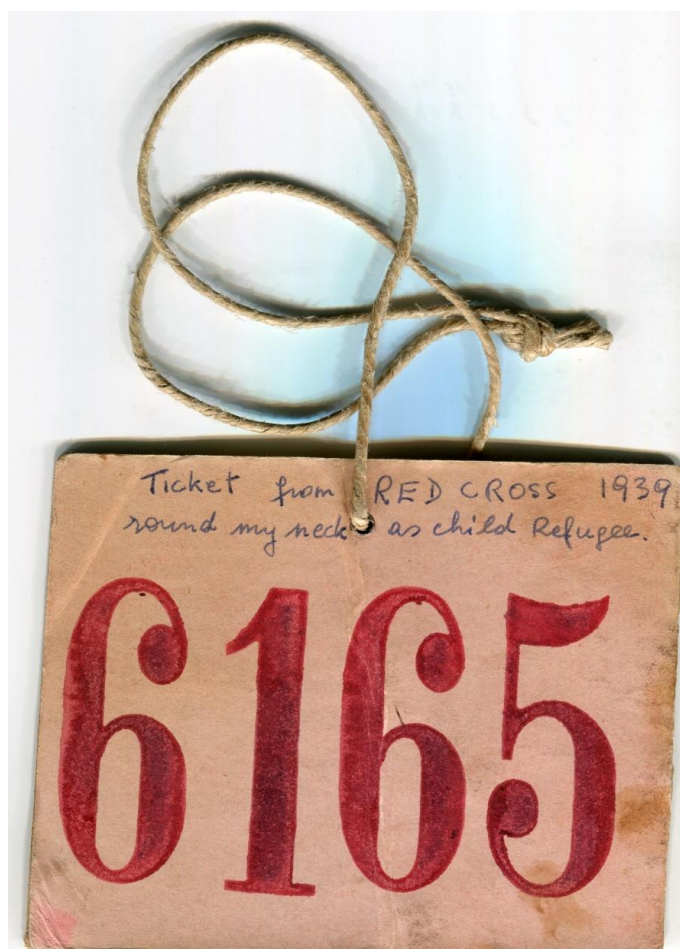


Beyond the Numbers: Helga's Journey

By Kevin Ostoyich, Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation

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***Kindertransport Tag Numbered #6165.
Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation Holocaust Collection.***

Numbers:

75; 6165; 3 1/4 inches x 4 11/16 inches; 1939; 10,000; 1,500,000; 6,000,000. These numbers all have a specific meaning when it comes to a piece of cardboard that has recently become part of Holocaust Collection of the Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation. 75 and 6165 are the numbers printed on the piece of cardboard. 3 1/4 inches and 4 11/16 inches are its height and width dimensions, respectively. 1939 is the year written on it by hand. 10,000 is the approximate number of children who were saved by being sent to Great Britain on what is called the *Kindertransport*. 1,500,000 is the approximate number of children who were murdered in the Holocaust. And 6,000,000 is the approximate number of Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust.





***Opposite Side of Kindertransport Tag Numbered 6165. This side has the number 75.
Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation Holocaust Collection.***

But numbers can only tell so much. The small piece of cardboard has more than numbers on it. The side that has the number 6165 printed on it, also has the following written by hand: “Ticket from RED CROSS 1939 round my neck as child refugee.” The side that has the number 75 printed on it, has the following on it written by hand: “Helga (Sara) Wertheimer (now Helga Bellenger).” To get a true understanding of the significance of the piece of cardboard, one must go beyond the numbers and learn the personal story of the girl who arrived in England with it dangling around her neck.

Fortunately, in 2007, Helga was interviewed by Lyn Smith for the Imperial War Museum. The following narrative of Helga’s story draws from that interview as well as various primary sources that pertain to Helga and her family as well as secondary sources that shed light on the historical context of Helga’s story. All direct quotations from Helga that appear in the text are from the Imperial War Museum interview and thus are not individually cited in the footnotes.¹ Helga passed away on March 27, 2022; the past tense has been employed when referring to her testimony.²

¹ Helga Kohn-Wertheimer (Oral History), July 2007, Interviewer Lyn Smith, Imperial War Museum. Weblink: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80029048> (Accessed November 9, 2023).

² <https://www.myheritage.de/research/collection-10938/vereinigtes-konigreich-todesfalle-1980-2023?itemId=22284213-&action=showRecord&recordTitle=Helga+Bellenger> (Accessed September 21, 2025).



Helga in Austria:

Helga Wertheimer arrived in Harwich, England on June 28, 1939, wearing the cardboard tag and carrying a doll and a suitcase.³ She was nine years old, withdrawn, and confused. She was a Jewish girl from Austria. In Austria, various family members had tried to shelter her from the horrors that were befalling the Jews. Overall, they did a good job in doing so. Nevertheless, Helga had witnessed enough of what was happening to the Jews around her in Austria that some disturbing memories remained when she was interviewed by Lyn Smith. Overall, though, her memories of her Austrian childhood were hazy.

Helga had lived on a farm in the Austrian countryside. At around age seven, though, her Aunt Paula (one of her mother's two sisters) picked her up from the farm where she was living to take her to Vienna. Helga remembered it was about a four-hour train ride to Vienna. She did not have many memories from the time before she left for Vienna. It is not clear why she left the countryside. She surmised that the reason may have been that antisemitism was brewing around the farm. It is unclear why Helga was separated from her mother, Margarete (Grete) Kohn, that is, if Grete Kohn lived on the farm. It is unclear from Helga's testimony whether her mother lived on the farm or not. Records show that Grete lived in Vienna in the late 1930s.⁴ Helga noted that her mother was a very modern woman. In her testimony, Helga mentioned having photographs of her mother smoking cigarettes and wearing flapper dresses. She added, "I was scared of my mother." It appears that Helga did not know her biological father. Much later in life, her mother revealed disturbing details about her biological father that most likely explain why Helga did not know much about him and why her relationship with her mother was so problematic for much of their lives.

In Vienna, Helga lived with her mother's brother Arthur Kohn, his wife, and their daughter. Helga remembered attending school in Vienna. In March 1938, the Germans marched into Austria and annexed the country. This event is referred to as the *Anschluss* in German. Things immediately took a turn for the worse for Austria's Jews after the *Anschluss*. Helga stated that although she was sheltered as much as possible from the events that were transpiring around her by her family members, she nevertheless witnessed acts of antisemitism. For example, she recalled seeing a woman wearing a sign that announced that she had purchased items from Jews. She also remembered her mother having to scrub the pavement while wearing a fur stole and watching others having to scrub the pavement as well. She recalled though, that "we [children] were told not to look and not to worry."

At some point, perhaps in 1938, Helga's mother married Arthur Wertheimer. Helga remembered that her mother tried to pretend that Arthur was Helga's real father. Helga noted that she very much loved her stepfather. Given the circumstances, though, Helga's interaction with her stepfather did not last long. Regarding Arthur Wertheimer, Helga stated that "He had a sort of toy emporium kind of shop. He was so sweet. He used to give me loads of toys when they were first married And we used to go rambling and hitchhiking. Two times, maybe, three times. After that I never saw him again. He was

³ Regarding date and location of arrival: Inter-Aid Committee card [scanned copy in the Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation Holocaust Collection]. Regarding Helga's belongings at the time: Helga Kohn-Wertheimer, Imperial War Museum Interview.

⁴ For example, Margarete's address is listed as 23 Volkerstrasse, Wien 2 on the Inter-Aid Committee card [scanned copy in Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation Holocaust Collection].



beaten up and [was the] first one to go to concentration camp, I think. [The Nazis] Looted his shop and everything.”

Arthur Wertheimer was arrested and stayed one night in “protective custody” in July 1938. On *Kristallnacht* (also known as the “Night of Broken Glass”), the massive pogrom that transpired throughout Germany and Austria on November 9/10, 1938, Arthur’s shop was confiscated, and he was again taken into “protective custody.” This time his incarceration was longer, lasting from November 10 to November 22.⁵

It appears that Helga was not living with her mother and stepfather, but still with her Uncle Arthur and his family at the time of *Kristallnacht*. Helga recalled that on that night she and her cousin hid in a cupboard. She also remembered that her Uncle Arthur hid a radio. She added that her Uncle Arthur was later apprehended and taken to a camp.

Helga’s most disturbing memory of something happening to her personally in Vienna was when the aunt who was married to her Uncle Arthur sent her to buy oranges. In her testimony, Helga explained that her aunt had sent her for the oranges given that Helga had very blond hair as a child. Helga remembered that the woman from whom Helga was trying to purchase the oranges started to shout at her. When her aunt came to her aid, the two women yelled at each other and pulled at Helga’s arms in a struggle. At the time Helga did not understand what was going on; she had no idea why her aunt and the woman were shouting.

