

# VERA GISSING

## BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE



ECHOES & REFLECTIONS

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST. INSPIRING THE CLASSROOM.



Vera Gissing (born Vera Diamantova), daughter of Karel and Irma, was born on July 4, 1928 in Prague, Czechoslovakia (now Czech

Republic). Vera's father owned a wine and spirits business in Celakovice, near Prague. Her mother ran the business office. The family attended synagogue on the High Holidays (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur), but otherwise was not religious. Vera was a student at the local Gymnasium (high school) and was very proud to be a Czech citizen. She had a sister, Eva, four years her senior.

On March 15, 1939, Celakovice was occupied by the German armed forces. Shortly after the German occupation of Celakovice, the family was forced to house a newly-appointed town commandant. The commandant was cruel towards the family and he subjected them to brutal treatment.

Unbeknownst to the rest of the family, Irma registered Vera and Eva for the *Kindertransport*, the organized movement of refugee children, most of them Jewish, from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia to Great Britain.

The sisters escaped to Great Britain in June 1939, leaving their parents behind. They were separated upon arrival. Vera was placed in a foster family in Liverpool, and Eva went to a school in Dorset. While in Liverpool, Vera managed to get in touch with Edvard Benes, who had been the President of Czechoslovakia from 1935-1938. With Benes' help, Vera started attending a school for Czech refugee children in England, and later in Wales. Vera was in Wales when

the war ended in 1945. She later learned that her mother and father were killed in concentration camps.

Vera returned to Prague to study, and she became a literary translator. She later moved back to England, where she married Michael Gissing in 1949. Vera and Michael had three children and four grandchildren.

Vera freelanced as an interpreter, translator and editor for various British publishers, and wrote children's books and an autobiography, *Pearls of Childhood* (1988). Vera's story has been serialized on Czech radio and has become the subject of several television documentaries. She is known for her work on *The Power of Good: Nicholas Winton* (2002), *All My Loved Ones* (1999), and *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport* (2000). *The Power of Good* won the 2002 International Emmy for Best TV Documentary.

This interview was conducted on October 25, 1996 in Marlow, England, United Kingdom.