

# The boys at



**No. 52**

**In the late 1930s, ten young Jewish boys fled from Nazi Germany and Austria and came to South west London as part of the *Kindertransport*. This is their story.**

Although anti-Semitism - anti-Jewish racism - had existed in Europe for centuries before 1933, the rise to power of Adolf Hitler unleashed an horrific campaign of hatred, discrimination and persecution of Jews before the Second World War.

In German, the word *kinder* means 'children'. The 'Children's Transport' was the name given to the attempt to save the lives of as many Jewish children as possible from the Nazi regime. The *Kindertransport* began in November 1938, and enabled around 10,000 children to flee Hitler's tyranny and find safety in Britain. In the same month, the Nazi leadership unleashed a terrible night of violence against Jewish men, women and children who lived in Nazi-controlled territory. There was so much broken glass from houses, shops and synagogues throughout Nazi controlled land that the night was nicknamed *Kristallnacht* - 'Night of Crystal'. Hundreds of synagogues were destroyed, and around 7,500 Jewish owned businesses were attacked and looted. More than ninety Jewish people were murdered during 9-10 November, and 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to concentration camps such as Dachau and Buchenwald.

In Britain, many people were outraged by the actions taken by the Nazis and urged the government to relax immigration restrictions. The government responded by agreeing to allow an unspecified number of children under the age of 17 to come to Britain from Nazi-controlled territories in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. The government insisted that private individuals paid for the care and education of the children whilst they were in Britain. The children were not allowed to be accompanied by their parents and it was envisaged that the young people would return to their families 'once the crisis was over'.

The first *Kindertransport* arrived in Britain on December 2nd 1938. Around 10,000 children came to Britain by September 1939, when the initiative had to end because of the outbreak of the Second World War. Most of the children were never to see their parents again.

### Rolf Metzger

Rolf Metzger was born on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1928 in the German city of Mainz. His mum and dad were Robert and Betti who were married in 1922. Jewish people had lived in Mainz for centuries before Hitler came to power but

the discrimination that Rolf's family and others in the Jewish community faced was terrible. The synagogue that had been built in 1912 was burned down by the Nazis in the *Kristallnacht* pogrom in November 1938. Rolf came to England on the ship 'Prague' which sailed into the port of Harwich on 27 June 1939. He was just eleven years old when he had to leave his family and travel to a foreign country.

The photographs and documents that Rolf's family have very kindly shared with us show a happy boy having fun on his tricycle. His children's ID card, issued by the Nazis authorities, has a prominent red 'J' stamped on it – part of the discrimination that the Nazis heaped on the Jews; the Nazis were trying to separate Jewish people from other Germans. Other documents include Rolf's boat ticket from Holland to Harwich, and his confirmation certificate from West London Synagogue in 1944.





## Gunter Ruf

Gunter Ruf remembers getting together with his parents and siblings for meals in their apartment at 943 Bahnhof Strasse in Herne, Germany. They would all walk together to school, and after school they used to go to Gunter's parents' furniture shop where his mother would give the children a snack before returning home.

Gunter also remembers being very sad that he couldn't go swimming in the Rein Herne Canal or the pool with the other kids, because it was "Juden Verboten" (forbidden for Jews). The Ruf family were a very



Gunter on his first day of school in Germany, 1935

happy and united family until *Kristallnacht*

(November 10th 1938). That night, local Nazi thugs attacked the local Jewish synagogue and burned it down.

Gunter remembers walking to school the next morning and seeing in horror that all the windows in his parents shop had been smashed by the Nazis. The Ruf family were forced to leave their home, and went to live with Mr.

Ganz, who was the president of the Jewish

community in Herne. Five days later, Gunter's father was taken to a concentration camp. On the 19th April 1939, Gunter's mother, brothers and sister took him to Dortmund station and put him on a train to Holland. All he was allowed to take was a suitcase with some clothes and 5 Marks. That was the last time that Gunter ever saw his mother.

After taking the train to Holland, and then a boat to England, Gunter arrived at Liverpool Street Station with hundreds of other Jewish children. They were taken to a big hall and their names called out. Gunter couldn't understand a word that was being said but eventually his name was called out and he was collected by a Mr Ruben (who had sponsored him to come to Britain). Mr Ruben took Gunter to the *Kinderhostel* in Twickenham where he met two of the other boys, Emil and Freddy. Soon after he arrived, he was told to change his name to

George, as Gunter sounded 'too German'. During the next few weeks the other boys arrived at Lebanon Park.

Gunter recalls that life was good in Twickenham, but he was always thinking of his family and hoping that they would join him. He shared a room with two of the other boys and Matron Kroner and Gitte Brauer took care of them. It was the first time that Gunter had porridge and tea with milk and he remembers planting radishes and lettuces in the small garden. At the weekends, the boys went to the river to help pull boats in, and were paid halfpennies and farthings for their work. Later, in October 1940, German planes dropped incendiary bombs on the street.

Gunter went to primary school at St Mary's School. He attended special classes to learn English, as well as regular classes with the English children. When Gunter was eleven years old, he went to Orleans School before leaving when he was 14.

After the war Gunter, was able to see his father, who had escaped from Nazi Germany and had fought for the British Army in North Africa. Afterwards, he joined the army and travelled the world before setting up a motorcycle shop called 'Hamrax Motors' with Rolf Metzger. In 1963, Gunter left England and moved to Ecuador, where he met his wife, Rosalind, with whom he had four children. Today, Gunter lives in the USA with Rosalind, and is surrounded by his family.

After Gunter left Germany in 1939, his mother and sister were taken to Stutthof concentration camp, and his brothers to Bergen-Belsen concentration camps. Sadly,

Gunter's mother died on the Death March in Poland in 1945. His sister and brothers went to Australia and lived there until they died.



Gunter with his great-grandchild in the USA

## **Margot Brauer**

The boys were looked after in No. 52 by a 'matron', Alice Kroner, and Margot 'Gitte' Brauer who was just nineteen when the boys came to Twickenham. Gitte was born to a Jewish family in 1920 in Germany and came to the UK in 1938. She was born in Berlin to quite a well off family, who were able to help Margot and her older sister escape from Germany, just before war started. Many of the boys stayed in touch with Gitte and were very fond of her – ever-grateful for the care that she gave them in the *Kinderhostel*.

Margot was an excellent athlete, but was prevented from attending sports clubs, as Jews were banned from such activities by the Nazis. She attended the Olympic games in Berlin. She also witnessed Kristallnacht there.

The other boys who lived at the *Kinderhostel* in Twickenham were:

Fred Pauker  
Emil Haber  
William Heidenheimer  
Gerald Ohrbach  
Harold Ohrbach  
Kurt Kristeller

We'd like to thank Gunter and Rosalind Ruf, Helen Levy, Michael Popper, Reuben Reichmann, Ian Metzger, Tim Clark and Stephen Kramer for all their help with our project.

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