

Alice Boddy

Wartime Experience: Sent to England on a Kindertransport

I was born Sept 26, 1921, née Liesl Grunwald. My carefree, happy, active childhood was cut short abruptly as the Nazis marched into my home city of Vienna, Austria in March 1938. That very Friday afternoon, my classmates and I were attending a special performance at the Vienna Opera. As we left the theater we saw the march of the German Storm Troopers as they carried huge Swastika banners and sang "Wenn Judenblut von Messer spritzt," when Jewish blood spurts from the knife. Terror followed terror, and I had to grow up in a hurry.

My parents were well-educated, solid upper middle-class citizens. My father had been a high ranking and proud officer in World War I. Our parents had instilled in my older brother and me respect for learning, good study and work ethics, a thirst for knowledge, love of music and culture, and the study of foreign languages. They also taught us to be active in sports, and to keep an ongoing interest in the world around us.

The Nazis took most of our possessions, and my one salvation in those days was my bicycle. It was my sole means of transportation and I desperately needed it so that I could apply for our exit permits, tax papers, visas, etc. To this day, the bicycle is still my favorite way of getting around and is with me in my photograph.

After Kristallnacht, I registered for the Kindertransport, and five months later I was accepted into a group leaving for London. I can still recall the traumatic separation of children and parents as our train pulled out of Vienna. Just as I said a tearful good-bye and climbed the first step of our train, a young woman rushed up to me and handed me her little girl. She gaged as she said: "Please look after my child." The train pulled out of the station, and we pressed our faces against the closed windows. We waved good-bye as tears stained our faces. The mother of the little girl fainted, and I will never forget the sight of her lying on the ground of the platform. My charge soon developed a high fever, and I had to turn her over to our escorts.

I remember very clearly the handsome young man sent by Great Britain to escort us across the Channel. Once there, we were assembled in a big hall with children on one side and our English "parents" on the other. I was very lucky. The family to which I was assigned was both good to and for me. I am still in touch with their three sons, who think of me as their younger sister.

In spite of the tragedy unleashed by Hitler, my early upbringing and love of nature and learning has served me well. I have kept it all up to this day, but I can never forget or forgive the fact that six million innocent human beings of all ages--including my own grandfather and other close relatives--were murdered. It has left deep scars.