

**NARRATIVE
NONFICTION**
reads like fiction but
it's all true

The Children Who Escap the Nazis

A story of the Holocaust



During a dark time in history, a daring rescue operation saved the lives of thousands of Jewish children. **By the editors of *Scope***

As You Read

How does the Kindertransport affect Lore's life?

On a chilly April morning in 1939, 14-year-old Lore Sulzbacher sat alone in a huge train station in London. All around her, people were talking. Lore didn't know what they were saying. She didn't speak a word of English.

Lore clutched her only possessions: a suitcase filled with clothes and photographs and her accordion, a musical instrument she loved to play. She wondered what was going to happen to her.

Just a few days earlier, Lore's parents had said they were sending her away. Germany, where Lore lived, had become dangerous for Jewish people like them. Thousands of Jewish parents across Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia were sending their kids—some less than a year old—to Britain to live with strangers. They were all part of a desperate plan to save the lives of thousands of children.

As Lore waited in the station that April morning, doubt crept into her mind. She didn't know the family that had volunteered to take her in—not even their names. What sort of people would they be? Would they be kind? Fear washed over her. Why did her parents have to send her away?

A Storm of Hatred

Germany had not always been dangerous for Jewish people. In Fürth, the city where Lore grew up, Jewish and non-Jewish Germans lived and worked side by side. Still, life in Germany in the 1920s was not easy. Germany had recently suffered a crushing defeat in World War I. The German economy had collapsed, and many people had lost their jobs.

Then, in the early 1930s, a man named Adolf Hitler rose to power. Hitler promised to make Germany strong again. He also gave Germans someone to blame for their problems: Jewish people.

Prejudice against Jewish people, or **anti-Semitism**, had long existed in Europe. Many regarded Jewish people, with their different religion, customs, and rituals, with confusion and mistrust.

Hitler fanned the flames of these centuries-



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Walker Art Library/Alamy Stock Photo (swastika); Mary Evans Picture Library/Imagno (Refugees)

old suspicions. He gave hateful speeches **denouncing** Jewish people. He called them “subhuman” and said they were corrupting all of Europe. They were the “pests” of the world, he said. These speeches were filled with lies, but many **embittered** Germans listened with eager ears.

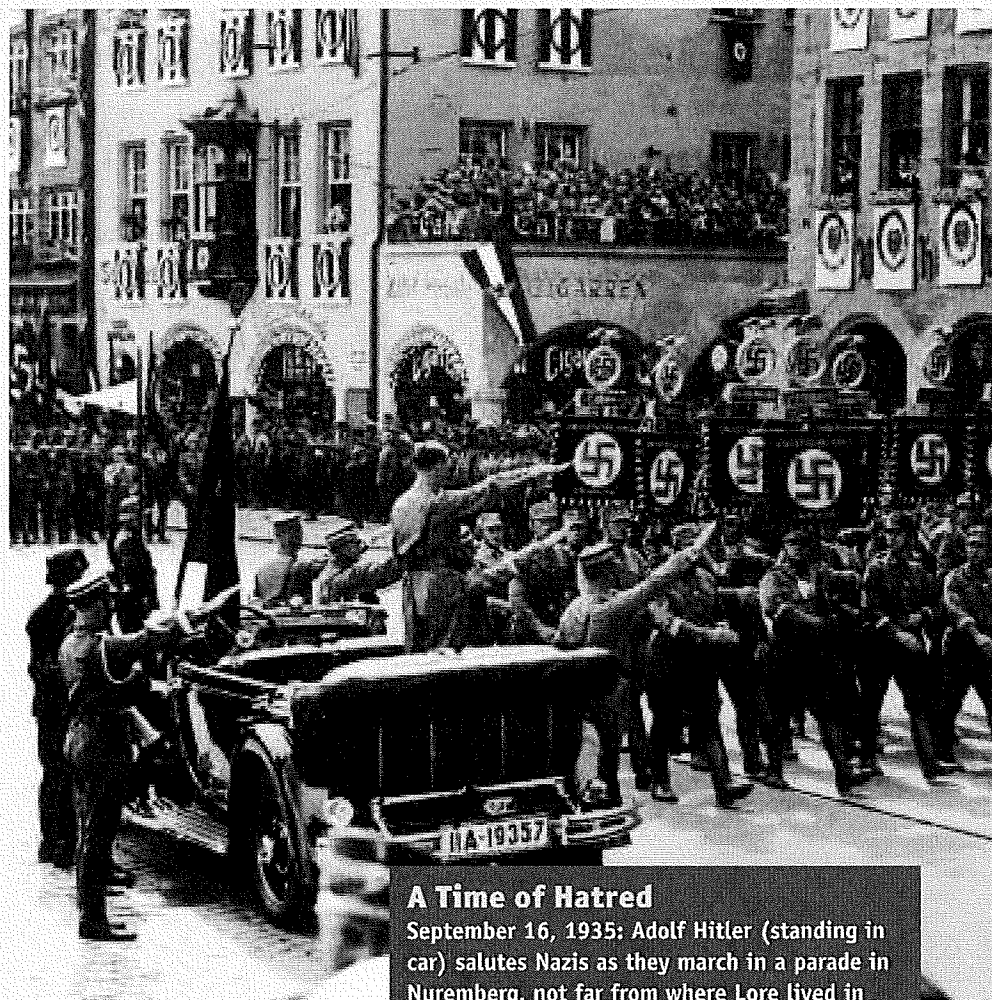
In 1933, Hitler became chancellor—the head of the German government. His racist beliefs shaped new laws that made life harder and harder for Jewish people. Over the next five years, Hitler and his Nazi Party stripped German Jews of their rights and **ostracized** them from society.