Helga was very confused at the time. She did not even have much of an understanding of what it meant to be Jewish. She noted that her relatives were very much “assimilated” in Austrian life and did not see themselves as different from other Austrians. It was after the *Anschluss* that she started to realize that she was Jewish. She kept seeing all these prominent places – toy shops, sweets shops, etc. that she liked being labeled as “Jude.” Given the prominence of these places, she started to take pride in being associated with “Jude.”

Overall, she was confused and sheltered. Regarding being sheltered, Helga noted in her testimony, “We were told after a while that we must not go out in the street. Obviously, there were no shops or anything. We must not talk to anyone. And towards the end we were just kept indoors all the time anyway. I remember that.” Helga believed that for the most part, she was not frightened because things were generally hidden from the children. One thing could not be kept totally hidden from Helga, though: the swastika. Although she did not fully realize what the symbol meant, Helga knew to stay clear of anyone wearing it. The swastika armband had a lifelong effect on her. As she explained,

That still turns my stomach. If I see a swastika armband. Because, when it was impossible for us to go out, there were all these louts standing about with swastika armbands, and, by that time, I knew already that...you mustn’t go near them, you mustn’t talk to them, you must avoid them, run away immediately. The swastika armband is, to this day, still, I still have a feeling about it.

⁵ Questionnaire Nr. 46670: The National Library of Israel website: [https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_CAHJP997011249661905171/NLI#\\$FL196627396](https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_CAHJP997011249661905171/NLI#$FL196627396) (Accessed November 16, 2023).



We didn't go out to the marches and things like that, you know, but the louts standing around our streets with swastika armbands. That I still have in my subconscious really. Hate to see an armband.

As the discrimination towards the Jews mounted, Helga's relatives looked for ways to get out of the country. They began to petition the *Fürsorge-Zentrale der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde Wien Auswanderungsabteilung* (the Emigration Department of the Welfare Center of the Jewish Community of Vienna) in hopes of finding a haven. The Jewish Community of Vienna had initially been shut down by the Nazis during the *Anschluss*, but was reopened in May 1938 and forced by the Gestapo to organize the emigration of Jews including Kindertransports.⁶ According to the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI), by January 1939, the Emigration Department had received 43,336 applicants with 74,643 dependents.⁷

Given the stringent quota system in the United States and the general reluctance to admit Jews by countries all over the world, it was not easy to get out of Austria. As Helga explained, "My stepfather and my mother had been trying to get visas.... It was very hard to get a visa. In fact, they turned you down more than not, as an adult."

Three questionnaires from the Emigration Department of the Welfare Center of the Jewish Community of Vienna pertaining to Helga's stepfather, Arthur Wertheimer, have been located.⁸ The first questionnaire is numbered 33064; it was only partially filled out and was not written by Arthur. (The handwriting does not match that which is on another petition (numbered 46670), which is signed by Arthur.) Moreover, at the top of the document, it is noted that Arthur is incarcerated [*"in Haft!"*]. It is possible that the undated questionnaire numbered 33064 was submitted by Grete most likely in November 1938 when Arthur was incarcerated. It is possible that the questionnaire was only partially filled out because Grete may not have known some of the information requested on the questionnaire about her relatively new husband. For example, two question marks are filled in for "Residence in Vienna since _____."

⁶ EHRI Website: https://portal.ehri-project.eu/units/at-001985-ikg_ar_8 (Accessed December 24, 2023).

⁷ EHRI Website: https://portal.ehri-project.eu/units/at-001985-ikg_ar_8 (Accessed December 24, 2023).

⁸ Questionnaire #33064 is located on the National Library of Israel website at [https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_CAHJP997011251473105171/NLI#\\$FL197010304](https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_CAHJP997011251473105171/NLI#$FL197010304) (Accessed November 16, 2023); Questionnaire #46670 is located on the National Library of Israel website at [https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_CAHJP997011249661905171/NLI#\\$FL196627396](https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_CAHJP997011249661905171/NLI#$FL196627396) (Accessed November 16, 2023); Questionnaire #29445/6915 is located on the National Library of Israel Website: [https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_CAHJP990050364760205171/NLI#\\$FL88827093](https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_CAHJP990050364760205171/NLI#$FL88827093) (Accessed November 16, 2023).



Helga
33064

FÜRSORGE-ZENTRALE
der 1. Kulturgemeinde Wien
Auswanderungsabteilung

Kristallnacht!
FB.
Nr. 33064

FRAGEBOGEN
(genau – mit Tinte, wenn möglich mit Schreibmaschine – ausfüllen)

Name	<i>Wertheimer</i>	Vorname	<i>Arthur</i>
Wohnort	<i>1180 Wien VII</i>	genaue Adresse	<i>Leopoldsdorfer Platz 10</i>
Geburtsdatum	<i>10. 2. 1879</i>	Geburtsort	<i>Budapest</i>
Stand (ledig/verheiratet/verwitwet-geschieden)	<i>verheiratet</i>		
Staatsangehörigkeit	<i>ö. österr.</i>	In Wien wohnhaft seit	<i>27</i>
Eventueller früherer Aufenthalt (Orts- und Zeitangabe)			

Beruf (Spezialfach) *Kaufmann*

Berufsausbildung *1898-1900 Handelsk. 10*

Bisherige Tätigkeit und letzte Stellung im Beruf

Wurde ein neuer Beruf erlernt? Wenn ja, welcher?

Ausbildung für den neuen Beruf

Sprachenkenntnisse

Gegenwärtige wirtschaftliche Lage und monatlicher Verdienst

Sind Sie in der Lage, sich alle für die Auswanderung notwendigen Dokumente zu beschaffen?

Wenden!

This questionnaire may have been filled out by Grete Wertheimer while Arthur Wertheimer was in protective custody in November of 1938. The handwriting is not that of Arthur Wertheimer. The person who filled out the questionnaire did not know important details of Arthur Wertheimer's life, for example, how long he had had his business in Vienna. Furthermore, it is noted at the top of the questionnaire that Arthur Wertheimer is "in custody" ["in Haft!"]. The National Library of Israel website:
[https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_CAHJP997011251473105171/NLI#\\$FL197010304](https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_CAHJP997011251473105171/NLI#$FL197010304)
(Accessed November 16, 2023).

The fully completed questionnaire numbered 46670 was dated December 10, 1938, and was signed by Arthur Wertheimer.

The questionnaire numbered 46670, provides basic information about Helga's stepfather. Arthur Wertheimer was born on February 10, 1879, in Budapest. He moved to Vienna from Budapest in 1892. He listed German and Hungarian as his languages. He was a salesman who had by the time of the questionnaire run his own business for thirty years. Arthur noted that during *Kristallnacht* his business, goods, and 1500 RM in cash were confiscated. He noted as well that approximately 3000 RM was taken from the warehouse.

Regarding a desired destination, he wrote, "Wherever possible, it does not matter." [*"Wohin es möglich ist, ganz egal."*] He wrote that he would take any employment that would get him out of the Greater German Reich [*Reichgebiet*]. Regarding funds to emigrate, he wrote, "none at the moment." Regarding anyone in country of desired destination, he noted his father Josef Keller in New York. He did not know the address, and wrote that Keller emigrated 56 years ago and has two daughters.



Arthur listed on the questionnaire two family members: Grete Wertheimer, wife, born in Vienna on September 17, 1897, occupation: Milliner [Modistin] and Helga Wertheimer, daughter, born in Vienna on April 5, 1930.

FÜRSORGE-ZENTRALE
der jüd. Kulturgemeinde Wien
Auswanderungsabteilung

Katasterblatt angelegt Nr. 46670

FRAGEBOGEN
(genau – mit Foto, wenn möglich mit Schiffsbescheinigung – auszufüllen)

46670

Name Wertheimer Vorname Arthur
Wohnort Wien genaue Adresse St. Jakobstr. 13/14
Geburtsdatum 10.2.1874 Geburtsort Prüßisch
Stand (ledig-verheiratet-verwitwet-geschieden) verheiratet
Staatsangehörigkeit Reichs-Deutsch in Wien wohnhaft seit 1892
Eventueller früherer Aufenthalt (Ort- und Zeitangabe) Budapest
von 1914 bis 1933

Beruf (Spezialfach) Kaufmann
Berufsausbildung Kaufmannlehre
Bisherige Tätigkeit und letzte Stellung im Berufs- selbst. eigener Geschäft
Wurde ein neuer Beruf erlernt? Wenn ja, welcher?
Ausbildung für den neuen Beruf
Sprachkenntnisse Deutsch, Ungarisch
Gegenwärtige wirtschaftliche Lage und monatlicher Verdienst von 10.000 Schilling
Sind Sie in der Lage, sich alle für die Auswanderung notwendigen Dokumente zu beschaffen?
Wenden!

