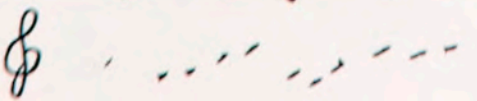
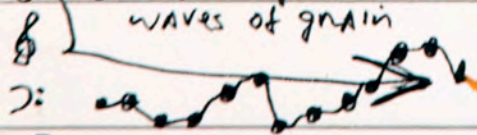


TRAEFTRA ① 3mins

2014



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waves of grain



KINDERTRANSPORT



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Tikkum Olam



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Gratitude for an Act of Kindness

IN THE BEGINNING OF 1939 IN VIENNA my parents and I had affidavits entitling us to come to the U.S.A. We had become very much aware that war would start in the near future and uncertain whether our quota numbers were high enough to permit us to emigrate in time. Our attempts to leave for Shanghai and Cuba had failed. Thus my mother decided to have me leave first and tried to get me on the Kindertransport by sending out an appeal to England for a sponsor. She acquired ten addresses of garment manufacturers in England, assuming they would be Jewish. A person willing to act as a sponsor would need to guarantee the child's stay with them and to deposit £50 to assure passage to the child's final destination. My mother received two answers to her appeal: one from a man in Manchester who said I could stay with him but he was not able to deposit the money, and the second from Mr. Hirst in Bradford, Yorkshire. Mr. Hirst was not Jewish but nevertheless he agreed to sponsor me and to provide the required funds. Mr. Hirst owned two clothing factories; I would live with his designer and his wife, the Kanders.

I left Vienna on a Kindertransport on July 4, 1939, truly my own Independence Day. The Kanders, a young Jewish couple, were extremely kind to me, but soon after I arrived, I was displaced again. After the war started in September, the government expected the bombings to begin immediately and decided that all young children in Bradford were to be evacuated into the countryside to a small town called Colne in Lancashire. Even though I still remember many details of my stay in Bradford, I simply cannot recall how I left for Lancashire – whether it was a bus or train that brought me there. It must have been very traumatic for me to have been uprooted once again.

We were taken to a schoolyard where people from town came to pick up the children and bring them into their homes. Another refugee child and myself, older than almost all the other children, remained the last ones in the courtyard. How devastating to believe that no one wanted us! Finally, a couple who owned a pub invited us to come with them. We lived above the pub in a room that had beds with rubber sheets on them; clearly they had been expecting very young children. We were treated well but the constant throwing of darts and the pungent odor of ale drifting into our room did make life a bit unpleasant. A few days later my roommate, who was quite adventurous, told me he had walked up a country lane and knocked on doors and finally an elderly couple agreed to take him in. "Why don't you try it?" he said to me.

Looking back I find it hard to believe that I had the courage to emulate him, but somehow, I did and I was taken in by a couple named Hindle who had a son two years younger than I, and once again I was treated extremely well. I attended

till the government decided it was safe for the children to return to their homes in Bradford. Happily, I stayed with the Kanders till April 1940. During that time I was notified that my affidavit quota number had come through. I traveled to London by myself to go to the American Embassy to apply for my visa to the U.S. The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) put me up in a hostel in London. I was 15 years old. In April 1940 I boarded the SS Rotterdam in Southampton for the voyage to America, and became reunited with my mother who had managed to take the last ship out of Trieste. My father, whose quota number was very low since he was born in Romania, boarded an illegal transport to what was then Palestine. It was late November, and the Danube froze over, stranding the ship. All the passengers were taken to a camp outside of Sabac, Serbia, where they spent the winter. He and I were still able to stay in touch with the help of the Red Cross but the following spring the Nazis invaded Yugoslavia and 900 people, including my father, perished. My mother received notice of where he was buried in 1956, with the words: "All victims named in the above list were liquidated between October 12 and 13, 1941." He was buried in a mass grave in Belgrade which I went to visit many years later. "Liquidated!" The horror in that word haunts me to this day.

Mr. Hirst came to see us in New York in 1948 and stayed with us for a couple of weeks. I wanted to repay the £50 but he would not accept it. When I asked him why he responded to my mother's plea, he said quite simply, "If someone asks for help one must not turn him away." *Tikkum Olam* – to repair the world.

WALTER AUSTERER
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