

## Elfriede's Starer



Elfriede Starer, who is Jewish, was born in France in 1927, but lived with her parents and younger brother Martin in Germany. None of their relations lived in that country.

She has vivid memories of the coming to power of Hitler in 1933. From then on Jewish lives began to be more and more restricted.

She lost her father in a tragic accident in 1935. His untimely death was to have unexpected consequences several years later.

In 1938 the family were deported to Poland under very brutal conditions. This was the first time that the Nazis acted against families, the earliest hint of what was to come during the war. This deportation led to events that culminated in the Kristallnacht, the Night of the Broken Glass. Britain then offered a home to Jewish children who lived in Germany and Austria, because they were in danger from attack by the Nazis. This operation became known as the Kindertransport. The British government also included a few of the children who had been deported to Poland, who were classed as orphans because they were fatherless, that is without a bread-earner in the family. Parents were not allowed to come with their children. Elfriede and her brother were eligible to come to England if somebody would take them into their home.

Life for her family was very difficult in Poland. They had arrived in Poland with nothing – no money, no possessions – and there was the imminent threat of war. When one considered how Hitler had expanded Germany, one could clearly see that the acquisition of Poland was his next aim. The danger was obvious to everyone. So their mother was prepared to send Elfriede and Martin

to England, with the proviso that they must stay together. It seemed impossible to find a family that was prepared to take both children. Eventually, an old couple in Coventry said they would take them in temporarily, until a more suitable home could be found for them.

In the meantime, Martin became very ill and was in hospital for many weeks. This delayed their departure to England.

In the summer of 1939, Poland and Germany agreed on an arrangement by which certain individuals, if they met the right conditions, would be allowed to return to Germany for seven days in order to put their property in the hands of a responsible agent, but they were not permitted to take any of their belongings out of Germany. Elfriede's mother, who had been born in Germany and was educated there, met the necessary conditions, and in the hope of getting to France, and from there to England to be with her children, she returned to Germany. Hers is an involved story, but she managed by her own ingenuity and resourcefulness to get to France to her parents. Sadly, however, in spite of every effort, she did not make it to England.

After their mother had left for Germany in June 1939, Elfriede and Martin were looked after in Poland by their aunt. They were expecting their travel papers to England to arrive any day.

A week after her twelfth birthday, Elfriede and Martin, who was just nine, travelled to England, unaccompanied by an adult. Their ship arrived in London on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1939. Six weeks later war broke out.