Wohin wollen Sie auswandern? wohin es möglich ist
egal

Welche Pläne haben Sie für Ihren neuen Aufenthalt? mehrere Jahre Arbeit
an was immer für einem Ort, wo man das Reich
geheimverboten können. Der Punkt in Budapest 1930-1933, 10.2.1874

Welche Mittel stehen Ihnen für die Auswanderung zur Verfügung?
Gespartes Geld

Welche Beziehungen haben Sie im Ausland, besonders in dem Land, wohin Sie auswandern wollen?

Vor- und Zuname	Wohnort	Genauere Adresse	Verwandtschaftsgrad
Josef Heller	Wien	St. Jakobstr. 13/14	Vater

Referenzen
Haben Sie einen gültigen Paß?
Ausgestellt von
gültig bis

Angehörige

Vor- und Zuname	Name	Geburtsort	Geburtsdatum	Beruf
Frau	Grete Wertheimer	Wien	17.9.1897	Modistin
Kind	Helga	Wien	5.4.1930	

Welche der obgenannten Angehörigen sollen jetzt und welche später auswandern?
alle

Wien, am 10/12 1933 Arthur Wertheimer
Unterschrift

Questionnaire numbered 46670, dated December 10, 1938, and signed by Arthur Wertheimer.

The National Library of Israel Website:

[https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_CAHP997011249661905171/NLI#\\$FL196627396](https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_CAHP997011249661905171/NLI#$FL196627396)

(Accessed November 16, 2023).

The third questionnaire for Arthur Wertheimer is numbered 29445/6915. The questionnaire was signed but not dated by Arthur Wertheimer. There is a stamp on it for May 31, 1939. The date May 26, 1939, is handwritten on it which most likely refers to the date of Grete Wertheimer's petition to go to England. On the questionnaire, Arthur Wertheimer noted the intended destination as "The United States of America, England, Australia" and wrote that he would take any work opportunity. Regarding assets to help with emigration, he listed a house and an appliances store worth approximately 5,000 RM. Grete and Helga were again listed with the hope that they would all go together. In the margin, May 26, 1939 was written next to the line for Grete.

May 26, 1939 most likely referred to the date Grete left for England under the domestic servant quota. Forms of the Emigration Department of the Welfare Center of the Jewish Community of Vienna pertaining to Grete's emigration from Vienna for England have been located. Her signed petition was



dated May 22, 1939.⁹ It appears that she was issued a passport on May 2, 1939 and that her visa was issued on May 15, 1939. Another form provides transport information for London.¹⁰

Helga and Grete were able to flee to safety in England, albeit separately. Arthur, however, did not escape from the Nazis.

During this time of acute Nazi persecution, Arthur Wertheimer changed addresses on multiple occasions. On the questionnaire numbered 33064, his home address is listed as Zenostrasse 1 alte Ledreck and his business address is listed as Thirteenth District Hadikgasse 12.

On the questionnaire numbered 46670 and dated December 10, 1938, his address is listed as Thirteenth District, Hadikgasse 12/9 bei Frauenglas. This is the address listed as his business on the questionnaire numbered 33064. The questionnaire numbered 29445/6915 originally has Vienna Twelfth District Schonbrunnerstrasse 273 filled in for address, but then Second District Volkerstrasse 23/7 “bei Freund” is written in the margins with an arrow drawn to the address line. Although “Freund” means “friend” in German, this most likely does not refer to him staying with a friend. “Freund” may refer to Marta Freund. Marta Freund is a Holocaust victim who is listed as having Volkerstrasse 23/7 as her address in the Yad Vashem archives.¹¹ It is not clear what Arthur Wertheimer’s connection to Marta Freund may have been.

According to document 29445/6915, Grete’s address on March 1, 1938, was Taborstrasse 51/21 in Vienna’s Second District.¹² This was the address of her two sisters, Elsa (Elisabeth) (born September 24, 1896 in Budapest)¹³ and Paula (Pauline) (born July 27, 1892 in Linz).¹⁴ By May 1939, she was living with Arthur Wertheimer at Volkerstrasse 23/7 in Vienna’s Second District. Grete most likely moved out of Taborstrasse 51/21 to live with Arthur Wertheimer. Elsa eventually moved to Ybbsstrasse 3/25 in Vienna’s Second District, and Paula stayed at Taborstrasse 51/21.

⁹ Document signed “Margarethe Sara Wertheimer” and dated “22. Mai 1939,” the National Library of Israel Website: [https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_CAHJP990050364760205171/NLI#\\$FL88827063](https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_CAHJP990050364760205171/NLI#$FL88827063) (Accessed December 25, 2023).

¹⁰ Document starting with handwritten word “Pass”, the National Library of Israel Website: [https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_CAHJP990050364760205171/NLI#\\$FL88827089](https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_CAHJP990050364760205171/NLI#$FL88827089) (Accessed December 25, 2023).

¹¹ <https://yvng.yadvashem.org/nameDetails.html?language=en&itemId=4914533&ind=1> (Accessed December 24, 2023).

¹² The sisters Elsa and Paula Kohn can be determined to be Helga’s aunts given 1) the information about their respective attempts to get to England meshes with Helga’s oral testimony and 2) Grete Wertheimer also listed Taborstrasse 51 as having been her address on the date March 1, 1938 in the Document 29445/6915 located on the National Library of Israel website: [https://www.nli.org.il/he/archives/NNL_CAHJP990050364760205171/NLI#\\$FL88827091](https://www.nli.org.il/he/archives/NNL_CAHJP990050364760205171/NLI#$FL88827091) (Accessed November 28, 2023).

¹³ The National Library of Israel website: [https://www.nli.org.il/he/archives/NNL_CAHJP990047905170205171/NLI#\\$FL80227186](https://www.nli.org.il/he/archives/NNL_CAHJP990047905170205171/NLI#$FL80227186) (Accessed December 25, 2023).

¹⁴ The National Library of Israel website: [https://www.nli.org.il/he/archives/NNL_CAHJP990047905170205171/NLI#\\$FL80227191](https://www.nli.org.il/he/archives/NNL_CAHJP990047905170205171/NLI#$FL80227191) (Accessed December 25, 2023).



During her time in Vienna, Helga felt a closer bond to her mother's sisters, Aunt Elsa and Aunt Paula, than to her mother. Aunt Elsa and Aunt Paula were not married, Helga referred to them as her "maiden aunts" in her interview with Lyn Smith. In June 1938 Paula submitted a questionnaire for herself and Elsa with the stated intention of going to New York.¹⁵ The New York plan did not come to fruition. In her interview with Lyn Smith, Helga recalled seeing her Aunt Elsa leave Austria for England alone. This was most likely in May 1939. Elsa had secured a domestic servant permit for England.¹⁶ Helga remembered seeing her aunt off at the train station but having no comprehension of what was going on at the time:

I remember seeing my aunt off when she got on a train because we had arrived in a taxi or fiacre (German: *Fiaker*) or something. My cousin and I, and we got very excited to *be* in a fiacre at all. And we were told to stop it because it was a sad occasion. And we were told not to giggle and laugh there because for us two children it was so exciting to *be* in a fiacre going to the station.

Elsa most likely left in May 1939. (There are multiple stamps on her paperwork for dates in May, and it is noted that she had given notice that she would not have her apartment after May 31.) Aunt Paula was going through the process of going to England at the end of August 1939. There are multiple stamps on her paperwork from the last week in August. Unfortunately, the outbreak of the Second World War on September 1, 1939, thwarted Aunt Paula's plans to journey to Great Britain. In her interview with Lyn Smith, Helga noted how her Aunt Paula was unable to escape the clutches of the Nazis due to the onset of the war.

Helga's mother, most likely left Vienna for Great Britain in May or June 1939. (Thus, around the time Elsa left.) Grete and Elsa were two of the approximately 20,000 Jewish women who escaped Germany and Austria to work as domestic servants in Great Britain.¹⁷

The Association of Jewish Refugees has assembled a testimony archive with interviews of many women, who, like Grete and Elsa, made it to Great Britain with domestic servant visas. According to Jana Buresova, who wrote about the domestic servant refugees for the Association of Jewish Refugees website, the refugees were often unhappy and exploited in Great Britain:

¹⁵ Questionnaire #34878 located on the National Library of Israel website: [https://www.nli.org.il/he/archives/NNL_CAHJP990047905170205171/NLI#\\$FL80227191](https://www.nli.org.il/he/archives/NNL_CAHJP990047905170205171/NLI#$FL80227191) (Accessed November 28, 2023).

