



Wolf Blomfield

31 January 1929

Berlin Charlottenburg, Germany

I came to Britain when I had just turned ten. I was a Kindertransport boy and came over on a train full of German Jewish children, on 15 March 1939. All we were allowed to bring was a small suitcase that we could carry, so for a ten-year-old it wasn't very much. My father put me on the train in Berlin and had tried to explain what was happening. I think I was too bewildered to completely grasp it. Just before the war my family and I were going to go to America via England but when war broke out the U-boats were sinking the boats coming from Europe to the States so I stayed in England. My mother had already left Germany and gone to Shanghai. She had remarried and her husband was in a concentration camp and the only way she could get him out was by emigrating and Shanghai was an open city. They took people when they weren't accepted anywhere else.

We arrived in England with little placards round our necks saying who we were. None of us spoke English, and when we arrived, there were kind ladies behind trestle tables offering us a drink, which I'd never seen before. I was very suspicious of it, but it was only tea with milk. We were all sent to children's homes and I was allocated to one in Croydon. It was staffed by German Jews so the food I got was familiar, which was helpful. It really would have added to the trauma if we were given food that we didn't recognise.

My father worked for a Jewish refugee organisation and he was able to put my name down on the Kindertransport list, which was very hard for him. We were very close and we loved each other very much. He thought I would be safer in England. He stayed in Berlin for a while, but then he was sent to a concentration camp in Poland where he died. We were able to correspond with each other for a short while, via the Red Cross, but then the letters ceased. Then at the end of the war I checked with the Red Cross lists of names of who had died where it was confirmed that he died in 1942. My mother stayed in Shanghai and then got a work permit to come to England and worked as a domestic, to her horror, and then got a better job and worked in an old people's home. She stayed in this country for about 20 years but eventually she went back to Germany, where she died aged 93 years old.

There were many differences between England and Germany, but at the time the biggest one for me was there were no Gestapo or SS here and it felt safer. My memories of Germany before I left are of the lakes around Berlin, but the Kristallnacht is indelibly marked in my mind. Coming home from school, I would pass the synagogue that I attended and I would always watch for it as I passed by on the train. One day I looked for it and it was on fire. It was terrible. My father tried to explain what was happening, about the Gestapo, the SS and told me to be careful. I think, in a way, my father protected me from some of the terrible side of what happened because I do have good memories as well.

It took me a long time to go back to Germany. Then one day I just felt that I had to go back, I suppose to lay some ghosts to rest. I finally went when the Berlin wall came down. I travelled with Robert, my best friend, who I had met on the train coming from Germany back in 1939. He had returned long before me. Berlin wasn't that different to how I remembered it as they had rebuilt much of it exactly the same. The Palace where I used to play in Charlottenburg is still the same.

Dr Katz, a Rabbi who taught me history and Hebrew gave me *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* by Sigmund Freud when I was about 16 years old. It was a very good introduction to psychoanalysis. It was then that I decided to do social work. One way of getting into social work was to do residential work so it was arranged for me to go to Lingfield House to work at a home for children who had been in concentration camps. Alice Goldberger ran the home. Alice was one of the most important people in my life. I knew her in Berlin as a young child because she ran the 'Hort' I attended every day after school. She moved to England before the war and trained with Anna Freud as a child psychoanalyst. Alice was crucial in my development, both in Germany and in England. I don't think she is recognised enough for her achievements. In 1949 when I went along to Lingfield House, I didn't know that Alice worked there; it was fantastic to see her again. I was maybe four or five years older than the oldest children in the home. The gap between us was quite narrow. It's strange because I never felt lucky next to these children, even though if my father hadn't put me on that train, I may have ended up as one of these children instead. I know now I was lucky. I am forever grateful to my father for his foresight.

I am still in touch with some of the Lingfield House children. When I go to Israel I always see one of the girls that I looked after, who is now a grandmother. It feels important to me to still know people that I knew back then.

I qualified in 1975 as psychotherapist and I still work as one today, but I don't give advice as such. I try and help people to understand themselves and find their own solutions. As a teacher and psychotherapist I am often reminded of a quote from Hillel who wrote 2000 years ago 'from my teachers I have learned much, from my peers I have learned more, but from my students I have learned most of all'. However, there are some basics to pass on such as being sensitive and empathetic towards others, and to remember that it is important to love as well as to be loved.

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