

ALAN PETERS

Alan Peters was sent to England on a Kindertransport.

“When I was fourteen, the German Army marched into Vienna followed by a motorcade led by Hitler in his limousine. My life and that of my family and friends changed completely”

Alan Peters was born in 1923 in Vienna, Austria. His father had his own business cabinetmaker, and the family lived on a quiet street of older working- class apartment houses

In March 1938, the German Army marched into Vienna and Alan’s life and that of his family changed dramatically. He was attending high school but within six weeks, all Jewish students were expelled and had to transfer to newly created segregated Jewish schools. Instead, Alan chose to drop out of school and apprentice for his father unofficially, since Jews were excluded from the official apprenticeship program.

On the morning after Kristallnacht, November 9th, 1938, an SS officer demanded the keys to the family business and offered to “buy” it for a token sum. Alan’s father, together with 5,000 other Jews, was arrested and sent to Dachau and later to Buchenwald. The purpose was to spread fear to encourage Jews to leave Austria.

There had been an unspoken agreement between Alan and his mother that he would not leave Austria without his father. But they felt a new sense of urgency and Alan’s mother urged him to leave and not wait for his father.

The British Government had agreed to shelter 10,000 children from Germany, Austria and later Czechoslovakia and Alan was selected to travel to England with a Kindertransport. Miraculously, his father was released from Buchenwald two days before Alan’s scheduled departure on the condition that he leave the country within 30 days. He arrived with his head shaved, looking gaunt and scared and the family was very briefly united.

Alan’s father was forced to leave for Italy alone, allowed to take one suitcase, his wedding ring and 10 German marks. The war broke out in September 1939, with Alan’s mother still in Vienna and my father in Milan. She was able join him several months later and the two boarded the last ship to Palestine, effectively saving their lives.

In England, Alan’s sponsors enabled him to attend university, graduating with a degree in engineering. He served as an officer in the British army and was reunited with his parents, who returned to Vienna after the war.