¹⁶ Dates written on various documents indicate Elsa left for England in May 1939. For example, May 5, 1939 is written in the margin next to the line for Elsa on the original questionnaire that Paula submitted in June 1938. (See the National Library of Israel website: [https://www.nli.org.il/he/archives/NNL_CAHJP990047905170205171/NLI#\\$FL80227186](https://www.nli.org.il/he/archives/NNL_CAHJP990047905170205171/NLI#$FL80227186) (Accessed December 25, 2023). Another document has May 14 as the date for Elsa to leave for "Bucks England." The National Library of Israel website: [https://www.nli.org.il/he/archives/NNL_CAHJP990047905170205171/NLI#\\$FL80227192](https://www.nli.org.il/he/archives/NNL_CAHJP990047905170205171/NLI#$FL80227192) (Accessed December 25, 2023).

¹⁷ For 20,000 number: Online Exhibition of the Wiener Holocaust Library titled "A Bitter Road: Britain and the Refugee Crisis of the 1930s and 1940s": <https://wienerholocaustlibrary.org/exhibition/a-bitter-road-britain-and-the-refugee-crisis-of-the-1930s-and-1940s-2/> (Accessed January 5, 2024) and Mario Cacciottolo, "Nazi persecution saw Jews flee abroad as servants," BBC News, March 8, 2012: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-16942741> (Accessed November 14, 2023).

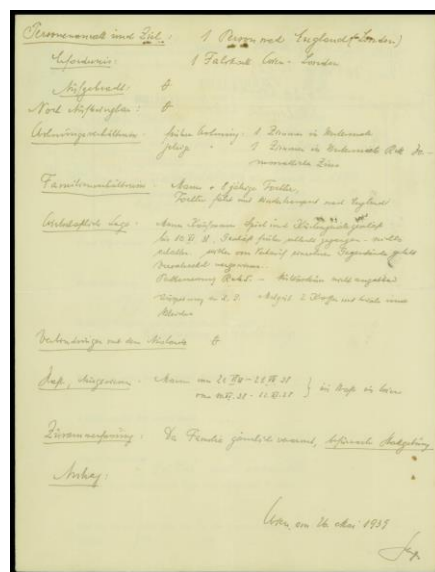


Several factors contributed to the women's unhappiness, quite apart from homesickness and anxiety about loved ones left behind. Grievances centre on their treatment/mistreatment as 'lowly servants' regardless of their education, qualifications or social standing (not unusually equal to, or greater than that of the respective mistress). Unfamiliar language, customs and practices could heighten a woman's humiliation or sense of lost identity in a class-conscious and alien society that had not endured foreign domination for centuries.¹⁸

As Mario Cacciottolo wrote for *BBC News*, although the number of women who were saved through the domestic servant visa program roughly doubled the number of children saved on the *Kindertransport*, the story of the domestic servant refugees "has largely been forgotten."¹⁹

A Cup of Tea

A document that is dated May 26, 1939, and is among the official paperwork for Grete's petition to leave Vienna indicates that by May 1939 it had already been established that Helga was going to leave for England.²⁰



Document dated May 26, 1939, pertaining to the intended emigration of Grete Wertheimer that notes that her daughter (Helga) will leave for England. ("Tochter fährt mit Kindertransport nach England.")

Document available on the National Library of Israel Website:

[https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_CAHJP990050364760205171/NLI#\\$FL88827054](https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_CAHJP990050364760205171/NLI#$FL88827054)

(Accessed November 28, 2023).

¹⁸ Jana Buresova, "Domestic Service," Association of Jewish Refugees website:

<https://www.ajrrefugeevoices.org.uk/intervieweeexperiences/domestic-service> (Accessed January 6, 2024).

¹⁹ Mario Cacciottolo, "Nazi persecution".

²⁰ Document dated May 26, 1939 located on the National Library of Israel website:

[https://www.nli.org.il/he/archives/NNL_CAHJP990050364760205171/NLI#\\$FL88827054](https://www.nli.org.il/he/archives/NNL_CAHJP990050364760205171/NLI#$FL88827054) (Accessed November 28, 2023). On the document it is stated that "Tochter fährt mit Kindertransport nach England." ("Daughter will go to England on a transport for children.")



Helga did, in fact, leave Vienna for Great Britain at the end of June 1939. She was saved from the Holocaust in what has since become known as the *Kindertransport*. *Kindertransport* refers to a combination of efforts by various organizations and individuals to provide a haven in Great Britain for children who were vulnerable to persecution in Nazi Europe. According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “In all, the rescue operation brought about 10,000 children from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland to Great Britain. The vast majority of these children were Jewish.”²¹ The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum explains further that “Private citizens or organizations had to guarantee payment for each child's care, education, and eventual emigration from Britain. In return, the British government agreed to allow unaccompanied refugee children to enter the country on temporary travel visas. It was understood at the time that when the ‘crisis was over,’ the children would return to their families. Parents or guardians could not accompany the children.”²²

The *Kindertransport* is generally regarded as having begun with the arrival of approximately 200 children in Harwich, England on December 2, 1938, and ended with the transport from the Netherlands on May 14, 1940.²³

When Helga went on the *Kindertransport*, she had a suitcase, a doll, and the doll's dresses. The dresses were made by her maiden aunts Elsa and Paula (sisters of her mother).



One of the doll's dresses that Helga brought with her on the Kindertransport.

Image located on the Imperial War Museum (London) website:

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30083420>

(Accessed January 5, 2024).

²¹ <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/kindertransport-1938-40> (Accessed December 20, 2023).

²² <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/kindertransport-1938-40> (Accessed December 20, 2023).

²³ <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/kindertransport-1938-40> (Accessed December 20, 2023).



Helga also came with various pieces of linen. She noted that it was common for people to take such items when leaving Austria: “You were not about to bring out any money, so they tried to turn it into sheets and clothes and pillowcases. Because you couldn’t bring any money out of Austria, but you could bring linen, bedding, and stuff like that. Especially on a domestic permit.” Among the items that Helga later donated to the Imperial War Museum is an embroidered table mat that she believed her mother brought with her when she went to England with the domestic servant visa.



Embroidered table mat that Grete Wertheimer brought with her to England on a domestic servant visa. The text reads, “Because I thought of you in Vienna, I brought this for you.” [Translation by Kevin Ostoyich]
Image location on the Imperial War Museum website:
<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30083428> (Accessed January 5, 2024).

In her interview with Lyn Smith, Helga claimed that she did not have too many memories of the journey. Regarding the train ride, all she could recall was shouting at the borders. She stated, “I remember getting on the ship. And the...biggest memory on the ship is they gave me a cup of tea with milk and sugar in it, and I could not drink it, because we were always given lemon tea. And, with milk and the sugar and all that it made me almost sick, I think. That’s the only memory I have of the whole trip. Just that cup of tea. [She laughs.]” This was Helga’s first taste of English tea. She eventually came to love the beverage.

The *Kindertransport* identification card for Helga notes that the “young persons” were admitted “under the care of the Inter-Aid Committee for children.”²⁴

²⁴ Helga Wertheimer Identification Card. A scan copy is in the Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation Holocaust Collection.



6165

This document of identity is issued with the approval of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom to young persons to be admitted to the United Kingdom for educational purposes under the care of the Inter-Aid Committee for children.

THIS DOCUMENT REQUIRES NO VISA.

PERSONAL PARTICULARS.

Name WERTHEIMER HELGA

Sex FEMALE Date of Birth 5.4.30.

Place WIEN

Full Names and Address of Parents
WERTHEIMER ARTUR & MARGARETE
23, VOLKERTSTR.
WIEN 2



(copy)

Identification card for Helga Wertheimer (front). The "Inter-Aid Committee for children" is noted on the card. The number on the top right of the card "6165" corresponds to the number on the tag she wore around her neck during the journey.
[COPY. The Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation does not have the original.]

According to Catherine Pepinster, the Inter-Aid Committee for Children had been set up by Sir Wyndham Deedes, whose "commitment to the Jewish cause was also shaped by his brand of Christianity, which convinced him that there needed to be a new state for the dispersed peoples of the Old Testament."²⁵ In addition to setting up the Inter-Aid Committee, Deedes became joint president of the Movement for the Care of Children from Germany.²⁶

The Inter-Aid Committee for Children was involved from the very beginning of the *Kindertransport*. It organized the first *Kindertransport* of 200 children after *Kristallnacht*, as is evidenced by a letter from the British Foreign Office to the Netherlands Legation that was dated November 29, 1938:

This is to confirm what I told you on the telephone this afternoon about the 200 refugee children from Germany who will be passing through Holland on December 1st on their way to this country.

The Inter-Aid Committee are unable to state the exact number of children and can only say that there will be about 200."²⁷

²⁵ Catherine Pepinster, "The Kindertransport to Britain saved thousands of lives and inspired the kibbutz movement of the young Israel," on Religion Media Centre website: <https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/news/the-kindertransport-to-britain-saved-thousands-of-lives-and-inspired-the-kibbutz-movement-of-the-young-israel/> (Accessed December 20, 2023).

