

Jewish migration created strangers in a strange land

Children left families in Germany to escape Nazis.

The day in 1936 when 13-year-old Ruth Moos fled Nazi-controlled Germany, her parents stood on the train departure platform in Berlin, crying. But she didn't dare look at them or wave goodbye. The pain would have been unbearable.

Instead, the teenager steadfastly read a novel she'd brought for her journey across the Atlantic. "I had to shut off my emotions completely," said the Laguna Woods resident, who is now 89.

That lasted for two decades. Then



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she began what became extensive, daily therapy sessions – and cried day and night for two years, she said.

Moos (pronounced *Moss*) was one of about 11,000 children whose parents made a heart-wrenching decision to send them to live with strangers in foreign lands as Adolf Hitler intensified persecution of Jews in Nazi territories before World War II.

Hitler's early policy was to promote



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Ruth Moos, 89, of Laguna Woods was 13 when she fled Nazi-controlled Germany in the *kindertransport* effort that moved mostly Jewish children from Germany, Austria, Poland and Czechoslovakia to other countries before the start of World War II.

Annual conference

What: This Kindertransport Association Conference honors the legacy of the *kindertransports*, a rescue movement that saved roughly 11,000 German, Austrian, Czech and Polish children of Jewish descent on the eve of World War II, when much of the world declined to take refugees running from the Nazis. Parents made the decision to send their children to live with strangers in foreign lands. Most of the children never saw their parents again.

Who: About 50 kindertransport survivors and 75 family and supporters will gather for this biennial event, the first to be held in Southern California. Organizers say it is one of the largest gatherings of Holocaust survivors.

When: Today, Sunday. On-site registrations will be accepted.

Where: Irvine Marriott Hotel, 18000 Von Karman.

Speakers: Shoah Foundation executive director Stephen Smith and Los Angeles filmmaker Sascha Schneider, among others.

Films: "Nicky's Children," a documentary on a British stockbroker who saved 669 children, and "Chuppa," a documentary on a teenage engaged couple who survived a concentration camp and two years in Russian forests and had a traditional Jewish wedding 50 years later.

Information: kindertransport.org

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Jewish emigration from his growing empire. Most nations, however, refused to accept refugees during the Great Depression. So, caring activists in and out of the Nazi region worked to at least get some children out.

The concerted efforts to move children to safety were known as the *kindertransport*. A gathering of some of those children who were saved is taking place this weekend in Irvine.

With permission from the British parliament, families and orphanages in the United Kingdom took in at least 9,300 children from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland in the nine months before open war broke out in September 1939. The hosts had to prove their ability to provide for the children and agree to care for them until adulthood.

About 1,400 unaccompanied children went to the United States without explicit government approval and over a much longer period.

The British kindertransports – and the letters between parents and children – ended with the invasion of Poland on Sept. 1, 1939. A transport of 251 Czechoslovakian youth left Prague on Sept. 3 but could not be completed. None of those children is believed to have survived the genocide.

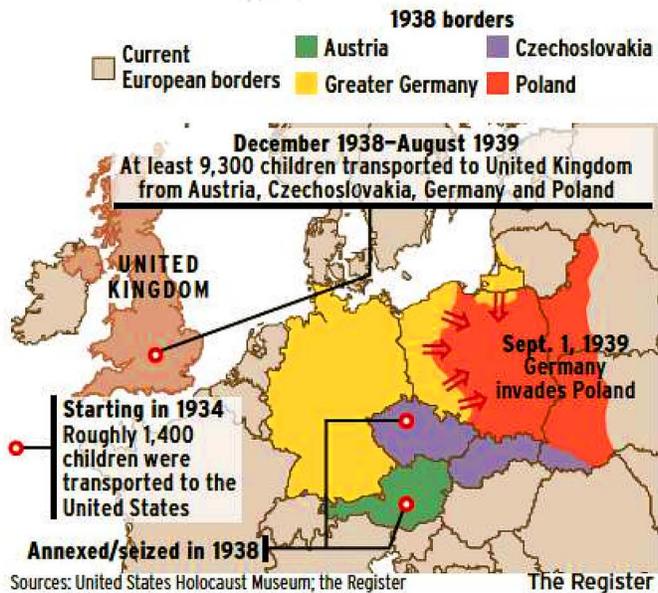
Her father wasn't even sure she needed to go, Moos said. Though Jewish, he didn't think he or his family would be a target of the Nazis because he had served in the German military during World War I and had received an iron cross medal. Moos' mother, however, felt it was urgent that she leave. The day Moos left was the only time she ever saw her father cry.

Two years after sending their daughter to live with a foster family in America, as



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Ruth Moos of Laguna Woods is shown with a collection of family photos from before World War II.



the Nazis' persecution intensified, the family took Moos' younger sister and fled Germany, moving to Argentina, illegally, by way of Uruguay. They asked Moos to join them there, but she refused.

"I was American now," she remembers thinking. Part of her resistance, she said, might have been the deeply hurt feelings that her mother did not accompany

her on the train ride from Berlin to Hamburg, where she boarded a ship to America.

Though her parents could have forced her to join them in Argentina, they chose not to. The couple rebuilt their lives in Buenos Aires. They and Moos were unable to visit each other for another 22 years. When they finally did, it was a surreal experience.

Moos was married with three children. Her eldest, a girl, was 13 and resembled Moos at that age. When they met at the airport, Moos' mother immediately gravitated to her granddaughter and called her "Ruth."

Moos agreed to be interviewed by The Orange County Register as a favor to her friend Jeff Wolff of Mission Viejo, the planning committee chairman for Kindertransport Association's international conference this weekend in Irvine.

It is the first time the biennial event is in Southern California. About 50 kindertransport survivors, including Wolff's father, Michael Wolff, are expected to attend, along with 75 descendants and supporters.

The exodus of unaccompanied youth from Nazi territory peaked in the nine months before the war in response to a coordinated, one-night mob action in November 1938 that ended with the destruction of 7,000 Jewish businesses and 1,000 synagogues; the arrests of 30,000 Jewish men age 18-50 and 91 deaths.

Among those arrested that night was Michael Wolff's father. His mother borrowed money from extended family to bribe officials and get him out, a common practice before the start of the war, according to Michael Wolff.

A few weeks before his third birthday, after his father's arrest, Michael's mother sent him to live with a foster family in Scotland. A year and a half later, the couple moved to Bolivia and Michael rejoined them.

As soon as they were settled, they applied for visas to move to America. After waiting 11 years, their number finally came up and they moved to Tennessee. Michael Wolff now lives in Santa Barbara but is joining his son in Orange County this weekend for the 2012 Kindertransport Association Conference. He has been attending the event for 45 years, he said.