

A Fleeting Moment

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The dank, dimly lit train platform was crowded that May evening in 1939 at the Masaryk Station in Prague, Czechoslovakia. The name Masaryk, in honor of our republic's first president, was a reminder of happier times and a source of pride for all of us. The invading Nazis had not yet renamed the city's streets and places. Descending dusk further darkened the gloomy sky and mirrored the mood of the somber family groups that stood looking down the tracks for an approaching train. With one small suitcase each and a numbered card hung around our necks, about sixty of us kids boarded the train that was our kindertransport to safety. Each compartment's door opened directly onto the platform, which made it easy for some anguished parents to take their children off the train, and then perhaps change their minds suddenly only to put them back on. Entire families came to say good-bye to their youngest members. Choking back sobs, loved ones fluttered handkerchiefs, dampened with tears, at the train as it pulled away and faded from view.

My mother and my aunt were there to see me off. My father left two months earlier to live in London, and my older brother was attending an English college. As I learned later, my departure was especially difficult for my mother. Not only was she parting with her ten-year-old son, perhaps never to see him again, but she had to bear the rebukes of my aunt, Malva, who upbraided my mother, "You're out of your mind sending the boy off to England. Do you know what you are doing? It's terrible!" Though Mother, too, was worried and agitated, she was resolute and would not be deterred. She was convinced she was saving me from almost certain death – the fate that tragically befell the children of my aunt. As for me, I was off on an adventure, unaware of the holocaust to come.

April, 2009