

## MEDIA KIT

# *A Childhood in Bohemia and the Flight to the West*

By Erika Storey

New English Edition & First German Translation

### AT A GLANCE

**What:** Publication of two new editions of a powerful WWII memoir documenting the post-war expulsion of 15 million Germans from Eastern Europe – a largely unknown chapter of history.

**Who:** Erika Storey, an 88-year-old survivor who has lived in Essex, England since 1958, bearing witness to events that began when she was just eight years old.

**When:** 31 December 2025.

**Why It Matters Now:** In an era of renewed displacement, political division, and propaganda, this memoir offers urgent lessons about collective punishment, the manipulation of populations, and the human cost of decisions made in distant conference rooms.

**The Hook:** For 80 years, this story remained largely untold in English-speaking countries. Now, for the first time, it's available in both English and German, bridging two nations and two perspectives on a hidden chapter of WWII history.

### THE STORY IN ONE PARAGRAPH

In June 1945, eight-year-old Erika Schroll was forced from her home in Bohemia with only what her mother could carry. What followed was a three-year ordeal of starvation, disease, and displacement that nearly killed her entire family – a story repeated across Central and Eastern Europe as approximately 15 million ethnic Germans were expelled under decisions made at Tehran and Potsdam. Written decades later by a woman who made England her home, this brutally honest memoir illuminates a “missing chapter” of WWII history, documenting not just what happened, but the psychological and social conditions that enabled such events – and why we must understand them to prevent their recurrence.

### KEY SELLING POINTS

#### Historical Significance

- **The Missing Link:** Documents the post-war expulsion of 15 million Germans, authorized at Tehran (1943) and Potsdam (1945) – a chapter largely “pushed under the carpet” in English-speaking countries
- **Eyewitness Account:** One of the few first-person narratives of the Sudeten German expulsion available in English
- **Scale of Tragedy:** 250,000 Sudeten Germans died during the expulsions, in addition to 200,000 who died during the war
- **Dual Perspective:** Honestly documents both Nazi indoctrination and post-war suffering without excuse or blame

## Literary & Emotional Power

- **Child's Perspective:** Vivid, intimate details only a child could observe – the smell of bonfire smoke triggering memories, a grandmother dying in an abandoned bus, wheels falling off a broken pram
- **Exceptional Prose:** Written in crystalline English by a non-native speaker, demonstrating remarkable literary skill
- **Family Saga:** Three-year journey from comfortable middle-class life to skeleton-like starvation, illegal border crossing, and eventual rebuilding
- **Memory Triggered:** Written after bonfire smoke evoked buried memories while pushing her daughter's pram in 1960s England

## Contemporary Relevance

- **Timely Lessons:** Reveals how propaganda shapes entire populations to dehumanize others
- **Cycle of Violence:** Documents how collective punishment perpetuates rather than resolves conflict
- **Universal Displacement:** Speaks to current refugee crises and forced migrations worldwide
- **Warning for Our Time:** Shows psychological conditions that enable atrocity – essential knowledge for preventing recurrence

## Unique Anglo-German Bridge

- **Two Nations, One Story:** Author lived in Bohemia (Germany/Czech), Bavaria (Germany), and Essex (England) – her story belongs to multiple countries
- **Dual Publication:** New English edition and first-ever German translation published simultaneously
- **Cross-Cultural Understanding:** Makes critical history accessible to both English and German-speaking audiences
- **British Connection:** Storey has lived in Essex since 1958, raised four children in England, making this a British story as much as a German one

## TARGET AUDIENCE

### Primary Readers

- **WWII History Enthusiasts:** Particularly those interested in lesser-known aspects and post-war consequences
- **European History Readers:** Anyone seeking to understand Central European complexities
- **Memoir & Biography Readers:** Those who appreciate powerful personal narratives of survival
- **Academic & Educational Market:** History departments, Holocaust and genocide studies programs
- **German-Heritage Communities:** Diaspora seeking to understand family histories
- **Peace & Conflict Studies:** Those examining cycles of violence and collective punishment

