

REVIEWS

RETTET WENIGSTENS DIE KINDER
 Ed. Angelika Rieber and Till Lieberz-Gross
 Fachhochschulverlag Frankfurt am Main
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It is to be hoped that this excellent book will receive an English translation in order to reach the much wider audience which it deserves. It contains the biographies of twenty former 'Kinder' from, or connected with, Frankfurt and is powerful testimony to the appalling experiences of Jews in Germany in the 1930s and '40s, as well as to the resilience of the children and the bravery of their parents. The book's title *Rettet wenigstens die Kinder* ("Save the Children at Least") refers to the correspondence of families desperate to send their children to safety.

Each of the poignant life histories recounted in this volume differs from the others, as children from varying backgrounds were transported to far-flung countries, most of them never to be re-united with their families. In addition the book has erudite, comprehensive and well-researched sections on how the Kindertransports were organised and which countries opened their doors to the young refugees. A total of 20,000 children were rescued, of whom nearly 10,000 came to Britain. A further 10,000 were dispersed to Belgium, France, Holland, Switzerland, the Scandinavian countries, amongst others. The USA was reluctant to accept any on the grounds that "it is against God's will to separate children from their parents" but finally relented and approximately 2,500 children were sent to Canada and the United States.

The editors and contributors to this book worked under the umbrella of the *Projekt Jüdisches Leben in Frankfurt*, an independent organisation which acts in close co-operation with the City of Frankfurt to welcome former citizens and their

descendants who wish to accept the City's invitation to visit. The *Projekt* is now working towards the erection of a Kindertransport memorial to the Frankfurt children, their families and the helpers, to be located within sight of the main train station (the Frankfurt Hauptbahnhof) from which the children departed.

The final section of the book is devoted to short biographies of some of those who helped with the Kindertransports and travelled with them, as well as to a very comprehensive bibliography. There are dozens of high-quality photographs of people, places and documents and this beautifully produced volume is an asset to the corpus of work on this subject.

Lilian Levy

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? (THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY)

by Gerhard Biss
 ASIN: B00XNAV0WQ
 Bound Biographies

This is a fascinating autobiography of a "little Austrian boy" who waved at Hitler before arriving in the UK on the Kindertransport.

Born in Vienna in July 1931 Gerhard's first memories were of being excluded from school because he was Jewish and other children making racist jibes when he passed. Propaganda leaflets were dropped from Luftwaffe planes promoting the Third Reich. He joined roaring crowds on the Danube Bridge for a good vantage when Hitler appeared as Germany annexed Austria in March 1938. "I waved to Herr Hitler and I'm sure he waved back to me," he told his mother. She was not at all impressed.

By then his father had already fled the Gestapo to Switzerland. Six months later seven year old Gerhard was told to pack for England, where his younger brother Walter had already been sent, although they were not to meet again for another 74 years. So he set off in lederhosen with a small bag and label round his neck on what seemed an endless journey.

At Liverpool Street Station he was met

my Mrs Ivy Chambers, his adoptive mother – who was to prove devoted – and new sister Joy, 10 years his senior. He spoke no English so struggled at school in south Croydon until an unhappy evacuation interlude. Working class suburban life is well described.

Back with "Mum" and "Pop" calamity struck when the family was bombed out, Biss in pyjamas, Pop in his postman's trousers and Mum in a fur coat. Descriptions of the Blitz and Doodlebug raids are very evocative.

Biss, who was an active member of the local church choir and enjoyed sports and scouts, eventually struck lucky with his education at Commercial College. Proficient shorthand always served him well. After naturalisation he did two year's National Service in the RAF and then resumed his shipping career.

Some years later he joined the merchant navy, enjoying a life of world travel and adventure. Back in civvy street, despite the wanderlust, he worked in personnel in the Saudi Arabian heat for a staggering 22 years, including during the first Gulf War. Desert life meant segregation of the sexes, strict modesty and a – not always successful – alcohol ban. Some very amusing and sometimes bizarre anecdotes are included.

Biss never married, although he had girlfriends, but reflects on matrimony, psychology and the search for identity in the second part of this lengthy book. He made a fleeting unannounced visit to see his birth mother while on a VSO vacation posting in southern Austria and found his immediate family had survived the war. It would have been interesting to know more about what happened to them. But he was fully assimilated into the British way of life, even writing to congratulate the Queen on her Diamond Jubilee as "one of those lucky little children who arrived on the Kindertransport".

Janet Weston