

RENIE INOW



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Renie Inow was 10 years old when she travelled alone on the *Kindertransport* in 1939, leaving her parents behind in Germany. She continued to receive letters from them until 1939. Renie still has these letters, and some of them are shared here.



'When I said goodbye to my parents at Cologne train station, although there were many parents and children around I can only remember my parents and looking at their faces and thinking I might never see them again.'

Renie Inow (*pronounced Renny*) was born in Wuppertal, Germany in 1929 and was raised in a traditional Jewish family. Born to her father Max and mother Beatrice, she had an older sister, Margalit and brother, Alfred.

When Renie was six years old, her sister was sent to live in Sweden, where she remained until the end of the war. Renie's parents, understanding that their future might be in danger, decided the safest place for the family was away from Germany, so they tried to find ways to leave.

In 1939, tensions in Germany were high. The Nazis had been making life difficult for the Jewish population for a long time, but it was getting steadily worse. Renie remembers the feeling of hate that was building towards the Jews.

When Renie's brother Alfred was sent to Dachau concentration camp, the family feared the worst. Her parents were able to get a visa for Renie to leave Germany and travel to England on her own on the *Kindertransport*. She was 10 years old.

The *Kindertransport* was a unique humanitarian programme which ran between November 1938 and September 1939. Approximately 10,000 children, the majority of whom were Jewish, were sent away from their homes and families in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, and went to Great Britain.

Renie began her new life in England, living with her Aunt Hedwig and her three cousins. She received many letters from her parents in Germany, which she treasured and still has in her possession today. From the letters they exchanged, we are able to tell a lot about Renie's life as a *Kindertransportee*.

We know that the journey for Jewish children was daunting and scary. Renie's father wanted to hear all about it. For many children it was the first time they would be away from their parents. He said in a letter to her:

'We are looking forward to reading your report about the journey, how you travelled, what you saw, how long you were on the way and where you stayed overnight. And what do you think of the sea and the large ships? The ships are much bigger than those you have seen on the Rhein.'

Renie's brother Alfred was released from Dachau concentration camp and allowed to join her in England in 1940.

Although life was very difficult for Renie's parents in Germany, in all their letters they wanted to maintain a positive tone of voice, so that Renie would not worry about them. A lot of the letters they sent were censored: the Nazis didn't want people outside the country to get any information about what was happening or what conditions were like for Jewish people. Therefore in their written exchanges they often recounted the times they spent together before the war. Her father wrote:

'Do you remember our prank with the blueberries? We sometimes used to buy some fruit before we returned home from our rambles in order to show Mother how much we had picked. A pity only that we could not keep our secret and soon we had to admit to Mother that we had cheated.'

The first birthday that Renie spent in England was bittersweet, and she received letters from many of her family members. Her mother wrote:

'My dear Renie, my very best wishes for your birthday. May you remain lovable and happy and a source of joy to everybody. Father and I think of you all the time.'

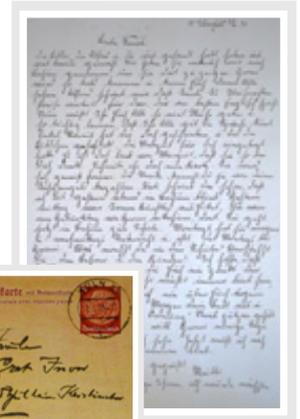
A few months after Renie moved to London, she was one of many children evacuated from the city to the countryside, away from the danger of Nazi air raids. Despite living safely in Hertfordshire and later in Worcestershire, Renie still felt isolated, and that no one understood what she was feeling. She recalls:

'I remember Mr and Mrs Barnes asking if I wanted to call them Mum and Dad. I was shocked as I wasn't ready to stop thinking about my mother and father in Germany. I resolved to call them 'Mum and Dad' but the words would mean the same as 'Mary and John' to me. I was living inside a bubble where I never felt like I fitted in.'

Renie stopped receiving letters from her parents in September 1939. She and her siblings did not know why. Her mother and father had been transported to Nazi-occupied Poland. In 1941, they were taken from the Łódź Ghetto and murdered.

After the war Renie moved back to London from Worcestershire and completed a course in tailoring and learned dress making and cutting, although she did not enjoy this. She continued to write letters to her sister and brother. Later in her life she spent time in Israel and visited her home town of Wuppertal in Germany to tell her story to groups of schoolchildren.

The letters between Renie and her parents help us to think about what life was like for Jewish children who came to Britain in the war and what it was like for those who stayed in Germany and other Nazi-occupied countries.



Find out more...

The Holocaust: hmd.org.uk/holocaust

The Kindertransport: hmd.org.uk/kindertransport

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