### Media Targets

- **National Newspapers:** History features, book reviews, opinion pieces on lessons for today
- **Radio Programs:** Interview opportunities about memory, survival, Anglo-German relations
- **History Magazines:** Feature articles on post-war expulsions, untold WWII stories

- **Literary Review Publications:** Memoir and biography critics
- **Academic Journals:** Holocaust studies, migration studies, European history
- **German-Language Media:** Particularly in Germany and Austria for the new translation
- **Local/Regional Media:** Essex connection, British angle on European history

### Secondary Audiences

- **Book Clubs:** Discussion-worthy themes of memory, guilt, forgiveness, resilience
- **Educational Institutions:** Supplementary reading for WWII and European history courses
- **Human Rights Organizations:** Case study in collective punishment and forced migration
- **Interfaith & Reconciliation Groups:** Example of moving beyond bitterness toward understanding

## WHY JOURNALISTS SHOULD COVER THIS STORY

### Multiple News Angles:

1. **Historical Revelation:** “The WWII Story That Went Untold for 80 Years”
  - 15 million people displaced in history’s largest forced migration
  - Decisions made at Tehran and Potsdam with massive human consequences
  - Events largely unknown in English-speaking world
2. **Contemporary Relevance:** “Lessons from History for Today’s Crises”
  - Echoes in current displacement crises worldwide
  - How propaganda shapes populations (then and now)
  - Dangers of collective punishment
3. **Human Interest:** “From Skeleton to Survivor: An 88-Year-Old’s Journey”
  - Eight-year-old girl survives camps, starvation, illegal border crossing
  - Father’s tears when he finds skeletal family in 1947
  - Rebuilding life in England as au pair, mother, writer
4. **Literary Achievement:** “Non-Native Speaker’s Remarkable English Prose”
  - Written to inform English speakers about unknown history
  - Powerful, poetic language from someone who learned English as adult
  - Memory triggered by bonfire smoke decades later
5. **Anglo-German Relations:** “Essex Author Bridges Two Nations’ Stories”
  - British resident for 67 years tells German story
  - Simultaneous English and German publication
  - Cross-cultural understanding and reconciliation
6. **Women’s History:** “Mothers and Children: The Hidden Victims”
  - Focus on women’s and children’s experiences
  - Mother’s desperate choices to keep family alive
  - Sister’s death at 18 from malnutrition-related heart condition
7. **Regional Interest:** “Local Author’s International Impact”
  - Essex resident since 1958
  - Four children raised in England
  - Local connection to global historical event

### FEATURE ARTICLE IDEAS

1. **“The Missing 15 Million: Europe’s Forgotten Displacement”**
  - Comprehensive look at post-war expulsions through personal story
  - Expert commentary on why this history remained obscure
  - Comparison with other forced migrations

2. **“When Memory Returns: The Bonfire That Changed Everything”**
  - Exploration of traumatic memory, suppression, and recovery
  - How specific sensory triggers unlock the past
  - The therapeutic and educational power of bearing witness
3. **“A Child’s-Eye View of History’s Horrors”**
  - What children observe that adults miss
  - The unique perspective of child survivors
  - Long-term effects of childhood trauma
4. **“From Enemy to Neighbor: One Woman’s Journey”**
  - How Storey moved from victim of collective punishment to advocate for understanding
  - The role of compassion in breaking cycles of hatred
  - Anglo-German reconciliation through personal relationships
5. **“The Book That Took 50 Years to Write”**
  - Why some stories take decades to tell
  - The importance of survivor testimonies before they’re lost
  - Racing against time to document living history

## BOOK DESCRIPTION

### **June 1945. A small town in Bohemia.**

Eight-year-old Erika Schroll is torn from her home along with thousands of other German women and children. Her father is missing. Her world is collapsing. Packed into an SS barracks, then transported in open coal wagons to East Germany, she and her family face a brutal reality: catastrophic hunger, disease, and a winter that kills many around them.

