



Martin's Story, Chapter 9

And can you tell me about your journey to Britain?

Yes. The children who were on that Kindertransport were supposed to foregather in Warsaw. Now I was in Brzesko and one of my relations took me by train back to Krakow and there my aunt in Krakow took my sister and me to the railway station late at night. There were, I don't remember exactly how many but something like four or five of us children and one man was supposed to look after us on the journey to Warsaw. The journey was an overnight journey, we arrived in Warsaw early in the morning and we were taken to a building which I think was something like a children's home but we were there and other children who were going on that Kindertransport were there, they had come either from Warsaw or from other parts of Poland, and I think without now being sure that probably one or two more arrived during that day. We stayed in that house for the day and then, under the care of another man we went on an overnight journey again to Gdynia. And we arrived in Gdynia during the morning and we spent the day again at a home in Gdynia. Then we boarded the ship. Now it sounds strange but we had to board the ship fairly early because it was a Friday evening and of course the Jewish Sabbath begins on Friday evening and one isn't allowed to embark or disembark from any kind of vehicle or vessel during the Sabbath. So we had to get on the ship fairly early on the Friday. Friday evening that is. And then eventually we had a service, a religious service, Sabbath evening service on that Friday so I went to the service and afterwards I went back on deck to have a look at the shore but I couldn't see it because the ship had sailed and the land was out of sight. And then we spent the next day sailing in the Baltic and again in the evening I went to the cabin which was shared among 6 boys and when I woke up the next morning and looked out of the porthole to my surprise there was land. Because during the night we had entered the Kiel canal. Now the Kiel canal was an international waterway so we were allowed to go through it and we spent part of that day going through the Kiel canal and then later in the day we emerged from the canal and my recollection did not square with what I was later to see on maps. My recollection was that we went out of the Kiel canal into the open sea whereas the maps show that the Kiel canal ends in a river, the river Elbe. And I couldn't understand this for a long time until years later I for a quite different reason found myself back in that part of Germany, many years later, this was in connection with my work. And I saw the answer. The Kiel Canal does

go into the river Elbe but at that point the river Elbe is too wide for you to see the opposing shore. So the impression you get is that you are going out into the open sea although geographically you're going into the river Elbe.

Now we spent the rest of that day partly in either the Elbe or in the North sea, it wasn't possible to see at what point one actually left the river, and then the whole of the next day was spent in the North Sea. And towards the late afternoon we began to see the coast of what I now realise was East Anglia. And then in the evening we entered the river Thames and had to moor there whilst waiting for a pilot to take us up the Thames. During the night we went up the river Thames and the next morning we were tied up in the Pool of London. I got my first view of the Tower Bridge and we waited there and we were told that a man was coming along to look after us. And the man came and it turned out that he spoke only English which wasn't terribly useful to us (laughs) but at any rate we were taken off the ship into one of the port buildings and there my foster-mother was waiting with her sister because my foster mother was very deaf and so she took her sister along to do any interpreting that was necessary for a deaf person. But at this stage I didn't even know the name of my foster parents so I learnt it then. Part of that day was spent in London and then in the afternoon we went by train to Coventry and arrived in Coventry in the early evening.

Can you describe your emotions at making such a momentous journey on your own without your mother?

I was very apprehensive and quite frankly I was very much afraid because I was going into what for me was completely the unknown. I have since those days travelled in various foreign countries and it holds no terrors for me today because when you're a grown-up person you usually know how to handle any situation that comes along but for a child it was very frightening especially since I couldn't speak English and the people around me couldn't speak either German or Yiddish and so I found myself repeatedly in situations which were puzzling and which I couldn't handle in any way because I couldn't talk to anybody and it was quite a while before I learnt enough English at least to explain to people what I wanted. But even then that wasn't the end of the difficulty because there were the cultural differences between a boy from an orthodox Jewish household and English working class people who had a completely different set of values.

And you were obviously separated from your sister as well.

No. no, we stayed together but we stayed together you might say in that we were in the same place but we were separated in another sense. My sister reacted to all this very badly, worse than I did. I think that's fair comment. I probably reacted badly also but she reacted worse and the result was that we could hardly communicate with each other. We should have given each other support but if anything I think it worked the other way, I think if anything this distanced us from each other even further. I think on balance if we could have been in different households we might have got on better but being together but with her reaction her way and my reaction my way I think it made it more difficult, not less.