²⁶ Pepinster, "The Kindertransport to Britain"

²⁷ Letter from R. M. Makins to Jonkheer E. Teixeira de Mattos Netherlands Legation located in The National Archives, Kew, Richmond TW9 4DU: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/kindertransport/first-arrivals/> (Accessed December 21, 2023).

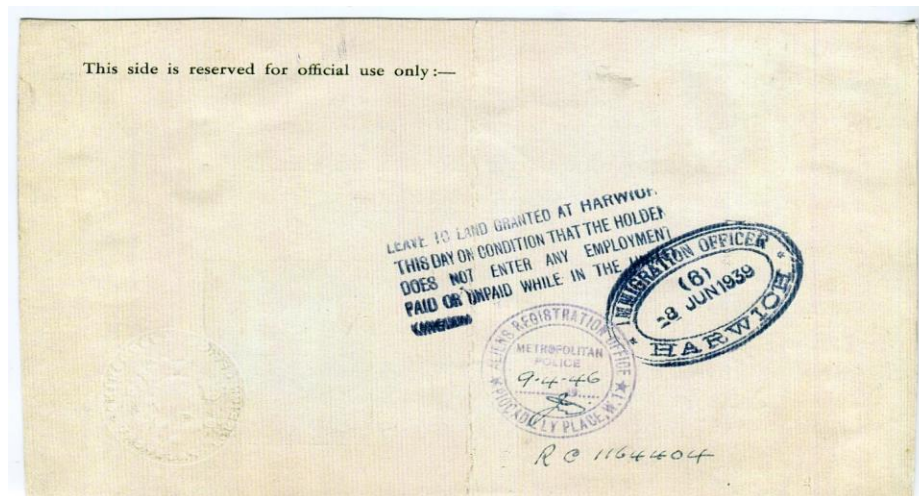


A British Foreign Office circular explained the role of the Inter-Aid Committee as well as the use of cards to identify the children:

The Inter-Aid Committee for Children, 20 Gordon Square, London, W.C.1, a voluntary organisation which originated out of The Save The Children Fund, is arranging to bring large numbers of refugee children up to the age of 17 (without their parents) from Germany and Austria to this country for educational purposes. H.M. Government has agreed to admit to the United Kingdom children sponsored by this Committee and to dispense with the requirement of a visa for them. Any person enquiring about the possibility of sending a child to this country should be referred to this Committee.

A special two part document of identity, the form of which has been approved by the Home Office, will be used by the Committee for each child. It will be filled in London by the Committee and submitted to the Passport Control Department for stamping. The person responsible for bringing the children to this country will be supplied with a card for each child and application to the Passport Control Officer or a British Consul for visa or further authentication will be unnecessary. On arrival of the child in the United Kingdom, the card will be endorsed by the Immigration Officer, one part being retained for official purposes and the other being given to the conductor of the party who will forward it to the Inter-Aid Committee. Specimen copies of the card will be forwarded as soon as available.
23rd November, 1938.²⁸

Helga's identification card was stamped by an immigration officer upon her arrival in Harwich, England on June 28, 1938. Harwich was the port of arrival of the vast majority of the *Kindertransport* children.



Identification card for Helga Wertheimer. A stamp on the card shows that she landed in Harwich, England on June 28, 1938. The card also has a stamp from the Aliens Registration Office dated April 9, 1946. [COPY. The Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation does not have the original.]

²⁸ British Foreign Office circular dated 23 November 1938 (FO 371/24085), The National Archives, Kew, Richmond TW9 4DU: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/kindertransport/arrangement-transports/> (Accessed December 21, 2023).



Given the importance of Harwich as the entry port for the children of the *Kindertransport*, a memorial created by Ian Wolter was erected there in September 2022.²⁹



Memorial in Harwich where the Kindertransport children (including Helga) arrived.

The memorial was created by Ian Wolter.

Photo is from <https://kindertransport-memorial.org/> (Accessed November 16, 2023).

Children were sent from Harwich to London via train. They arrived at London's Liverpool Street Station. During her interview with Lyn Smith, Helga choked up as she remembered her arrival at the Liverpool Street Station:

My *loveliest* memory, you see. At Liverpool Street I was met – [*She choked up.*] I was met by a brother of the man who became my foster father. [*She choked up.*] And I attached myself to him *immediately*. I mean, I was a child who really longed for just kind words and smiles, and he was *so lovely* to me. [*I*] couldn't speak a word of English, of course. It didn't matter. He was just such a *lovely* man. And I hoped I was going to stay with him. But he handed me over then to his brother. They came and fetched me in a big car. That was all *very* exciting for me, in those days, coming from confusion and everything. Big car came. My foster father's daughter was in it. She was three years older than I was. I think she was eleven, twelve, at that time.

²⁹ <https://kindertransport-memorial.org/> (Accessed November 16, 2023).





A statue at Liverpool Street Station commemorating the Kindertransport. Source:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kindertransport_%E2%80%93_The_Arrival#/media/File:Kindertransport.jpg
 (Accessed November 15, 2023).

Helga was taken in by the Bland family of Kidderminster. The Blands were a Christadelphian family. Christadelphians are a small Christian denomination that are distinguished theologically by their rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity. They see themselves as having a religion that is very much in harmony with Judaism. Despite their modest numbers, they played a disproportionately large role in the *Kindertransport*. Approximately 250 of the 10,000 children of the *Kindertransport* were sponsored by the Christadelphians.³⁰ The children were either taken in by individual Christadelphian families or housed in two hostels: Elpis Lodge in Birmingham and Little Thorn in Rugby.³¹ Jason Hensley, who is spearheading a project titled “Part of the Family” to document the experiences of Jewish refugees with the Christadelphians, notes that the two hostels were set up differently. Whereas Little Thorn was owned and operated by the Christadelphians, “Elpis Lodge was managed by Dr. Hirsch and run on Orthodox lines. As such, it was a bit of a joint venture between the Jews and the Christadelphians of Birmingham.”³²

Hensley asserts that the Christadelphians were motivated to act on behalf of the Jewish refugees because they “believed the promises that were made to Abraham and his children throughout the book

³⁰ Jason Hensley, *Part of the Family: Christadelphians, the Kindertransport, and Rescue from the Holocaust* (Middletown, DE: Jason Hensley, 2016). 250 number appears on p. 63; 10,000 number appears on p. 61.

³¹ Hensley, *Part of the Family*, 32.

³² Hensley, *Part of the Family*, 33.



of Genesis. And they believed that because of God's love for Abraham, and because the Jews were a special, covenant people to God, they should be given aid."³³

Helga adored her foster father, Joseph Powell Bland. She stated, "My foster father was a saint, really. He really believed in what he was doing. He treated me exactly like his own daughter."

According to Ancestry.com, Joseph Powell Bland was born in Kidderminster, Worcestershire, England on September 20, 1878 to Joseph Bland and Alice Millward Dangerfield.³⁴ His father was a prominent Christadelphian who published many theological tracts. For example, the senior Joseph Bland published the sermon "Salvation: What It Is, and How to Obtain It" in 1891.³⁵ Among his many publications listed at the end of that work, there is a lecture titled "Russia and the Jews." The description of the lecture reads "A lecture (with much additional matter) bearing upon the persecution of the Jews in Russia, and the stupendous events to which it will lead as exhibited in the ancient predictions of the prophets of Israel." This indicates that Helga's foster father would most likely have been exposed to theological arguments that linked the persecution of the Jews in modern times to biblical prophecy.

As had been the case for many Christadelphians, Helga's foster father had been a conscientious objector during the First World War and had been exempted from military service.³⁶ Helga remembered her foster father as being a carpet designer, who was very intellectual.³⁷ When he would come home from work, there was to be peace and quiet in the house.

Joseph Powell Bland was married to Elizabeth Anne Hanson.³⁸ Whereas Helga spoke glowingly of her foster father in her interview with Lyn Smith, she was more sparing with praise for her foster mother:

My foster mother was a bit of a simple woman. She had been [my foster father's] housekeeper.... He used to live with his mother, and she had been his housekeeper. And when the mother died, he married her. But you could see that there was an academic difference

³³ Hensley, *Part of the Family*, 47. In addition to his book, Hensley maintains a website with a documentary and video portraits of former Jewish refugees who were housed by Christadelphians. See <https://www.iwaspartmentofthefamily.com/> (Accessed January 5, 2024).

³⁴ <https://www.ancestry.com/genealogy/records/joseph-powell-bland-24-7dq7hm> (Accessed December 26, 2023).

