

Loree Napier - Kindertransport. 05-03-18



Loree Napier

Loree Napier, a survivor of the Holocaust and a child refugee on the Kindertransport out of Nazi Germany, gave an extremely moving talk on her life and her early experiences and memories in Nazi Germany and her subsequent escape to England.

Loree explained that she has spoken in many cities in the UK and at events commemorating the Holocaust and celebrating Holocaust survivors.

She began by reading a poem: 'What it means to be a refugee' which was very poignant and set the tone for the rest of the afternoon's meeting. She then explained that she became a British citizen as a result of the Diaspora and has been involved in many good causes over the years, giving back to the UK for having taken her in as a child.

Loree told us her life story and her recollections of the development of Nazi Germany, how she was affected by it and her personal experience of Nazism in her early years. Her family moved to Berlin to be safer from the growing violence and discrimination against Jews, but she saw horrific events even as a young child. She gave very moving details of the persecution of Jews that she herself witnessed and commented that she, even as a child, had been ostracised by former friends.

Her parents tried to get to the USA but were told that the 'quota' of refugees was full and they were refused. Her father subsequently died in Auschwitz concentration camp and she provided some harrowing details.

So on 20th June 1939, aged only 9, Loree was put on a train, the 'Kindertransport', and bound for a new life, via Hook of Holland and Harwich and Liverpool Street Station, London. She had only one suitcase and spoke no English. With her she carried her most precious possessions, including a sepia photograph of herself with her mother, on the back of which was the tender message: 'Meine liebe Hannelore, vergiß niemals deine Mutti'. (My dearest Hannelore, never forget your Mummy'). Loree mentioned the

tremendous sacrifice that her and other parents had made, letting their children go alone to a foreign land, never knowing if they would see each other again.

Loree read an excerpt from 'One Small Suitcase' which explored the dilemma of not having an 'identity': being neither English nor German; neither Christian nor Jewish. The pathos of the excerpt was gut-wrenching.

Loree's first placement as a refugee child was in Cardiff, where she was placed to be a companion to the daughter of the house. The circumstances were very difficult and it was not a happy experience.

Her second foster home was in West Yorkshire and was a much happier experience. Loree has great affection for these foster parents, who were very kind to her. With the demise of the carpet trade in Yorkshire her foster family moved to Kidderminster where her foster father got a job in the carpet trade. Loree gained a place at Kidderminster High School for Girls, where she experienced anti-Semitism.

There was a general feeling of mistrust of German refugees prevalent at the time. Loree's memories of her early years both in Germany and England were feelings of 'not fitting in' for many reasons, first as a Jew in Nazi Germany and then as a German refugee in war torn England.

Loree met her mother again for the first time since she was a child of nine, as a married woman and a mother. Her own mother had become very bitter and sad. When her mother came to England she worked as a maid. She had previously been very wealthy, but German refugees were denied work in their chosen fields of expertise and were only allowed to go 'into service'. Loree, however, is very grateful and thankful for her opportunities and counts her blessings.

Loree's first return visit to Germany was in 1996, 57 years after leaving. She felt very anxious at the thought of returning to her birth country, as her last memories of Germany had been of shouting and chanting and violence.

Concluding her very personal and touching story, Loree told of a recent experience, when she met Barbara Winton - the daughter of Nicholas Winton, the 'English Schindler'. Loree was part of a group of people who took a rail journey to Harwich from Liverpool Street Station, in 2016, as a reverse commemoration and reunion of Kindertransport/Holocaust survivors of the original journey from Harwich to London.

She told the story of how she broke her foot at the reunion and missed all the Harwich activities, ending up in a hospital in Clacton, some miles away!

Loree still keeps her Jewish links and heritage, but her faith is now Christian. She spoke with humour as well as painful honesty, borne out of her experiences, and made many wry comments, which the audience appreciated.

You 'could have heard a pin drop' throughout the talk. There was utter engagement with both the speaker and the content and Loree was very warmly applauded at the end.

Heidy Hague