www.martina-pipprich.de

qualitalk edited by
Chris Schuth | Max-Planck-Straße 45
55124 Mainz | Germany
phone (+49) 06131 - 476466

www.chris-schuth.de
mail (schnabel-a) chris-schuth.de

August 2018
published four times a year. Pictures: by
the author, if not stated otherwise.

Note: This article was first published
by Alexander Mende, SÜDDEUTSCHE
ZEITUNG, 8 August 2018.

It is being republished with permission
of SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG.

ISSN 1615-9667 [Internet]
ISSN 1435-1641 [Print]

German-English translation by
Dr. Dieter von Jettmar, Vienna (Austria)

qualitalk will be forwarded to registered readers by e-mail and can be downloaded from the internet via www.chris-schuth.de/qtalk_79_en.pdf
Readers not connected to the internet receive the publication by snail mail.

© Chris Schuth