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

# The Children Who Escaped 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 impact Lore's life?

**O**n a chilly April morning in 1939, 14-year-old Lore Sulzbacher sat alone in an enormous train station in London. All around her, people were talking, but 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.

Only 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. Lore's parents were among thousands of Jewish parents across Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia who 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 cold 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? Terror washed over her. Why did her parents have to send her away?

### A Storm of Hatred

Germany hadn't always been dangerous for Jewish people. In Fürth, the charming city where Lore grew up, Jewish and non-Jewish Germans lived and worked alongside one another. Still, life in Germany in the 1920s wasn't easy. Germany had recently suffered a humiliating defeat in World War I. The German economy had collapsed, and unemployment had skyrocketed.

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-old suspicions. In taverns and meeting halls, he delivered 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.

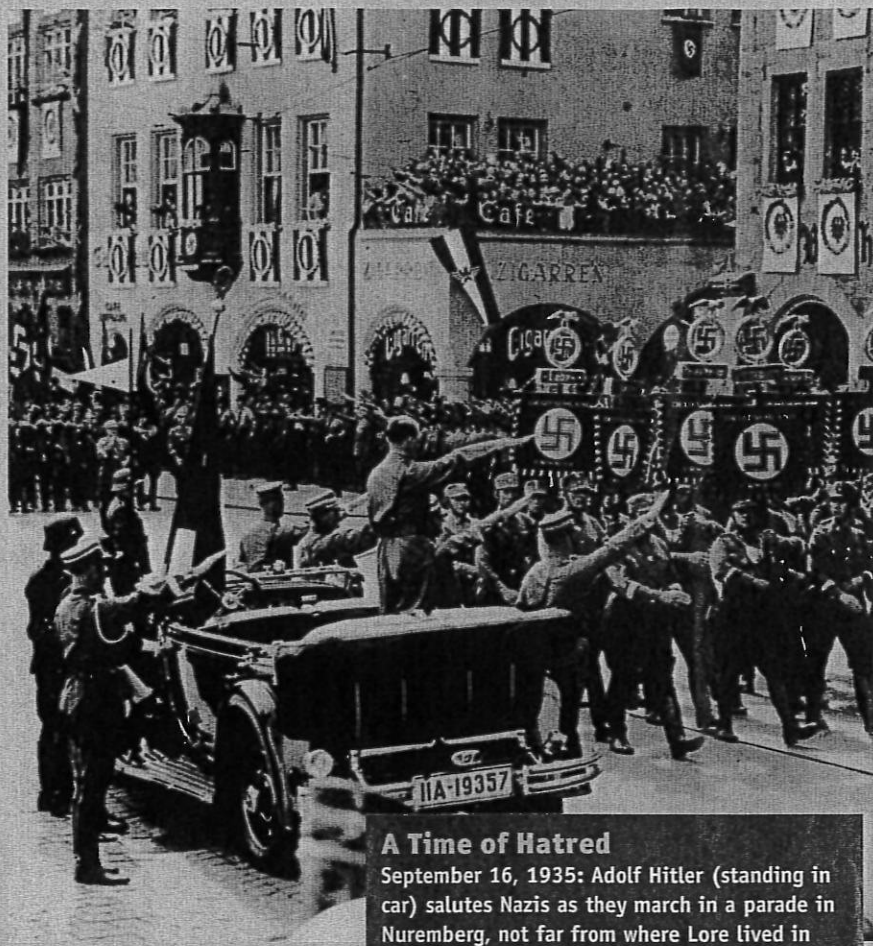
In 1933, when Hitler became chancellor—that is, the head of the German government—his racist beliefs shaped new laws that made life harder and harder for Jewish people. Over the next five years, Hitler and his Nazi Party stripped German Jews of their rights and **ostracized** them from society.

Jewish people were fired from their jobs and forbidden to vote. Friends and neighbors turned cold and cruel; some shouted racist insults at the Jewish members of their communities 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. After all, they had weathered anti-Semitic hostilities before. Many felt sure that their country would come to its senses, that Hitler would be **ousted**.

“This lunatic couldn’t possibly last much longer,” Lore remembers her parents saying.



### 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.

But that hope was soon shattered. On the night of November 9, 1938, in cities and towns across Germany, Austria, and parts of Czechoslovakia, large 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.

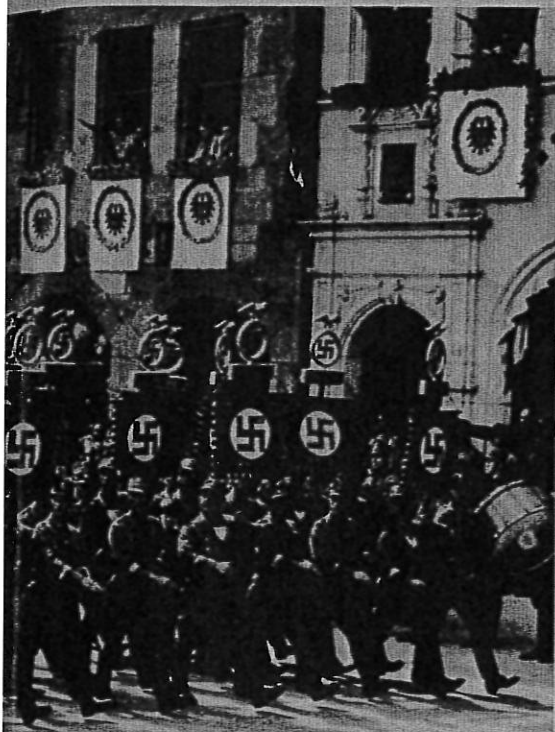
After that, Lore and her parents accepted the terrible truth: Their country—the only home they’d ever known—was no longer safe for them.

