



The Ship

The True Story of Dr. Hans Fisher, Escapee of the Holocaust

Produced by Deborah L. Coltin

Animated by Benjamin Gruenbaum

Narrated by Dr. Hans Fisher

Release Date: November 7, 2023

Running Time: 8 minutes 18 seconds

Primary Audience: Middle School Students and Older

SYNOPSIS

The Ship is the true story about Dr. Hans Fisher's escape from Nazi Germany on the ill-fated MS St. Louis, a ship with more than 900 Jewish refugees escaping Nazi Germany and which was turned away by Cuba and the United States. The film opens with Dr. Fisher's recollection of November 10, 1938, the day after *Kristallnacht*, the Night of Broken Glass, when Germany's Jewish-owned businesses and homes were vandalized and looted, and synagogues were set on fire. Dr. Fisher takes students on his journey from Germany to Cuba and the to the shores of Miami, only to return to Europe again because no country would accept the Jewish refugees. The film ends with Dr. Fisher sharing the lessons of the St. Louis, including a call to action to "learn how to communicate with people so they understand what it is they are really doing".

INTRODUCING THE FILM

The Ship is a true story lived and told by Holocaust escapee Dr. Hans Fisher. On May 13, 1939, more than 900 Jews escaped Germany aboard a luxury cruise liner, the MS St. Louis. Their destination was Cuba. However, the passengers were not allowed to enter Cuba because their landing passes were declared invalid. Hoping to find refuge in the United States, the ship sailed to the shores of Miami, only to be denied entry there as well. With no country willing to accept the ship of Jewish refugees, the MS St. Louis sailed back to Europe. In the end, the ship's passengers did not have to go back to Nazi Germany because Belgium, France, Holland and the United Kingdom agreed to take the refugees. Ultimately, though, more than 250 Jewish passengers were killed by the Nazis.

The Holocaust began in 1933 with Adolf Hitler's rise to power in Germany and ended on May 7, 1945, with Germany's surrender in WWII. The Holocaust was the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of more than 6,000,000 Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. Other groups targeted during the Holocaust included: Roma (Gypsies), individuals with disabilities, Black people, some of the Slavic peoples (Poles, Russians, and others), Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and homosexuals.

The Holocaust was fueled by hatred and intolerance, especially antisemitism—hatred of Jews. Every Holocaust survivor's experience is unique and a miracle. *The Ship* is Dr. Fisher's miraculous story of escaping Nazi Germany.

The short film [*No One Wanted Us—The Tragic Voyage of the SS St. Louis*](#) is a good introduction to the story of the St. Louis.

DEFINITIONS

- **Antisemitism** – hatred of Jews
- **Auschwitz** – Largest death camp where more than one million Jewish people were murdered mostly by being gassed
- **Genocide** - the deliberate killing of a large number of people from a particular nation or ethnic group with the aim of destroying that nation or group
- **holocaust** (lower case “h”) - destruction or slaughter on a mass scale, especially caused by fire or nuclear war
- **Holocaust** (Upper case “H”) – The Holocaust was the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million European Jews by the Nazi regime and its allies and collaborators. The Holocaust took place from 1933-1945.
- **Jude** – Jew
- **Kristallnacht** – The Night of Broken Glass when Jewish-owned businesses were ransacked and their windows smashed, synagogues were burned and people's homes were ravaged
- **Nazi Party** – The National Socialist German Workers' Party-was the far-right racist and antisemitic political party led by Adolf Hitler.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Dr. Fisher identifies himself as an escapee of the Holocaust rather than a survivor of the Holocaust. Do you think an escapee of the Holocaust is also a survivor of the Holocaust?
2. How did life for the Jewish people of Germany change after Hitler's rise to power?
3. Describe the events of Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass. What do you think the message of Kristallnacht was to the Jews of Germany? What about the message to the people of Germany? Why do you think businesses, synagogues and people's homes were targeted?
4. Who could the Jewish people turn to for help during Kristallnacht?
5. Is there anything about Kristallnacht you are left wondering about?
6. Why was Dr. Fisher's father released from the Buchenwald Concentration Camp?
7. Even though America had strict immigration quotas at the time, do you think President Roosevelt should have let the Jewish passengers into the United States?
8. What do you think the message was to Hitler and to the world when America did not take in the Jewish refugees of the St. Louis?
9. What might have changed for the Jewish people had America taken in the Jewish refugees of the St. Louis?
10. The St. Louis' Captain Gustav Schroeder told the Jewish passengers he would not bring them back to Germany, and he told the staff of the ship to treat with Jewish passengers with kindness. What do his actions reveal about the kind of man he was?
11. What can we learn from the story of the St. Louis?
12. What does the Holocaust have to do with you?
13. As a child, Dr. Hans Fisher was a refugee and an immigrant. What challenges do you think he experienced as a refugee? As an immigrant?
14. Dr. Fisher said that one of the important lessons of the Holocaust is that people have to learn how to communicate so they understand what it is they are really doing. What does this mean to you?
15. Why do you think it is important to learn about the Holocaust?
16. How can you assume responsibility for passing on the memory and lessons of the Holocaust?
17. The swastika is a symbol of the Holocaust. How would you react to the appearance of a swastika at your school or in your community? What are some actions you could take if this happens?
18. What are you left wondering about?

RESOURCES

- [The Voyage of the St. Louis](#)
- [Testimony of Dr. Hans Fisher](#)
- [Dr. Hans Fisher's Life](#) (Rutgers Oral History Archives)
- Dr, Hans Fisher Interview
 - [Part 1](#)
 - [Part 2](#)
- To learn more about the Holocaust watch [The Path to Nazi Genocide](#)
- [Swastika: Hate Symbol](#)

VISIT [Lappin Foundation's Holocaust Education and Commemoration Resource Page](#)

SHARE your feedback about *The Ship* by sending an email to dcoltin@lappinfoundation.org.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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