³⁵ See, for example, his published sermon "Salvation: What It Is, and How to Obtain It" from 1891: https://coggc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Salvation_What-it-is-and-How-to-Obtain-it-Joseph-Bland-1891.pdf (Accessed December 26, 2023).

³⁶ The Imperial War Museum Archives listing for Joseph Powell Bland notes "Christadelphian" as the "motivation" and "alternativist" for the "reason" for his conscientious objection to the war. He was granted exemption from military service on two occasions. On both occasions it was stated the exemption was for "business reasons": "MST (Military Service Tribunal) Kidderminster 18.3.16 - ECS (Exemption from Combatant Service) on business grounds" and "WNI (Pelham) (Work of National Importance under the Pelham Committee) Details of Court Martial: WNI (Pelham) (Work of National Importance under the Pelham Committee) 1.8.18 Exempt on business grounds. To stay where he is unless Tribunal changes its mind." <https://livesofthefirstworldwar.iwm.org.uk/lifestory/7651102> (Accessed November 23, 2023).

³⁷ The Imperial War Museum file for Joseph Powell Bland also identifies him as a carpet designer. <https://livesofthefirstworldwar.iwm.org.uk/lifestory/7651102> (Accessed November 23, 2023).

³⁸ Helga did not identify her foster mother by name in her testimony. The name Elizabeth Anne Hanson comes from Ancestry.com.



between them. Never mind. She was not bad to me, but she didn't particularly like that extra addition to the family. She was not bad, but she was not particularly loving either.

Joseph and Elizabeth Bland had one daughter and two sons. Helga spoke more about the daughter than the sons in her interview with Lyn Smith:

My foster sister was often very jealous....She told me this before she died, she said, "I used to be so jealous of you" because I got a lot of attention, I was a foreign girl [*She laughs.*], I was quite apparently very pretty as a child, you know. And she didn't take much notice of me most of the time. So, I was always rather a withdrawn child, you know. We got on alright. There were two boys there as well. We used to play cricket together and pick apples in the orchard and we did chores in the house and in the garden.

Helga noted that her foster mother did not really treat her the same as her own daughter, and that her foster mother favored the two boys over the girls. Overall, however, Helga thought of her experience with the Bland family as having been a positive one: "I had a lovely childhood to my mind. I couldn't have wished for anything else, really."

She did not remember the first few days with the Blands but was later told that she cried one night. She explained that she was upset about her uncle being taken away in Vienna.

While living with the Blands, Helga attended Kidderminster High School. She recalled gaining a classical education there with subjects such as music and Latin. Overall, she loved school. She particularly remembered a wonderful English teacher, who taught her English with a doll. She noted that she learned English after approximately three months.

Initially, Helga attended religious services with the family three times on Sundays. She noted though that "It all washed over my head because even at that age I did not believe in God or anything else, actually, except to have a happy life and be nice to people. Even at that age, it didn't *mean* anything to me." Eventually, the foster parents' own children started to complain about going to services, and the children no longer had to attend.³⁹

³⁹ The issue of Christian proselytization of Jewish refugee children is a point of controversy within the historiography of the Kindertransport. For example, Jennifer Craig-Norton writes,

The same set of archival documents reveals that a significant number of children had been placed with Christadelphian families, most of whom were frankly conversionist and who resisted allowing their foster children to take part in any Jewish religious instruction. These placements proved to be so uniquely troublesome that a Birmingham welfare officer referred to them as her "Religious specials". The Movement had such little success in preventing these children from being converted that near the end of the war the RCM General Secretary, Dorothy Hardisty, wrote: "The Movement possibly made a mistake in the beginning in not understanding how impossible it would be for a child to live in a Christadelphian household without sharing its religious life, and in connection with the children under the Christadelphian Community it has been difficult to get over an initial mistake". Although she limited her remorse to the children placed with Christadelphians, Jewish children in a variety of non-Jewish placements were



The family invited both Helga's mother and aunt to come stay with them, and they did come to visit together on one occasion. At some point later, a bomb hit the factory where Helga's Aunt Elsa was working. Although Aunt Elsa was not killed by the bomb itself, she died of a heart attack that was triggered by the explosion. After Aunt Elsa died, Grete visited the Blands again.

When Helga was fourteen, her foster mother sent her to a Jewish hostel in Birmingham. She was told this was for a holiday. This was perhaps the Elpis Lodge which was sponsored by the Christadelphians but managed along Orthodox Jewish lines. Helga says, "I met one girl there who was a Zionist and tried to make me a Zionist. And I met a young boy, who was trying to get into my bedroom, dormitory, or whatever at night [*She laughed.*]" Overall, she did not like the hostel. She says she was not interested in religion at all, and being Jewish did not really mean much to her.

It was also when Helga was fourteen that Grete started to come around more. Drama ensued. Helga explained,

She tried to take me away from this family, because she wanted to send me to work. Her sister had died. I suppose she was lonely too. But I was scared of my mother. Always have been. And I never lived with her. I didn't *feel* like she was my mother, you know. I didn't want another *upheaval*, and go somewhere else again. And she and my foster mother had a terrible quarrel. My foster mother pretended to have a heart attack [*She laughed.*] It's all been drama! A doctor was called. My mother went away and said she would leave me for another year.

At age fifteen, Helga had to quit school because her foster mother was afraid that Grete was going to sue the family over keeping Helga. Grete came and took Helga away. Grete secured Helga a job as an office girl in the sewing factory where Grete worked.

The relationship between mother and daughter was highly problematic. Helga says that her mother "bullied me unmercifully. I couldn't go anywhere or do anything. I couldn't read a *book*. I was told all the time I was good for nothing." Helga claimed that her mother then started to become jealous of her

similarly estranged from their religious heritage, both actively through proselytization and passively through lack of contact with Jewish communities and teachers.

Jennifer Craig-Norton, "Archives and the Kindertransport: new discoveries and their impact on research," *Jewish Historical Studies*. 2020. Vol. 51(1):1-15. DOI: 10.14324/111.444.jhs.2020v51.002 (Accessed December 26, 2023). Craig-Norton cites Archives of the Central British Fund, 1933-1960, Part 3, File 301, Reel 67, Item 1687 for the quotation of Dorothy Hardisty.

Although Helga attended Christian services with the family, the degree to which this can be considered proselytization or simply an attempt to integrate Helga into the family activities is an open question. Helga does not speak of being pressured, and she says that she and the Bland children no longer had to attend when the Bland children started to object to going. This tends to coincide with the findings of Jason Hensley. Hensley argues against the charge that the Christadelphians tried to convert the Jewish children. He writes, "Conversions were clearly something that Christadelphians saw as positive, but they were not the purpose of aiding refugees." Hensley, *Part of the Family*, 39. He claims that to date none of the former refugees he has interviewed have ever expressed that they felt pressure to become a Christadelphian. He claims further that attending Sunday school was merely a matter of being involved in family activities. Hensley, *Part of the Family*, 39-40.

In her interview with Lyn Smith, Helga does talk of tensions between her mother and the Bland family. It is not clear though whether these tensions had anything to do with religion.



at work. She noted that Grete said to her at the time, “Oh everybody used to say I was the beauty in the factory, but now that you’ve come, they all...[*She laughed.*] Really my own mother said this to me.”

Eventually, Helga decided to run away. She explained,

I left my mother when I was seventeen. Packed a bag one morning—there was this row about [my aunt’s] watch, which [my mother] used to give me and take it back and give it me and take it back and so on. And by this time, I was very unhappy living with my mother. Age fifteen, sixteen. Not allowed to go anywhere, do anything that I liked, you know, such a different *life* altogether. And literally just listening to her all the time. She was a very domineering—

Helga went to Chelsea and “found a room for seventeen shillings with gaslight, there was no electricity. We all shared a bathroom,” and she found a job as a typist for the Peter Jones department store. Grete was able to track Helga down though because Helga had registered with the police as a stateless person. Helga explained that her mother then “waylaid me at Peter Jones, and she waylaid me in the place when I came home, so I had to leave both those places.” Helga then stayed with an older woman until she found another place to live. This woman found Helga a job in an estate agency, where she met her soon-to-be husband.

Helga got married at age eighteen to a son of the prominent politician, Frederick Bellenger and Marion Theresa Stollwerck. Frederick Bellenger was a member of the House of Commons for over thirty years and had briefly served as Secretary of State for War after the Second World War.⁴⁰ Marion Theresa Stollwerck had been adopted by Karl Stollwerck of the famous German chocolatier family. The Bellenger family—particularly Marion—were initially not very accepting of Helga. Helga felt that her mother-in-law did not believe that any women were good enough for her sons and that she tried to build a barrier between Helga and her father-in-law. Helga claimed that her mother-in-law would pretend and say things like her father-in-law did not like Jews. Regarding the Bellengers, Helga said, “They all tried to make me feel there was something not quite up to the mark with me. They all tried to do that. But...it just washes over me, I never felt like that myself.”⁴¹ She noted that eventually her mother-in-law came around and accepted her.

