



## **Martin's Story, Chapter 8**

During all this time certain things were going on of which we were only vaguely aware. In various countries in Europe people had begun to realise that dreadful things were happening to Jews in Germany and in Austria and in Czechoslovakia which the Germans had occupied, and also some people were beginning to realise that a Second World War was very likely to come, the tensions were building up and of course if Germany occupied other countries then Nazi rule with all its horrors would be extended to those countries. And so in a number of countries in Europe people were lobbying governments and effectively what they were saying was 'We know you have a very severe unemployment problem and you don't want to add to it by admitting a large number of refugees to compete with your own people for such jobs as there are, but will you at least save some of the children? They won't add to the unemployment problem'. And the governments of several countries agreed to do this. Now unfortunately these governments included countries like France and Holland which were later to be occupied by the Germans, so the children who were taken to those countries fell into German hands again and many of them I'm afraid did not survive. One country that did admit a few children – only a few, because it's a small country – was Switzerland and although throughout the Second World War there was always a possibility that the Germans might occupy Switzerland in fact they never did so the children who went there were safe. But another country that agreed was Britain. Now Britain at first made certain conditions. One of these conditions was that none of the cost and none of the organisational burden should fall on the British taxpayer. In other words if either individuals or charities were prepared to organise the thing and pay for it then the British government would issue visas for children. That was a condition which remained in force as long as the so-called Kindertransporte actually lasted. There were other conditions that were made but were later relaxed. At first for example every child that was admitted was supposed to have deposited on its behalf a sum of £50 which would pay for repatriation when the emergency was over. Well it eventually became clear that this wasn't just a temporary emergency and that condition was relaxed. Again another condition was, or rather lack of a condition, was that the children could be housed at first either with foster parents or in hostels. Now this was changed and the condition was imposed that the children had to be housed with foster parents. So some of the original children went into hostels

but later children couldn't go into hostels and I think the reason for this was that the appropriate government departments realised that if a war came they would want to evacuate British children from the cities and would need the hostels for that purpose which is a reasonable sort of condition to make. But most of the so-called Kindertransporte which took children under this scheme came directly from Germany or Austria. There was a young British businessman who I believe is still alive, although he's over 100 years old now, and very belatedly when he was in his 90s he was given a knighthood, Sir Nicholas Winton, he arranged for some children to come from Czechoslovakia and also there were a few Kindertransporte from Poland but the Kindertransporte from Poland were all for children who had taken part in this forced expulsion from Germany. They were not for children who had lived in Poland all their lives. And I was fortunate that I did get a place on such a Kindertransport and I came to England and was sent to foster parents in Coventry.