Jewish people were fired from their jobs. They were forbidden to vote. Friends and neighbors turned cold and cruel; some shouted insults at Jewish people or threw stones at them. Signs appeared in windows of restaurants and shops that said “Jews not wanted.” Sometimes Jewish people were beaten in the streets.

By the time Lore was 12, she could no longer swim in public pools or go to the movies or even walk through public parks—just because she was Jewish.

Yet many German Jews believed that the terror would soon end. They had coped with prejudice before. Many felt sure that the country would come to its senses, that Hitler would be **ousted**.

“This lunatic couldn’t possibly



A Time of Hatred

September 16, 1935: Adolf Hitler (standing in car) salutes Nazis as they march in a parade in Nuremberg, not far from where Lore lived in Fürth. On the flags is the swastika, a symbol of the Nazi regime.

last much longer,” Lore remembers her parents saying.

But that hope was soon shattered. On the night of November 9, 1938, in cities and towns across Germany, Austria, and parts of Czechoslovakia, mobs organized by the Nazis unleashed terrible violence. Jewish homes, schools, and synagogues were burned to the ground. Jewish stores were looted and destroyed. This night of violent attacks came to be known as *Kristallnacht*, or the Night of Broken Glass.

After that, Lore and her parents accepted the truth: Their

country—the only home they’d ever known—was no longer safe for them.

They needed to get out.

The Children

As news of Kristallnacht spread, people around the world were horrified. Yet few countries were willing to open their doors to those trying to escape Hitler. At the time, millions of people in Europe and the U.S. were struggling to find work and feed their families. Many countries, including the U.S., argued that a wave of newcomers from



“Here is a chance of taking the young generation of a great people. Here is a chance of **mitigating** to some extent the terrible suffering of their parents and their friends,” British Home Secretary Samuel Hoare said in a debate over what should be done.

On November 22, the British government voted in favor of helping child refugees. In the coming days, a rescue operation took shape. This operation would be called the Kindertransport. (*Kinder* means children in German.)

It was decided that Jewish children under age 17 could receive special travel documents

On November 25, British radio aired a call for volunteers. Soon after, more than 500 people had offered their homes to young refugees. Meanwhile, representatives went to Germany and Austria to set up systems for organizing and transporting the children. (In March 1939, Hitler’s army invaded Czechoslovakia. Transports for Jewish children were quickly organized there as well.)

Parents in Nazi-occupied countries now faced a hard decision: Send their children to live with strangers to keep them safe from Nazi terror—or keep their families together and try to survive the violence.

Saying Goodbye

On December 1, 1938, the first train of the Kindertransport left Germany for England. By early 1939, nearly 300 children were arriving in England every week.

On April 14, 1939, Lore’s mom and dad told her that they had arranged a place for her on the Kindertransport. Lore had four days to get ready to leave.

Lore was allowed one suitcase, one piece of hand luggage, and 10 marks—about \$70 today. The Nazis didn’t want anything of value to leave Germany.

At the train station, Lore’s parents said they would see her again. As the train pulled away, Lore stared out the window until her mom and dad disappeared from sight.



In 1942, the main Axis countries were Germany, Italy, and Japan. The main Allied countries were Great Britain, the U.S., the Soviet Union, and China.

Germany would compete for scarce jobs.

