



Martin's Story, Chapter 4

But then one day I had one of these trivial illnesses that children catch at school, sore throat, that sort of thing, and I had been off school for a couple of days and would probably have gone back to school a day or two later but one morning in 1938 I was asleep in my bed, all the rest of the family were asleep in our beds, when there was a knocking at the door, my mother got up and opened the door and the Nazis walked in and we were taken straight out, taken away, we didn't know where we were being taken. Immediately we were taken to a small police station which was a few streets away and there we just had to wait, we didn't know what was going to happen to us. Eventually a bus came along. Now in Leipzig a bus was a fairly rare sight because public transport was by trams. The only buses one ever saw were buses which had been chartered to take either groups of people somewhere or something of that sort. So this was a specially chartered bus. There were already some people on board who had come from different parts of the city, we had to get onto this bus and we were taken to the railway station where we joined what to me looked like an enormous crowd of people, of course it was probably much smaller than I remember it because to a small child everything looks very large, and we were put on board a specially chartered train and eventually the train set off and we were not told where we were going. The train eventually stopped somewhere and one of the other people came into our compartment and said "Do you realise we're locked in?" And one or two people tried the door handles out of curiosity, nothing more, and we were indeed locked in but of course from outside the train it could be seen that people were trying the handles because the outside handles were moving. Immediately a policeman came on board and he said, I can remember his form of words, "If anyone tries to escape", as he put it, "use will be made of the firearms". I omitted to mention that when we went to the railway station in Leipzig I was very surprised to see that although there were lots of policemen about, and there were always lots of SS men, the German police of course as a matter of course carried revolvers, which police do in most countries, but on this occasion they were also carrying rifles, as were the SS men. And so we were in no doubt that firearms were available. When this man said "Use will be made of the firearms" we knew exactly what was meant so we stopped trying the handles.

Well the train went on, as trains do it simply went through some stations, it stopped at others to let more prisoners on and there were other trains that we could see which appeared as far as we could tell also to contain prisoners. Well some of the people there of course knew their geography, the grown-up people knew their geography, they knew we were going eastwards but that was as much as we knew. Then after dark we arrived at a small railway station where we stopped and we were ordered off the train. And we were taken outside the station where there was a sort of ramp and standing on each side of the ramp was a line of SS men. And we were eventually formed up into rows with an SS man at the end of each row and we were marched off. We were very soon outside this small town and we went eventually into a forest. Well the rows into which we'd been formed up became a bit untidy in the forest because the forest path was much narrower than a street but we were still a column of people with these SS guards. Now I don't know exactly how long we marched but it seemed a long way, it can't have been as far as it seemed but it seemed a long way, and it doesn't sound too terrible simply to march through a forest but of course there were people there in all sorts of conditions, there were people ranging in age from the very young to the very aged. There were people who were carrying babies. There were old people who couldn't walk very well. And as I discovered on the train itself, we had been among the lucky ones that we had been taken away from our home as one family. There were people who had been taken away after husbands had left for work and children for school, and husbands were taken from the workplace, wives from the home, children from the school, they didn't know whether they would ever meet again. They had no idea where they were going or what was going to happen to them. We at least kept together. And there were also people who had been taken out of hospital beds and the like. And some of these people found it very difficult to walk long distances. And I'm afraid quite a few people did not survive. I have read figures of the number of people who died but I don't know how much reliance one can put on the actual figures so perhaps it's better not to quote them. But at any rate we were lucky in that we were not at the extremes of either youth or old age and we were not seriously ill or anything, we could at least walk.