

Activity 2: Kindertransport & Child Refugees in Wales: Part 2 - The Journey

Robert Wasserberg - Video Transcriptions

CLIP 1

Robert Wasserberg - RW

Interviewer – I

RW: One evening—in the middle of the night I remember 'cause we were all in bed—there was, there was, not a ring or a knock, a tap on the window—my mother's room—which was the signal, that it was [sic] friendly call; it was this Czech officer. He tapped on the window, they came in and he talked to my mother, I heard them talking downstairs. Anyway, the situation was that they were organising a bus by the Red Cross—a children [sic] transport.

And he might be able to get the children onto the transport. But he hasn't got the full details, but he's just informing my mother.

And eventually, he came one evening, another evening. And he said 'Right, I've got all the details in front of me, all the papers, but I'm afraid Mrs Wasserberg, you can only send one.'

'So, what shall I do? I've got two children; I've got three children.'

'I'm sorry, there's only room for one more, 'cause the bus is full. There's only one, room for one, you've got to make your choice.'

So, my mother made...I mean my mother was in a hell of a, you know, Hobson's choice [the necessity of accepting one of two or more equally objectionable alternatives].

Three children, the oldest one was 14. I was the next one down - I was 11. The youngest one was two.

So, my mother made the choice, and she chose me because the eldest one was like the master, father of the family 'cause my father wasn't there. The youngest was a baby; he was two years old - he was still in swaddling clothes. So, I was chosen.

So, the bus arrived—night, and you know, he said, he said 'Mrs Wasserberg I'm here, come on let's go'. Remember we're in Košice and our and our final destination is Canada, so we got a long way to go.

It was the 18th of June.

I: 1939?

Activity 2: Kindertransport & Child Refugees in Wales: Part 2 - The Journey

Robert Wasserberg - Video Transcriptions

CLIP 1 continued

RW: '39; June, July, about that it was...remember it was summer. Although, my mother tried to give me all greatcoats and fur coats and things to put on and those woolly socks, I said 'Mum, it's so hot.'

'No, you take it with you; in Canada it's colder than here.'

Anyway, I remember the moment that I stood by the bus and my mother was there...my mother just broke down, my mother just broke down. She wouldn't let me go; she held me in her arms, she held me in her arms.

I can still remember 'til today, and this is many years ago, the warmth of her face next to mine. And I remember I felt the warmth of her face and the wet, and her tears on my smooth face, because I was still only 11 years old

And, and, and I, I just don't know she, she just broke; she was completely broken.

CLIP 2

RW: So, we went off. Eventually we got to Danzig: called Gdansk. And when we got there, we arrived at the gates. The whole place was covered in Hakenkreuz [swastikas]—the flags—and German soldiers and German military, German police—Nazi Police—you know?

And...you know, we came to the gate and there was [sic] guards on the gate and we stopped, and the driver said to the (inaudible) 'Show the papers, pass, pass, pass, pass, pass papieren.'

And, so they got, they got the list of all the children on the bus. They started reading through. And then the guard called a Sergeant. The Sergeant came over, he had a look at it. 'Cause what happened was that the German officer was calling out names and he wanted, he wanted all these children who were being called out to get off the bus.

And all these names were Jewish names. In fact, what he said 'Alle Juden raus!' ['All Jews out!']

The Czech officer said 'No! No, we all go, or none of us go.'

In the meantime, a military vehicle drew up and they cocked their rifles, and they were pointing it [sic] at the bus.

Activity 2: Kindertransport & Child Refugees in Wales: Part 2 - The Journey

Robert Wasserberg - Video Transcriptions

CLIP 2 continued

RW: And the Czech officer wasn't going to allow the German officer into the bus.

Especially after he said 'Alle Juden raus!' ['All Jews out!']

So, what happened was this German officer put his foot on the step and the Czech officer went and stuck his chest into the German officer's face, like this.

And he put his hand into the pocket of—into his pistol holder and he wanted to withdraw the pistol.

The Czech, and he said 'No, we're not going. We're not letting any of the children off the bus. We're not letting it. No one goes.'

And he shouted 'Fahrn, fahrn, raus, schnell, fahrn, raus [Drive, drive, out, fast, drive, out]. Get out of here. Get away. You're not coming in. You're not, you're not getting onto the boat and you're not coming in unless you let the Jews off', so he said 'Fair enough, we're not letting the Jews off'.

I: The soldier?

RW: His name was Svoboda, Svoboda, Lieutenant...

I: He was the one who protected you?

RW: ...Lieutenant Svoboda. He was a non-Jew; he was a Czech. And if it wasn't for that Czech, I wouldn't be...you wouldn't be interviewing me here today.

Well, from there we went back into Hungary, partly. And then we went from Hungary through Austria, went through Austria.

I: And what happens in Austria?

R: We went into Vienna, but we didn't stop, just took on some food. We went through and eventually, eventually we went to Belgium and eventually we got to Holland.

I: What happened there?

RW: In Holland we were taken in by the Dutch Red Cross organisation. We were given, we were given a place to sleep and eat and fresh clothes, laundry, bath. You know, the usual. And the Dutch in their lovely way were very, very kind and sweet to us.

Except one night, they told us to get up and pack our things, and we were on the way again. But this time we were taken down to the—this was in Rotterdam, but not in Rotterdam, we were taken outside of Rotterdam to a small fishing village. We were put onto fishing boats.

Activity 2: Kindertransport & Child Refugees in Wales: Part 2 - The Journey

Robert Wasserberg - Video Transcriptions

CLIP 2 continued

RW: And we were ferried across to Harwich.

Apparently, apparently, we were told, we were told later that we were put on this boat because the Nazis were at the gates of Holland. The Germans hadn't moved in yet, but we were told, you know, they were taking us out for security reasons. You know, they didn't want to...

And in the meantime, they had made a...remember I was 11, I didn't know what was going on; I mean, I was just a little boy.

But we were told that they couldn't take us to Canada. They couldn't take us to Canada. They were negotiating with other countries: America, England, France. You know, whoever could...I mean there were these three adults with 60 children, not [sic] nowhere to go.

Not [sic] nowhere to go, they didn't know what to do with us, but they were responsible for us and they wouldn't throw us just like that. So, you know they were, they negotiated with England.

Take my hat off to England; it's the only country that would have us.