



## Irving Bienstock

*Irving Bienstock is a Holocaust survivor. His story of survival puts a human face on an unimaginable time in Jewish history.*

Irving was born in Dortmund, Germany, a town near Dusseldorf. He did all the things you would expect a young boy to do: going to school and playing sports. Things changed when Hitler came to power. A series of laws were passed that permitted the mistreatment of Jewish people. Many Jewish men were arrested. It was no longer safe for the family so Irving's father escaped from Germany to Belgium on September 28, 1938 to avoid being arrested. By Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass on November 9, 1938, Jewish synagogues and businesses were targeted and destroyed. Irving's schooling came to an end. Members of his extended family were deported to concentration camps in Poland. The danger for Jews increased and his mother had to make some painful decisions.

Irving had a ten year old sister named Sylvia. She had developed diabetes and was denied medical care because she was Jewish. She and their mother boarded a train bound for Holland without the necessary travel papers. This desperate mother searched the train for someone who might help her daughter and she eventually found one woman who agreed to pose as Sylvia's mother. Leaving the train before reaching Holland's border, Irving's mother left her daughter and hoped for the best.

It was now time to do the same for Irving. He was only 12 years old and also did not have travel papers. On January 15, 1939, his mother searched the train for someone to help her child, but this time, could not find one. She left him on the train and hoped he would arrive safely in Holland. He was all alone with only 10 German marks (about \$4), one suitcase, and a plan to find a synagogue where someone might help him. Imagine being alone on a train, going to a new place, not understanding the language and knowing no one. He was that brave!

When Irving crossed the border, the Dutch police saw he had no papers. He was asked, "Where are you going?" His answer sounded sincere: he was visiting an uncle in Amsterdam. Irving had to get off the train. He waited for hours in the cold and assumed he would be returned to Germany. The officer brought him to a small hotel where he introduced him to a man from the Jewish community in Arnhem. This man took Irving to a children's home run by the Jewish community. Once there, Irving saw other escaped children who told him to get something to eat. He entered the dining room and to his surprise – there was his sister! This was a miracle. They lived there for 3 months. When spring arrived, the children were sent to the city orphanage of Amsterdam. Irving would be there for 13 months. Due to her diabetes, Sylvia was transferred to a hospital for medical care.

Unlike many other refugee children, Irving and his sister were reunited with their parents. They boarded a ship from Holland with their mother, and met their father in New York. Through much hardship, this family survived. They were the lucky ones.



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