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 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 figured if they



Hoare said in a debate over what should be done.

On November 22, the British government voted in favor of helping child refugees, and in the coming days, a complex rescue operation would take 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 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.)

transporting the children. (In March 1939, Hitler's army invaded Czechoslovakia, and transports for Jewish children were quickly organized there as well.)

Now, parents in Nazi-occupied countries faced an agonizing decision: Send their children to live with total strangers in a far-off country to keep them safe from Nazi terror—or keep their families together and try to survive the violence.

### Saying Goodbye

On December 1, 1938—just a few weeks after *Kristallnacht*—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 would have only four days to get ready to leave.

The rules were strict: 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 insisted they would see her again. As the train hauled itself out of the station, all Lore could do was stare out the window until her mom and dad disappeared from sight.

### A New Life

Most children arrived in England with little idea of



### Europe 1942



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.

couldn't get entire families out, maybe they could at least save the children. They appealed to the British government to take action.

"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 25, British radio aired a call for volunteers. Soon after, more than 500 people had offered their homes to young refugees. Meanwhile, representatives traveled to Germany and Austria to set up systems for organizing and

what lay in store for them. Often they didn't 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 didn't have foster families were sent to boarding houses or hostels.

When Lore arrived in London, a couple appeared and 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 quickly accepted Lore as a sister, and the two became close friends. 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.

Despite these kindnesses, Lore was homesick and felt like an outsider. 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.

On top of everything, Lore worried about her parents. They wrote often—sometimes more than once a week. 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 responsibility to try to get her loved ones out of Germany. She did manage to find guardians in England for two friends and a cousin. But getting her mom and dad out was more difficult. She knew the rule: If she could find jobs for her parents in England, they would be allowed to come.

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

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

Eventually, Lore 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 her family would soon be reunited.

Then, on September 1, 1939,

### 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.

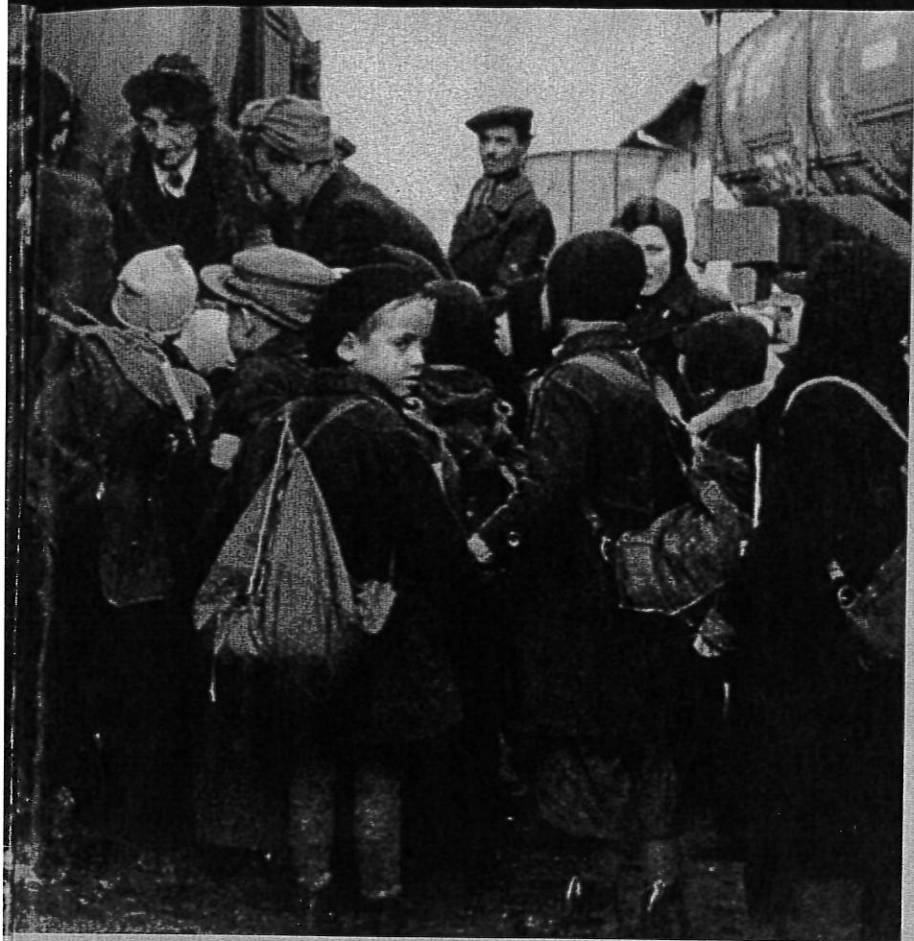
dreadful news arrived: Germany had invaded Poland. Britain was forming an alliance with other countries in Europe to fight Hitler.

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 was able to get snippets of news about her parents through a relative in Switzerland.

Through the difficult years of the war, Lore tried to make the best of life in England. She learned to sew while working in the dress shops the Schreibers owned. She



also took art classes at night. After all, this is what her parents had wanted for her: to live her life, to 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 said goodbye to the Schreibers and 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 until finally, in April 1945, Germany surrendered.

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 men, women, and children the Nazis murdered. This atrocity would later be known as the Holocaust.

Many 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 is carrying her piggyback through a park in Fürth.

Despite everything that she lost, Lore seemed to look back on her life with a sense of gratitude. After the war, she had a son, three grandsons, and a marriage 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 coming together—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.” ●

### 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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