When her father finally finds them in 1947, he weeps at the sight of their skeletal bodies. The reunion brings both joy and an impossible choice: stay in the Soviet zone and die slowly, or risk being shot while crossing the border illegally into West Germany.

### **The missing chapter of WWII history**

After World War II, approximately 15 million Germans were expelled from Eastern Europe in a mass displacement authorized at Tehran and Potsdam—a chapter of history largely “pushed under the carpet,” especially in English-speaking countries. Among them were 3 million Sudeten Germans from Bohemia, where German and Slavonic cultures had been intertwined for centuries.

Written decades later by a survivor who made England her home, this powerful memoir illuminates the human cost of collective punishment and political decisions made in distant conference rooms. Through vivid, intimate detail—the smell of bonfire smoke triggering buried memories, the taste of oats with husks that seemed like delicacies, the desperate ingenuity required simply to survive each day—Erika Storey documents not only what happened, but why it matters.

In today’s world of political upheaval, *A Childhood in Bohemia* offers urgent lessons about the cycles of violence and the dangers of collective punishment. It reveals how ordinary people can so easily be shaped by propaganda to dehumanize others—and why we must remain vigilant against such manipulation. But above all, it stands as a testament to human resilience—to the capacity to survive, rebuild, and bear witness.

***A story of resilience. A call to remember. A warning for our time.***

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Erika Storey** (née Schroll) was born in Saaz, Bohemia, on December 29, 1936. She lived through the final years of WWII as a young child, witnessing the Nazi regime's propaganda machine and experiencing the post-war expulsion of Sudeten Germans firsthand.

After surviving years of starvation and deprivation in Soviet-controlled East Germany, her family illegally crossed the border to Bavaria in 1947, narrowly escaping death when border guards opened fire on them. Her sister Elisabeth died in 1950 at age 18 from a heart condition caused by malnutrition.

In 1958, Erika came to England as an au pair – a journey that would define the rest of her life. She met and married a teacher, settled in Essex, and raised four children: Christine, Joseph, Marion, and Ellen. Her daughter Christine, who created the cover artwork for both editions, now lives in Germany with her own family.

The memoir was written in the 1990s following the sudden death of Erika's husband in 1987 and the subsequent deaths of both her parents. During this period of grief, she felt compelled to document a chapter of history that remained largely unknown in English-speaking countries. Drawing on her excellent English language skills developed over decades in Britain, she wrote to ensure that the experiences of millions of displaced people would not be forgotten.

At 88, Erika Storey continues to live in Essex, England, where she has made her home for more than six decades.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### The Post-War Expulsions: Key Facts

#### Scale:

- Approximately 15 million ethnic Germans expelled from Eastern Europe (1945-1950)
- 3 million Sudeten Germans expelled from Bohemia and Moravia (now Czech Republic)
- Largest forced population transfer in European history

#### Authorization:

- Tehran Conference (1943): Allied leaders discussed population transfers
- Potsdam Agreement (1945): Authorized "orderly and humane" transfer of Germans
- Reality: Chaotic, violent, and deadly implementation

#### Human Cost:

- Estimated 250,000 Sudeten Germans died during expulsions
- Additional 200,000 Sudeten Germans died during WWII
- Countless others died from starvation, disease, and exposure in camps

#### Historical Context:

- Followed centuries of German settlement in Bohemia (since medieval times)
- Reaction to Nazi occupation and atrocities during WWII
- Part of broader ethnic cleansing across post-war Europe
- Largely overlooked in Western historical narratives

#### Why It Matters:

- Represents collective punishment on massive scale

- Demonstrates human cost of decisions made at international conferences
- Shows cycle of violence: victims becoming perpetrators
- Remains sensitive issue in Czech-German relations today