Helga pursued a career in the tourist industry.⁴² In later years, Helga and Grete were finally able to forge a closer relationship. Helga explained this softening between them may have been due to her mother coming to think of motherhood as “saintly” in her old age. Helga claimed that when Grete was 87 years old, she revealed a secret to Helga that perhaps explains why the matter of paternity for Helga had been so murky and the relationship between mother and daughter had been so problematic over the years. According to Helga, “She said she was raped.”

⁴⁰ “Obituary. Mr Frederick Bellenger,” *The Guardian*, London, May 13, 1968, p.4.

⁴¹ IWM Interview, Part Three.

⁴² Geoff Marsh, “Thank You Britain for Saving Us from Hitler,” in the *Daily Express*, July 6, 2005.



Tragic Fates:

Helga and her husband went to Vienna in 1949 and tried to find out what had happened to her relatives. She claimed that when she asked a woman who lived next door to her grandmother's flat, the woman, "slammed the door in my face." She then encountered an old man in the building who told her that he remembered Helga's grandmother being taken away on a cattle truck. Helga says that at the time that was all she knew about what had happened to her grandmother. She says she later found out she was killed.⁴³

Helga noted that her mother never found out what happened to her family in Austria. Helga says, "I know more now fifty years later. They're opening all these archives. She never found out. I'm glad she never found out where they ended up. I'm very glad. Because she was very attached to her family.... She never knew where they went. I'm very glad. They were all shot in Poland, I know that."

Helga's stepfather, Arthur Wertheimer had tried to get Grete, Helga, and himself out of Austria in 1938 and 1939. Whereas Grete and Helga did get out, Arthur did not.

15. Feb. 1941 ¹⁷

577. DEUTSCH Rosa Sara	12.8.1881
578. OPOCZYNSKY Samuel Wojcie	26.12.1891
579. OPOCZYNSKY Debora Sara	23. 8.1898
580. ROSENBERG Hirschel Fleischer Gisela Sara	4. 9.1893
581. SINGER Rudolf Ier.	15.8.1878
582. SINGER Elza Rebecca Sara	5.6.1888
583. SINGER Ingeborg Sofie Sara	23.10.1899
584. HALPOM Adele Sara	14. 4.1868
585. STEINER Julie Sara	30.1.1877
586. BOKF Friedrich Ier.	11.10.1896
587. BOKF Sofie Sara	20. 7.1898
588. GELBART Abraham Ier.	7. 4.1879
589. LAZAR Herbert Ier.	2. 9.1892
590. LAZAR Mathilde Sara	12. 2.1893
591. BIRNBAUM Julie Sara	20. 6.1886
592. ORSHUTZIN Irene Sara	7. 4.1914
593. SPIEGEL Adalbert Ier.	17. 4.1905
594. LUSTIG Hermann Ier.	8.11.1879
595. LUSTIG Elisabeth Franziska	20.4.1889
596. FRIEDMAN Hermann Ier.	10.1.1891
597. STERN Simon Ier.	2.9.1879
598. DRAB Viktor Ier.	3.8.1898
599. EISLER Bernhard Ier.	15.5.1878
600. EISLER OSCAR Ier.	12.12.1911
601. PIK Paula Sara	7.6.1886
602. HERZOG Gisela Sara	5.9.1868
603. HERZOG Kamilla Sara	29.6.1874
604. HERZOG Laura Sara	28.3.1872
605. JAPKE Moses	26.8.1880
606. REICH Leopold Ier.	30.11.1891
607. REICH Adele Sara	9. 4.1900
608. JANDOWSKI Stanislaus	20. 5.1899
609. BAUER Rachail Ier.	13. 3.1866
610. BAUER Julia Sara	10. 9.1871
611. FREISCHNER Olga Sara	11. 3.1888
612. BEGALL Walter	26. 4.1925
613. JAMENSKY Hania Sara	29. 3.1890
614. JAMENSKY Horach	25.12.1894
615. WEISS Josefina Sara	15.10.1911
616. WERTHEIMER Arthur Ier.	10. 2.1879

Left: Arthur Wertheimer (birthdate February 10, 1879) listed at number 576 on the list of those deported on Transport 1 on February 15, 1941. Arolsen Archives, DocID: 130500842, Link: <https://collections.arolsen-archives.org/en/document/130500842> (Accessed November 15, 2023).

On February 15, 1941, Helga's stepfather, Arthur Wertheimer, was sent on Transport 1 from Vienna to Opole, Poland. According to the Yad Vashem record, Arthur was prisoner number 576 on the transport and was murdered.⁴⁴

⁴³ It is not clear who this grandmother was. In the interview, Helga mentions that her grandmother's last name was Breitner. Helga mentions that she never met her maternal grandparents because they were already deceased. It is unlikely that this was her paternal grandmother, given that Helga did not have any interaction with her biological father. Given that Helga talked about visiting her "grandmother" with her cousin, it is likely that the woman was the mother of wife of Helga's Uncle Arthur.

⁴⁴ <https://yvng.yadvashem.org/nameDetails.html?language=en&itemId=4951466&ind=1> (Accessed December 25, 2023). Note: The number matches that provided in the Arolsen Archives document: <https://collections.arolsen-archives.org/en/document/130500842> (Accessed November 15, 2023).



According to Yad Vashem there were 1,001 Jews on Transport 1.⁴⁵

Helga's Aunt Paula, whose escape to England had been thwarted by the outbreak of the war, was sent on February 26 on Transport 3 from Vienna to Opole, Poland. According to the Yad Vashem record, Paula was prisoner number 968 on the transport and was murdered.⁴⁶

Right: Pauline Kohn (Helga's Aunt Paula) (birthdate: July 27, 1892) listed at number 968 on the list of those deported on Transport 3 on February 26, 1941.

Arolsen Archives, DocID: 130500918, DeepLink: <https://collections.arolsen-archives.org/en/document/130500918>.

According to Yad Vashem, there were 1,005 Jews on Transport 3.⁴⁷

Yad Vashem provides the following information about what happened to the Jews who were sent to Opole, Poland on the transports:

In Opole, the deported Jews were housed in the local synagogue and in other large buildings. It is apparent from letters the deportees sent to their relatives in Vienna that the local Opole Jews, whose own situation was horrendous, did all they could to help the newcomers. But their efforts were fruitless; the lack of food and awful living conditions resulted in a high mortality rate among the old and the sick. In March 1941 the Jews of Opole and the refugees from Vienna were forced into the specially designated Opole Ghetto. In May 1941, the 800 able-bodied men who had arrived from Vienna were transferred to a forced labor camp in Deblin. Most of the Jews from the Viennese deportation were murdered as part of Operation Reinhard in spring and summer 1942.⁴⁸

968. Kohn Pauline Sara	27. 7. 1892
969. GOLDBERG Grate Sara	5. 8. 1921.
970. GOLDBERG Menasse	15. 1. 1939
971. NADEL Rachel Beer	10. 7. 1903
972. KROEL Rudolf Israel	12. 8. 1906
973. ZEILING Isak	7. 11. 1880
974. ZEILING Gisle Sara	20. 1. 1897
975. ROTH Salomon	3. 5. 1891
976. ROTH Gittel	1. 2. 1898
977. KAUFMAN Johann Israel	20. 4. 1901
978. KAUFMAN Janette Sara	21. 12. 1906
979. KAUFMAN Maximilian Israel	18. 11. 1925
980. KAUFMAN Herbert Israel	20. 5. 1927
981. KARTIS Chinke	19. 6. 1888
982. GOLDBERG Fanny	9. 1. 1890
983. MAYER Wilhelm	23. 8. 1920
984. ASKESER Moses	1. 3. 1890
985. ASKESER Lola Sara	25. 5. 1898
986. ASKESER Felice Sara	11. 8. 1922
987. GHOSHMAN Hans Israel	18. 7. 1897
988. GHOSHMAN Kornelia Sara	17. 9. 1902
989. BABAD Moses	3. 5. 1891
990. BABAD Sara	20. 1. 1898
991. GOTTMANN Gittel	29. 5. 1875
992. SCHOICHET Brana	12. 5. 1875
993. OLKENICKI Sala	5. 7. 1902
994. HERSCHL Otto Israel	30. 9. 1899
995. HERSCHL Berta Sara	23. 11. 1890
996. MELLER Oskar	25. 9. 1899
997. BAKSCHANSKY (BAKSHENSKY) Moses	15. 5. 1890
998. HERSCHOWITZ Denison	10. 1. 1870
999. HERSCHOWITZ Betty Sara	11. 8. 1891
1000. NEUMANN Josefine Sara	9. 8. 1901
1001. HOLLANDER Irma Sara	24. 8. 1899
1002. HOLLANDER Deseb	15. 11. 1881
1003. WEISS Malvine Sara	3. 6. 1871

The EHRI provides the following information about the liquidation of the ghetto at Opole, Poland: "The liquidation of the Opole Ghetto began as early as spring 1942. A transport to Belzec extermination camp left on 31st March 1942, and deportations to Sobibor followed in May and October 1942."⁴⁹

⁴⁵ <https://deportation.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=de&itemId=6983149> (Accessed October 5, 2023).

