



Kristallnacht Remembered

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By Leni Hoffman (Eckmann)

Sixty-one years after this infamous event occurred, it still lingers in my memory. I was an eight-year-old girl at the time. Hitler declared that anarchy could rule on November 9, 1938. The political violence was specifically aimed at the Jewish population of Germany. The precursor to Kristallnacht was the harassment of Jews for no reason except hatred. Hate crimes against the Jews were sanctioned by the German government.

Our first encounter with the new order of Nazism was when my father was imprisoned, along with thousands of other Jewish males, for a crime allegedly committed by a Jew against a German diplomat. My mother and I visited my father in prison. He had been severely beaten. He was physically hurt and sad. On a subsequent visit, we brought him a basket of food. My father liked sweets. I brought him his favorite chocolate bar hoping it would make him feel better. The prison guard would not allow me to give it to my father. I argued with the guard, as any innocent child would, to no avail. The guard wanted the chocolate. I would not give it to him. I took it home.

My father returned home after a few weeks of imprisonment. His spirit was crushed. He could not make sense of what had happened to him. He had always been a law-abiding citizen; he was on good terms with the townspeople. Why did the law not protect him? Why were his civil rights violated? Because he was a Jew and Jews no longer had any civil rights in Germany.

Subsequent to my father's incarceration, our windows were smashed on several different occasions. My mother was no longer allowed to have young girls apprentice under her supervision in the art of dressmaking. Neighbors began to shun us. As time went on, harassment became more intense. It culminated in Kristallnacht.

Kristallnacht marked the organized, merciless onslaught on Jewish homes, businesses and synagogues all over Germany. The Nazi thugs never made it to Lendershausen (my town) because they ran out of time and/or were too tired from the mayhem they caused in Hofheim. I guess one could say that we were lucky to be spared the humiliation and pain experienced by the affected families in Hofheim. The day following Kristallnacht, my mother and I went to visit friends in Hofheim where a larger Jewish population resided and where the synagogue was also located. I still recall the wanton and senseless destruction the Nazi thugs had left in their wake. The synagogue, homes and stores lay in shambles. The Jewish victims had to witness the madness without recourse. As history tells us, Kristallnacht was a pivotal point in the violence against the Jews in all of Europe. This was the beginning of the end, so to speak.

Soon after Kristallnacht, prejudiced hostility struck me personally. I was ostracized. I was not allowed to participate in any sport or social activities. All activities were "Hitler Jugend" related. The

children joined the Hitler Youth organization and wore the required uniforms. Participation was forbidden to Jewish youths. I was sick at heart. However, the worst was yet to come.

One day, without warning, I was banished from school forever. Jewish children were no longer allowed to attend German schools. My parents made the very difficult decision to send me to Belgium in July 1939 with the last Jewish children's transport (Kindertransport) to leave Germany. My parents perished in the camps. Because of their personal sacrifice, my life was saved and I am here to tell the tale.