#### **Bohemia/Sudetenland Background:**

- **Medieval Origins:** Germans settled in Bohemia from 12th century onward
- **Cultural Integration:** German and Czech cultures intertwined for centuries
- **1918:** Czechoslovakia created after WWI; 3 million Germans became minority
- **1938:** Munich Agreement ceded Sudetenland to Nazi Germany
- **1939-1945:** German occupation of all Czechoslovakia
- **1945-1946:** Post-war expulsion of virtually all ethnic Germans
- **Legacy:** Empty villages, broken families, lasting trauma on both sides

#### **SELECT PULL QUOTES**

##### **On Why She Wrote:**

“I was pushing my eldest daughter in her pram through an allotment in South Harrow, Middlesex, when some bonfire smoke drifting over me evoked such intense memories, it was as though a thunderbolt had crossed a cloudless blue sky. From then on my recollections have not left me alone.”

##### **On the Expulsion:**

“A Czech opened our door and informed us that we had to be out of the house within ten minutes. The only luggage would be hand luggage. In our case, it meant that my mother could take what she could carry; the bare essentials and nothing very heavy – a set of spare clothes for each of us, a thin blanket, some food, a few photos... It was 13th June 1945.”

##### **On Survival:**

“Her father found them in 1947, dressed in ragged clothing with wooden shoes, after being released to West Germany following several years of captivity in Yugoslavia... It was a shattering reunion. The father wept when he saw his wife and two daughters with their skeleton-like bodies in Freiberg after years of separation.”

##### **On Propaganda:**

“We had a reading book called Fibel at school, which showed illustrations of ugly-looking Jewish children standing on walls, spitting down on nice-looking German children. Little did we know about the possibility of brainwashing a whole nation in this way, which has always been very effective and has devastating effects.”

##### **On Contemporary Relevance:**

“I am also aware that there are people all over the world thrown arbitrarily into similar situations and circumstances today.”

#### **WHY THIS BOOK MATTERS NOW**

In an age of:

- **Rising nationalism and xenophobia** → Shows where collective scapegoating leads
- **Renewed displacement crises** → Offers insights from history’s largest forced migration

- **Sophisticated propaganda** → Reveals how easily populations can be manipulated
- **Political polarization** → Demonstrates importance of understanding all perspectives
- **Fading living memory** → Preserves firsthand testimony before it's lost forever

This memoir serves as both historical document and contemporary warning—a bridge between past and present, between nations, between suffering and understanding.

## COMPARABLE TITLES

Readers and reviewers may find connections to:

### Memoirs of Displacement:

- *A Woman in Berlin* by Anonymous (Marta Hillers)
- *All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr (fiction but similar setting)
- *Suite Française* by Irène Némirovsky

### WWII Child Perspectives:

- *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank
- *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak (fiction)
- *Austerlitz* by W.G. Sebald

### Post-War Europe:

- *The Unwomanly Face of War* by Svetlana Alexievich
- *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* by Tony Judt
- *Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II* by Keith Lowe

### However, this memoir stands apart as:

- One of few first-person English accounts of Sudeten expulsions
- Written by long-term British resident bridging two cultures
- Combining child's perspective with adult historical understanding
- Addressing both Nazi propaganda exposure and post-war collective punishment

## PUBLICATION DETAILS

### New English Edition:

- Title: *A Childhood in Bohemia and the Flight to the West*
- Publisher: Arena Books
- Format: Paperback and E-book
- ISBN (Paperback): 978-1-914390-47-0
- ISBN (E-book): 978-1-914390-48-7
- Pages: 426
- Price: £24.99, €29.99, US\$ 34.99
- Publication Date: 31 December, 2025

### First German-Language Edition:

- Title: *Eine Kindheit in Böhmen und die Flucht in den Westen*
- Publisher: Arena Books
- Format: Paperback and E-book

- ISBN (Paperback): 978-1-914390-49-4
- ISBN (E-book): 978-1-914390-50-0
- Pages: 496
- Price: €30.99
- Publication Date: 31 December, 2025

**Cover Art:** Christine Storey (author's daughter)

### **REVIEW COPY REQUESTS & MEDIA INQUIRIES**

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- High-resolution book cover images (English and German editions)
- Additional pull quotes document
- Author interview transcript (written)