⁴⁶ <https://yvng.yadvashem.org/nameDetails.html?language=en&itemId=4924485&ind=1> (Accessed December 25, 2023).

⁴⁷ <https://deportation.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en&itemId=6991401> (Accessed January 7, 2024).

⁴⁸ <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/deportations/6983149> (Accessed December 26, 2023).

⁴⁹ EHRI Document Blog post titled, "Messages from the Ghetto – Viennese transports to the General Government in early 1941": <https://blog.ehri-project.eu/2019/01/22/messages-from-the-ghetto/#enref-22-1>. (Accessed December 25, 2023).



Had Grete not received a domestic servant visa and had Helga not boarded the *Kindertransport*, they most likely would have suffered fates similar to those of their relatives.

A Tag that Tells a Story:

In 1939 a nine-year-old girl named Helga Wertheimer arrived in England wearing a tag with a number around her neck. In 2005 Helga was photographed holding her *Kindertransport* tag while talking with Camilla Barnes—then the Duchess of Cornwall at Clarence House in London. Helga is quoted in the *Daily Express* article about the event as having said, “Camilla was interested in how I came to Britain with just this number around my neck. It was a Red Cross number, 6165.”

What has since happened to Helga’s tag? And what is to be made of that number?

In 2011 William Kaczynski co-authored a book titled *Fleeing from the Führer: A Postal History of Refugees from the Nazis*.⁵⁰ Kaczynski had been a refugee himself during the Holocaust. According to the Wiener Library website,



Kaczynski and his family fled Nazi Germany in 1939 after his father’s release from Sachsenhausen concentration camp and settled in the UK. During the Second World War, they were detained as enemy aliens in internment camps near Liverpool and on the Isle of Man. After their release they were naturalised as British citizens and lived in north London.⁵¹

Left: Helga showing the Duchess of Cornwall her Kindertransport tag. Newspaper Clipping Scan in the Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation Holocaust Collection.

Prior to releasing the book, Kaczynski became aware of Helga and her past. He contacted Helga, and she decided to give her Kindertransport tag to him. In February 2011, Kaczynski wrote the following letter to thank her for her gift and to update her about the book:

⁵⁰ <https://www.thehistorypress.co.uk/publication/fleeing-from-the-fuhrer/9780752461953/> (Accessed December 27, 2023).

⁵¹ <https://wienerholocaustlibrary.org/exhibition/the-william-kaczynski-collection/> (Accessed December 27, 2023).



Dear Helga,
 It was good to have
 spoken with you to-day and
 pleased you are happy for
 Kindertransport Tag which you
 so kindly gave me, to go into
 the book. I am writing about my
 collection. In fact as I mentioned, it
 will also be on the front cover.
 The book will be called "Fleeing from the
 Führer. about Refugees from WWII.
 I hope it will come out in about
 Oct of this year and I will inform
 you nearer of the date.

With good wishes
 William

Left: Letter from William Kaczynski to Helga Bellenger informing her that the tag was going to appear on the cover of his book. Dated February 9, 2011. Note: The photograph has been cropped to conceal addresses. Original Scan in Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation Holocaust Collection.

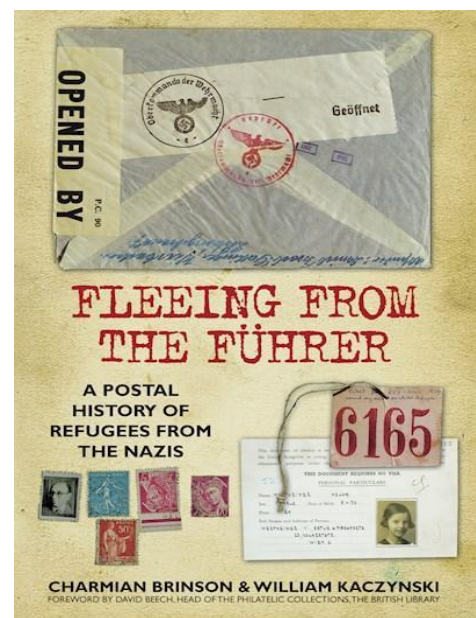
True to his word, Kaczynski made sure Helga's tag appeared on the cover of the book.

Right: Photo of Cover of *Fleeing from the Führer: A Postal History of Refugees from the Nazis* by Charmian Brinson & William Kaczynski.

Photo from History Press website:

<https://www.thehistorypress.co.uk/publication/fleeing-from-the-fuhrer/9780752461953/>

(Accessed December 27, 2023).



Given their shared interest in the postal history of the Holocaust, William Kaczynski and Danny Spungen of the Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation struck up a friendship over the years. After Kaczynski passed away on May 31, 2023,⁵² his family members decided to donate Helga's *Kindertransport* tag to the Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation. Given the mission of the Foundation to spread awareness through active engagement with items from the Holocaust, Helga's *Kindertransport* tag will continue to journey across the world.

As young people interact with the 3 1/4 inches x 4 11/16 inches piece of cardboard with the numbers 75 and 6165 printed on it, hopefully, they will remember what happened during the year 1939 and the reflect on the meaning the numbers 10,000; 1,500,000; and 6,000,000 have within the history of the Holocaust. But, hopefully, too, their thoughts will go beyond the numbers, to the story of Helga Bellenger and how as a confused, nine-year-old Austrian girl, she had survived the Nazis through the kindness of strangers.

⁵² <https://wienerholocaustlibrary.org/exhibition/the-william-kaczynski-collection/> (Accessed December 27, 2023).



About the Author



Kevin Ostoyich is a professor of history at Valparaiso University. Kevin and his students at Valparaiso began partnering with the Florence and Laurence Spungen Foundation in 2013. The Foundation provided artifacts (mostly documents & postal history) to the students from Holocaust survivors who were in the Shanghai ghetto, “Shanghailanders,” for archival studies and the curation of temporary exhibitions at the university. In 2021, he collaborated with the Foundation to author the preface and two additional chapters in the Foundation’s book, *Forging Secrets: Faces and Facts Inside the Nazi Operation Bernhard Scheme*, published in 2022. In July 2023, he joined the Foundation staff as a researcher, writer, and interviewer, focusing on artifacts from the Spungen Foundation collection. He has interviewed and written stories about Shanghailanders on the Foundation’s behalf.

At Valparaiso, he served as chair of the Department of History from 2015 to 2019, was the recipient of the Dixon W. and Herta E. Benz Fund for Faculty Support (an endowed position) from 2020 – 2022, and was bestowed the Excellence in Teaching Award for 2017-2018. He holds his B.A. from the University of Pennsylvania and his A.M. and Ph.D. from Harvard University. He was recently a fellow at the Käte Hamburger Kolleg (global dis:connect) at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München and is currently a fellow at the Centrum für angewandte Politikforschung / Center for Applied Policy Research (CAP) at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München.

He is a board member of the Sino-Judaic Institute and the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum and a non-resident fellow of the American-German Institute of Johns Hopkins University. Kevin has served as a fellow and guest professor at multiple institutions and universities; has written many articles and book chapters; has co-edited *The History of the Shanghai Jews: New Pathways of Research* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022) and authored *The German Society of Pennsylvania: A Guide to Its Book and Manuscript Collections* (German Historical Institute, 2006); interviews Holocaust survivors; gives lectures about the Holocaust worldwide; and creates historical theatrical plays about Shanghai Jewish refugees with students.

The Spungen Foundation can devote many pages honoring Kevin’s work, so let’s just say he keeps very, very busy teaching, writing, conducting interviews, and working on documentaries.



About the Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation

The Spungen Foundation was established in 2006 by Florence Spungen and reflects the individual and collective philanthropy of the founders, their children, and their grandchildren. The Foundation focuses its grantmaking typically in Santa Barbara, CA and Lake County, IL. One of the Foundation's strategic areas concentrates on the Holocaust and genocide education. The Spungen Family Foundation has one of the largest collections of Holocaust artifacts in private hands, mainly consisting of postal history, such as letters, post cards, stamps, along with money, children's artwork, and more. The collection has been used for Holocaust education all around the world.

The mission of the Foundation is to improve the quality of life of individuals and families facing health challenges, and to address issues that particularly affect the Jewish community.

Visit us at: www.spungenfoundation.org