But in Britain, a group of Jewish and non-Jewish **advocates** for refugees was determined to do something. They couldn’t get whole families out, but maybe they could save the children. They appealed to the British government to take action.

to come to Britain, where they would be placed in foster homes, boarding houses, or hostels. Fifty pounds—about \$1,500 today—had to be set aside for each child to pay for their eventual return to Germany after the crisis ended. (The money often came from sponsors or the children’s parents.)

A New Life

Most children arrived in England with little idea of what lay in store for them. Often they did not even know the names of their foster families. They waited at train stations to be picked up, wearing numbers around their necks so they could be identified. Children who did not have foster families were sent to boarding houses or hostels.

When Lore arrived in London, a couple approached her. They introduced themselves as Mr. and Mrs. Schreiber. Lore didn't understand much of what they said, but she went with them to their home in the city of Lincoln.

The Schreibers and the people of Lincoln did their best to help Lore. The Schreibers gave her a bed to sleep in and food to eat, and they sent her to school to learn English. Their 17-year-old son treated Lore as a sister. At school, kids invited Lore to play cricket, one of England's most popular sports. Lore didn't know the rules, but the kids made sure she knew when to run.

All the same, Lore was homesick. She wasn't used to English food and customs. School was hard; her classmates didn't speak German, and she struggled to understand the lessons.

Above all, Lore worried about her parents. They wrote to her often. In one letter, her father told her to be strong. "Keep your



head up high," he wrote.

Willing to Help

Like many Kindertransport children, Lore felt it was her duty to try to get her loved ones out of Germany. She found guardians in England for two friends and a cousin. But getting her mom and dad out was harder. She knew the rule: If she could find jobs for her parents in England, they would be allowed to come.

Lore walked around Lincoln looking for the biggest homes—the ones sure to be owned by rich people. She knocked on doors and put her broken English to work.

Do you need a gardener? A cook? she would ask.

Finally, she found a family willing to help. They said they would hire Lore's parents and sent an application to the British government. Lore felt sure she would see her parents soon.

The Kindertransport

The experiences of the Kindertransport children varied widely. Some were taken in by kind families. Others were put to work as domestic servants or sent to work on farms. Above left: Lore with her mom and dad in Germany.

Then, on September 1, 1939, dreadful news came: Germany had invaded Poland. Britain was joining forces with other countries in Europe to fight Hitler.

World War II had begun.

Pushing Forward

The start of World War II put an end to the Kindertransport in Germany. For Lore and the other children, the dream of seeing their families was crushed. Most communication stopped, though Lore did get bits of news about her parents through a relative in Switzerland.

Through the hard years of the war, Lore tried to make the best of life in England. She learned to



After the war, hundreds of Kindertransport children found one or both of their parents. But most never saw their parents again. Few Jewish people in Nazi-occupied countries survived.

Tragically, Lore's parents were killed in a Nazi death camp called Auschwitz. They were among the 6 million Jewish people the Nazis murdered. This terrible period of history would later be known as the Holocaust.

Decades later, Lore sat down to tell her story to an interviewer. She still dreamed about her parents, she said. Sometimes in her dreams, her father carried her piggyback through a park in Fürth.

Despite all that she lost, Lore seemed to look back on her life with a sense of gratitude. After the war, she had a son and three grandsons. Her marriage was as happy as her parents' had been.

Today, the Kindertransport is remembered as a remarkable feat. The lives of some 10,000 children were saved thanks to the **herculean** efforts of many people from many walks of life—politicians, religious leaders, advocates, and the thousands of families who opened their homes.

"I think I'm very lucky to be here," Lore said. "I've had a lovely life." ●

sew while working in the dress shops the Schreibers owned. She also took art classes at night. After all, her parents had wanted her to live and thrive.

But the grim realities of war were ever-present. German warplanes rained bombs on England. German tanks rolled through Western Europe—Belgium, the Netherlands, France. It seemed that Hitler could not be stopped.

When Lore turned 18 in 1943, she joined the British army. "I felt I was saying thank you to

England for saving my life," she would later say.

Lore was posted to London and given a job as a driver. She made many new friends. For the first time, she felt like she truly belonged. "The people on my left, the people on my right," she recalled, "we were all the same."

The End of the War

In 1941, the U.S. joined the fight against Germany. The war raged on for four more years. Finally, in 1945, Germany surrendered. The war was over.

Writing Contest

In an essay, a slideshow, or a video, explain the challenges faced by the children of the Kindertransport. Support your ideas with text evidence. Send your entry to **Kindertransport Contest**. Five winners will get *The War I Finally Won* by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley.



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