

I Seek a Kind Person: My Father, Seven Children, and the Adverts that Helped Them Escape the Holocaust

Julian Borger

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Julian Borger's illuminating, elegiac memoir *I Seek a Kind Person* traces his search for his Viennese father's wartime history.

In 1983, Borger's father, Robert, committed suicide. Borger, a journalist, later discovered an advertisement in the *Manchester Guardian*: Jewish families in 1938, fleeing from the Nazis' annexation of Vienna, hoped to find refuge for their children. Robert was listed among six others. This fact, paired with Robert's Welsh foster mother's haunting comment—that he was the “Nazis' last victim”—fueled an interest in these children's stories.

Indeed, much of the memoir's poignancy derives from a gulf in knowledge: Who Robert was long before the younger Borger's birth is pieced together through European and personal histories. Vienna's Jewish past is traced with a focus on repeated persecutions despite periods of flourishing. Meanwhile, Borger's memories of his grandmother, who was reluctant to embrace her British exile; ephemera left by his grandfather; photographs; conversations with varied descendants; and filled-in accounts—including from a memoir by a man who had also been listed in the newspaper adverts—help to recreate what Robert's upbringing might have entailed.

Such proximity through archival material remains haunting throughout. Even as these gathered experiences reveal people's resilience, hints of trauma linger. Vienna's bygone elegance is juxtaposed with Kristallnacht and wartime treacheries. And a sometimes understated tone about the anguish involved in families' tough separations makes the topic even more resonant. Amid this darkness, the kindness of a few foster parents stands out, highlighting how the fortunes of many hinged on lucky placements and escapes to places as far-flung as Shanghai.

I Seek a Kind Person, a memoir about Jewish families whose stories intertwine through a chance wartime advertisement, deals with generational pain and the miracle of surviving.

KAREN RIGBY (January / February 2025)

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