

Postcards from the Children's Transport (1938-1939)

Abstract

Following the pogrom against Jews in November of 1938, the Nazi regime blamed Jews for the destruction of *Kristallnacht* and exacted an overwhelming financial penalty on their victims. In response, many families who had resisted emigration since 1933 decided to seek a way out of the Reich. Some parents chose to evacuate their children to England. The British government, in response to clear breakdown of law and order in Germany, eased their immigration restrictions for Jewish children after November 9, 1938. Boats from Dutch harbors carrying fleeing young Jews became known as the *Kindertransport* [children's transport]. The transcribed postcards below are from Jewish children who escaped Germany by way of the *Kindertransport*. The first one left on December 1st, 1938, less than a month after the November Pogrom. These excerpts, a small portion of a sizeable collection of 365 eyewitness testimonies at the Wiener Library in London show that escape from the Reich (while only briefly) was possible. Thousands of children arrived safely in England. While these documents are largely positive—with many outlining a welcoming and supportive reception—over 1,000 children were detained by British authorities as enemy aliens after the start of the Second World War in 1939. Later, the relaxing of enemy alien restrictions in 1941 allowed many of the older children, now reaching an age of maturity, to serve in the British Expeditionary Force that helped to liberate the European continent.

Source

Herr J.W. Berlin-Spandau

Dear Parents,

Have been well received in Holland. The people are very good. We were given a midday meal and soda from the Dutch. They are pleased with us. Soon be at the coast. It is 7.30 in the evening. I am writing very badly here. Will write more. It is just a note from me. We are all here. Love your son Horst.

Herr Dr. J., Hamburg – Othmarschen

My dear Parents,

We are already in Holland where we have been delightfully and marvelously looked after. The people behave touchingly. We were also photographed. If I receive the newspaper, you will receive a picture. Everything is too beautiful. We think of you a lot. This is just another sign of life which you see shows how magnificently things are going for us. Lots and lots of love, 100 kisses your Pitt. We are very jolly and have been singing. My very best Werner.

Frau R. E., Altona

Dear Recha,

Before boarding the steamer for England. My dear unfortunate people. According to Dutch time it is quarter past 6. You will be astonished that we are writing again already, but we have not stopped being astonished either. Scarcely were we in Holland, the train stopped there and women brought vegetables, and can you imagine how it tasted. That was not all, there was sparkling water, chocolate, baskets full of bread rolls and apples. In every station there are sweets, and all the Dutch are coming with us to the ship.

Forgive me for scribbling. At one o'clock tonight we are going onto the ship. Unfortunately you cannot see how well things are with us. In haste your Ruth. Soon going on the sea, so just much love and kisses your loving Hildegard.

Herr A. R., Bunde.

My dears,

We are here in Rotterdam and as we have been given more cards, just want to write to you. Today Thursday at 9.45 we left Hamburg. When we arrived in Oldenzaal we were given vegetables with meat and a drink. You will not believe how that tasted to us. At every station we were given something. We were very pleased. Soon will be going on the sea. Now will end. Much love and kisses, Hildegard.

To the Gentlemen of the Paulinenstift Girls' Orphanage, Hamburg

My dear Sirs,

We are at the moment on the train right across Holland. At the first Dutch station we were heartily received. Women arrived with huge pots, plates and forks. We were given vegetables with kosher meat, tasted marvellous. At every later station we were given something else, everyone an apple, bread roll and a bar of chocolate. Our watches have already all been changed to Dutch time. Edith's brothers and sisters have already visited us. Your Gerda sends much love for everyone, especially for G. Love and a kiss Oavideljus. It is a good start. Everything is fine. Love Ilse. Much love from Wolff. Love Lilly and Margit, Love Clärchen and Eva.

Frl. E. R., Hamburg.

Dear Fräulein R,

The train is swaying a lot. The Dutch have looked after us so well that straightaway I have already gained a real desire once more to go to England, for I think that it will be like this there too. We have been photographed three times by the press. In Holland there was first-rate food, even meat. We are all first-rate. The journey goes forward very well with musical instruments. Everyone sends much love. Love to everyone. P.S. But all my very best love to you and Ger from your Davicde.

Frau M. Z., Oldenburg.

My dear Mutti,

I am writing to you from Rotterdam. Another half an hour and we are travelling in the ship. We were received very kindly in Holland and were given food there. I will shortly write you a detailed letter. I am well and cheerful. Love to everyone from me, Tante Erna, Fr., and others and everyone else I know. Kisses from Röschen.

S. B. Family, Frankfurt (Oder).

Dear Herr and Frau N.,

Hopefully you are well. When you get this card, I will be in England. Love to everyone, much love, Ursula G.

Frl. M. F., Berlin.

Dear M. and Herr Fr.,

We are coming into Rotterdam at the moment. According to English time it is now 8 o'clock. Onkel Alexander was at the Schles[ischer] Bahnh[of]. Tomorrow morning the ship will dock in England. More soon. Thank you very much for everything and much love from your Edmund. I feel as I have not felt for a long time. Love to Frau G.

Frau Else P., Hamburg.

My dear Else, dear children,

The journey was very beautiful, [we] were received everywhere very attentively. We are nearly in Rotterdam. Herr and Frau K. are very kind and are travelling with us. Much love and kisses your husband and father. Much love to comrades at home.

Frau K. W., Berlin.

Now we are about to change over to the ship, we are already looking forward to the cold sea journey, and when you receive the card, the voyage will already be over. So, dear Mama, no more regrets. In Holland we were received very well. Hot food, lemonade, sweet buns and chocolate, and the attention was excellent, simply superb. More details in the next letter. Things are really superb with me. I must end because I must get dressed for the voyage. I still have almost all of the food. Much love and kisses from Else.

Source of English translation: Postcard transcripts, 1939-1939, The Wiener Holocaust Library Collections, <https://www.pogromnovember1938.co.uk/viewer/fulltext/93816/1/eng/>

<https://wienerholocaustlibrary.org/>

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